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## Book Reviews

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### Book Reviews

*VOICE TERMINAL ECHO: Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts* by Jonathan Goldberg. New York: Methuen, 1986. Pp. x + 194. \$26.00, cloth; \$13.95, paper.

Postmodernism. In a small theater, a voice (recorded?) tells the story of a life, but is interrupted by glitches, erasures, repetitions. Other voices (the same voice?) enter with other pieces of narrative (the same story?). The voices are audible in combination, disrupting each other, echoing, overlapping, creating new fragments of meaning out of seemingly random juxtapositions. The narrative continuum has been shattered by the multiplicity of competing vocal channels. For the audience (those still listening) there is disorientation, also exhilarating release—a lifting of the burden of linearity. Jonathan Goldberg's new book functions like the postmodern theatrical event, performing upon the collective voice of traditional literary criticism the same disruptive dispersal, providing a comparable liberation from time-honored continuities. I found myself almost wishing that the book had been cast in a more immediately performative mode—marketed in handy playable cassette form so that we could hear the cacophony of fragmented voices or, better yet, staged as a single, unrepeatable theatrical event.

Written and bound, with the author's name dutifully inscribed upon it, *VOICE TERMINAL ECHO* is tamed by its participation in the authorizing rituals of scholarly publication. But not tamed altogether. Despite the increasing familiarity of postmodernism, Goldberg acknowledges that not all readers will take kindly to his method. He anticipates the "horror of so-called humanistic criticism which has not failed to see itself threatened but also, more disconcertingly, the horror of socially engaged criticism which has preferred to regard poststructuralism as a new formalism rather than confront its own sentimentality" (p. ix). The book's polemical thrust is therefore twofold. He joins the many recent attacks on the New Criticism, on what Jonathan Dollimore has called the "transcendent subject" and on an aesthetics of "harmonic idealism," but Goldberg sets his work apart through his insistence that a critical praxis of textual indeterminacy is not an evasion of history but instead radically historicist. He uses the disorienting methods of postmodernism to effect an opening into the pluralism and unsettledness of texts in the Renaissance, before the stabilizing fictions of authorship, which we have recently begun to find burdensome, had first taken hold.

To cast Goldberg's argument in such discursive terms is, of course, to violate its performative nature, its assaultive "refusals of the tactics of making sense" (p. 7). He suggests that the best guide to the book, multiple, fractured, might be its index. But at the same time, the book allows—covertly encourages—the assemblage of furtive fragments and the discovery of pattern. He begins with Marvell's "Nymph complaining for the death of her *Faun*"—an effective entrypoint since it is a text whose simultaneous resonance and impenetrability few readers would dispute. In "The Garden" and in Marvell's poetry generally, the creative act entails "annihilating all that's made." "The Nymph complaining" is deeply self-referential, Marvell's "most elab-

orated version" of the "moment of creative annihilation" (p. 14). The voice of the Nymph articulates the situation of a poet in that its very entry into language defines a prior loss—of a fawn, a garden, some mythic original discursive site where, the voice plaintively assures us, language, meaning, existed without self-negation. The poem's final image—the weeping statue of the Nymph wearing away its substance through the very act of "engraving" tears upon its own breast—defines the discursive space of the poem and of its reading, in which meaning is constituted only insofar as "text is worn away" (p. 36).

The following chapters are placed in precise chronological order, interestingly enough—as though to provide a stable ground for the pyrotechnics of dispersal—and take up in turn Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton. In *The Shepherdes Calender* voices that could be associated with the poet are scattered over different, antithetical figures; the process expands into the woodcuts and into the annotations of E. K., who "may be an invention for this text; he is, at any rate, made possible by it" (p. 64). In the psychic economy of *The Shepherdes Calender*, even when Spenser appears to take on a humanist public role as poet to the Queen, his very attempt to rest "in fayre Elisa" means surrendering authorial identity so that she becomes the producer of the text and the poet is silenced. This negative economy is, in Goldberg's analysis, the enactment of a historical dilemma—the place (no place) of the poet in a cultural system that holds the poet for naught, in which the very pinnacle of success—achieving the favorable notice of the Queen—dissolves authorship under Authority.

In the early Shakespeare, the dispersal of identity is easier, closer to a mode of play. Goldberg offers a brilliant Lacanian reading of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* that explores the play's unacknowledged circuitry of letters and desire. Its characters, often dismissed as wooden, are indeed wood or woods (like Ben Jonson's *Silva*), haunted by echo; they themselves are "instruments of the letter," already written. "Similitude is their being" (p. 77). Goldberg's analysis of chains of displacement in *Two Gentlemen* is evocative for the sonnets, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Cymbeline* (which he discusses) and for other early plays like *Love's Labor's Lost* (which he doesn't), in which human identity is also constituted as text and wafted away in the "sweet smoke of rhetoric." Goldberg's claim is that Renaissance "character" is not identity in the late nineteenth-century Bradleyan sense but echo: so Hamlet dies, articulating "I am dead." In that "impossible sentence" a fiction of internality is evoked, but as its own ghost, in the same way that Hamlet's father had spoken from the grave to be "written" on Hamlet's tablets: "Meet it is I set it down." Voice is inscribed "within the iterability of writing" (p. 100).

The Shakespeare section ends in a solemn parody of benediction: texts are spoken in the sacred name of fathers, sons, and "the ghost of the sovereign author." It is a suitable introit into the iconoclastic Herbert chapter that follows, and a warning—not *Procul profani* but *Procul sacri*. Critics of *The Temple* have almost always been content to stay within the text's overt thematization of the giving up of self and authority in the name of a transcendent God. Goldberg disrupts this mode of criticism and its "repeated exercises of faith" (p. 101) by resisting its essentialist drift. In *The Temple*, God exists only "in writing. In the dead letter. An otherness without transcend-

ence. Literally" (p. 107). Here, as throughout the book, there is new attention to the original presentation of the text. *The Temple* was announced on the 1633 title page as

THE  
TEMPLE.  
Sacred Poems  
and  
Private Eja-  
culations.

---

By Mr. George Herbert.

---

Psal. 29.

*In his Temple doth every  
man speak his honour.*

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Goldberg points out, quite rightly, that there is something odd about this—it is time for us to look more closely at such seemingly familiar arrays. Part of the oddity, at least from a post-Victorian perspective, is the almost inevitable sexual connotation of "Eja-culation" (used in the sexual sense, according to the *OED*, as early as 1603). If we refuse to pass demurely over the obvious (and Goldberg won't allow us to) Herbert's collection becomes, among other things, a "space of dissemination" for resowing the disowned seed of interiority, identity. Herbert is always "caught within the father's no," yet enacting, sometimes, as in "The Bag," through disrupted narratives, the dispersal and fragmentation of the Father's voice.

In his preface, Goldberg suggests that his discussion will allow the emergence of differences between seventeenth-century *authors* and sixteenth-century *writers* in their relationship to textuality (pp. ix-x). In Herbert (also in *Hamlet*), authorship, authority over one's own text, has become a visible possibility and a problem. In Milton, who is usually treated as the sovereign author *par excellence*, the *idea* of such authority is everywhere. Much Milton teaching and criticism used to consist—still consists—in worshipful descants upon the poet-priest's infallible Voice. Because of that continuing traditionalism, Goldberg's analysis in the Milton chapter is particularly welcome. "Milton's Warning Voice: Considering Preventive Measures" argues that authority in Milton's texts comes not through the voice's compelling presence, "the present of a self-conceiving," but rather through its promise of what is to come but cannot arrive. "The place where Milton *is*" is "waiting,

positioned in a career always about to begin" (p. 124). He speaks always *pre-vented* (one of his favorite words), within the impediment of its not yet being time. "Pre-vented, he comes before himself, lodges the voice within the antecedence in which, not being his own person, he can speak in the person of the truth that he conceives conceives him" (p. 125). This paradoxical formulation comes close to accounting for the peculiar deadness of Tradition as it is encoded in Miltonic texts, at least in the perception of many readers of the 1980's. Our interest in Milton lies elsewhere, and Goldberg's short-circuiting of the relentlessly demanding Voice helps free Milton's texts for other kinds of analysis. Interesting things happen in this part of Goldberg's book: a canonical line emerges through strategies of evasion—Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton. In scattered patches, Goldberg begins to assert more discursive control over the discussion, as though his own authority as a reader-critic is fueled by the Miltonic thrust toward textual ownership. And yet, particularly toward the end, as though to fend off the nascent consolidation of continuity and authority, the voice of *VOICE TERMINAL ECHO* becomes increasingly fractured, attaining a curious lyricism through the breaking of sentences into chains of vivid phrases, suggesting new combinations through its atomization of conventional critical discourse. It is an appropriate conclusion to a dazzling display.

But how are we to read this book, presented on the one hand as postmodernist performance—a dance upon the dead bones of authorship—yet on the other hand as a work of literary criticism, part of a more conservative discourse accompanied by the usual statements of intent on the part of the author-critic, the citation of other voices, the validating mark of footnotes? Much as Hamlet states, impossibly, "I am dead," Goldberg announces the dissolution of his authority over his own text, or rather, perhaps, announces his authority as dissolution: "The voice on these pages is not singly determined to a procedure of logical demonstration. Multiple and fractured, it responds to texts and recounts them, pursuing and permitting disseminative practice" (p. 4). Like other varieties of postmodernism, Goldberg's performative dispersal is at least rhetorically dependent on the conventionalized unities it disrupts. There would be no release of energy without a prior containment (and for that reason, the exhilarating force of the book may not exist for those who have not known what went before). In the Renaissance, iconoclasts were careful to preserve the visibility of the sacred image beneath their slashes of obliteration. So, in Goldberg, we "(read under erasure: itself, its, its own, is)" (p. 32).

All of which is to suggest that *VOICE TERMINAL ECHO* is indeed historicism, for all its textualization of history, in spite of (because of) its refusal to grant historicism a separate, protected space. Its author invokes recent structuralist and poststructuralist methodologies, but piecemeal, bending and interweaving models to serve his detailed exploration of the vagaries of particular texts. As we have already noted, by refusing to assent to the normalizing procedures of standard editorial practice, he also helps clear the ground for fresh reading. It can be objected that his stance as one who reads after the "death of the Author" inverts the Renaissance textual situation he seeks to elucidate. Post-identity is not quite the same as pre-identity: his desire to avoid a hermeneutics of progress causes him at times to describe as

scattering what might otherwise be interpreted as motions toward collection. I am thinking in particular of his bleak discussion of Spenser, in which the poet "scatters death" but the "place" of Spenserian poetry is "recirculation." Rather than the continuing re-enactment of extinction, we might just as well view this as a compulsive thrust toward identity expressed through Spenser's continual throwing himself back into creation (*pace* Freud, who is on account of his positivist bias a strange figure for Goldberg to invoke). Like the texts it discusses, Goldberg's text can only achieve its own articulation, its full brilliance, through the erosion of what has gone before. But that is less his peculiar flaw than the condition of writing itself, at least as he portrays it. In addition to providing a rich, turbulent array of ideas, images, and beginnings, *VOICE TERMINAL ECHO* is, in its uncompromising self-placement on the tremulous line of self-contradiction, as lucid and clear-cut an enactment of the postmodern critical dilemma as we are likely to be offered. For that reason, and for many others, it should be of interest to readers well beyond the area of English Renaissance studies.

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*Reflections on Gender and Science* by Evelyn Fox Keller. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. Pp. 193. \$20.95.

Feminist inquiries into science have occurred on two fronts. The first is an inquiry into the status of women in science (their problems of entry, promotion and funding) which has led to critiques not only of sexism in the profession but of basic problems in the ways girls are socialized away from such careers. A second inquiry, one which Evelyn Fox Keller labels radical, probes the scientific enterprise itself as in part a manifestation of gender ideology. This critique finds that science as it has come to be defined epistemologically in the West is masculinist in its structures.

*Reflections on Gender and Science* will surely be viewed as a central statement within such a radical inquiry. Its proposals are directed to fellow scientists. I would like, instead, to comment briefly on some of the implications this book has for other disciplines. Keller's rigorous argument should be understood in a context much larger than that of departments of science, for her book should quickly establish itself as a central text in feminist theory. My interest, however, is to locate it elsewhere as well: seventeenth century studies.

Keller's "argument" is as much a reading of history as it is of science, and "argument" is surely the mode of her discourse. No wonder that one of her most surprising and far-reaching readings is her essay on Bacon, another writer who used "argument" as a mode for talking about science. In the end, each of them proposes sciences which at the time of each's writing are not yet practices. Two differences, however, separate Keller from the older polemicist. First, she brings to her argument her experience of the laboratory, as a mathematical biologist who has done primary research in theories of aggregation in cellular slime mold. Second, the project she proposes grows not

only out of her debate with the dominant science of her culture, as Bacon's did also with his, but out of her experience with the failures of that dominant science in laboratory experiences. The elegance of her argument arises in part, therefore, from a proposed project whose outlines are already shaping themselves in practice—a practice which already points to success in the work of Barbara McClintock. Keller marshalls rich historical and psychological contexts to strengthen her argument, for despite its seeming appearance as a set of autonomous essays, this is a rigorously unified volume.

The book is divided into three sections of three essays each. The first group argues that the founding of modern science in the West, at the period of its origins, made choices which gave to the shape of its methods of inquiry and its epistemology a distinctively masculinist orientation. The essay on Plato's epistemology argues that "knowing" has ancient roots in erotic and sexual metaphors, and that Plato's solution to the sex/eros nexus was to sever radically the sexual act from eros, which becomes the desire for and love of pure knowing. This severance in turn split mind from body. Platonism erected an epistemology which privileged mind as the agent of logos at the expense of body. Logos in turn was a shared site of mind and nature; the two could meet—perfectly—but only when mind was freed absolutely from bodily desires and needs.

In the second essay, Keller turns to the sexual metaphors of Bacon's science. In many respects Bacon maintains the Platonic mind/body split, but, more importantly, defines a new and thoroughly anti-Platonic split between the rational mind and a nature that is no longer seen as united with the logos. This split is described by Bacon in sexual imagery. In *The Masculine Birth of Time*, Bacon states, "I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave" (trans. by Farrington, p. 197). Bacon's metaphor reads two ways: masculine mind can coerce, force, even rape an objectified, feminized nature to make her reveal her secrets, or, ideally, it can wed her. This marriage is described as a chaste one of complementary, but opposed, sexual opposites.

The third historical essay looks at the witchcraft debates of the 1640s and 1650s. These debates formed part of the background for the founding of the Royal Society in London, for many of the founders participated in the debates. A revival of Paracelsianism in the 1640s proposed a sexual image of nature in opposition to the empiricist discourse rooted in Bacon and Descartes. Paracelsian Nature was not an objectified female body upon which masculine rationalism must pit itself; it was a dynamic interactive system of simultaneous masculine and feminine principles poised in eternal balance (not unlike the yin and yang of Taoism). The triumph of Baconian masculinist science with the founding of the Royal Society was not, therefore, an event of determinist progress as it has traditionally been viewed; it was an historical event in which a particular subject/object relation defined within particular discursive traditions won out over an opposing model.

The second trio of essays focuses upon a psychological analysis of ego formation. In "Gender and Science," she analyzes the classic object relations model of ego formation. Ego autonomy is valued to the degree with which it attains objectivity—subjectivity being associated with various kinds of ego dependency. She concludes that objectivity remains stamped by the interper-

sonal drama through which it was learned. Given the polarization of masculine and feminine, "objectivity, properly speaking a human goal, becomes construed as objectivism, a masculine goal, whereas subjectivity becomes construed as subjectivism, a feminine prerogative" (p. 71).

The second essay of the group, "Dynamic Autonomy: Objects and Subject," is the keystone piece of the book's entire argument. In it, Keller analyzes the relations between objectivity, power and domination. She finds the psychological model of objectivity is replicated in modern science's own traditional (Baconian) definitions of its twin goals—knowledge and power. Her critique of this power-oriented objectivity draws upon those revisionists within object relations psychology who have studied pathologies of ego-rigidity, among others the rape mentality. This inquiry has led to a revised model of ego-formation itself—a model formulated around a concept of "dynamic autonomy," not absolute objectivity and separation. "Dynamic autonomy" allows the subject to partake in relatedness without losing its identity as separate. Such a subject's negotiation of tensions within flexible, even permeable, boundaries between self and other is the hallmark of its dynamism. Keller concludes, "tension is not the same as opposition, and the purpose of this analysis has been to understand the ways in which our own psychosocial experience—above all, the disjunction of male from female—leads to a bifurcation between autonomy and intimacy, separation and connection, power and love" (p. 113).

The third essay in this group, leads the reader back to science. "Dynamic autonomy" as a revised model of ego-maturity is now placed in relation to nature. This dynamic ego seeks to "know" nature through a newly constituted "dynamic objectivity"—an objectivity which itself can negotiate permeable boundaries between the scientist and her object of study. Specifically, "dynamic objectivity" utilizes the epistemological model of McClintock who worked out a methodology which she described as a "feel for the organism"—an empathetic entry into the processes of the object of study.

The last group of essays specifically examines applications of "dynamic objectivity" as a praxis, not just a prospectus. The essay on quantum mechanics argues that the double-bind of all current models may well be the result of the questions which tradition has taught physicists to ask. Keller looks at the metaphor of law as applied to nature. She suggests that a physics which is pervaded by legalistic discourse may also be blinded by the control that that discourse exerts over its ability to formulate innovative hypotheses. In place of a nature governed by laws, Keller offers McClintock's concept of "order" and invites her readers to entertain "a conception of nature orderly in its complexity rather than lawful in its simplicity" (p. 136).

The second essay in this group reports Keller's work in the theory of aggregation in cellular slime mold. Her struggle in the laboratory to restructure hypotheses after those conceptualized in terms of master molecule theories were found to fail, was finally vindicated when she was able to reorganize her description as one "emerging from an interest in order rather than law" (p. 138). The collection concludes with a discussion of the career of McClintock. (Keller has written her biography: *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock*. New York: Freeman, 1983.) Although McClintock's lonely and ill-funded research has been belatedly vindicated by



her profession, particularly after her reception of the Nobel Prize, the impact and implications of her example are yet to be fully understood. Keller concludes this essay with both caution and optimism, remarking:

However, we need to remember that, as long as success in science does not require self-reflection, the undermining of masculinist or other ideological commitments is not a sufficient guarantee of change. But nature itself is an ally that can be relied upon to provide the impetus for real change: nature's responses recurrently invite reexamination of the terms in which our understanding of science is constructed. Paying attention to those responses—"listening to the material"—may help us to reconstruct our understanding of science in terms born out of the diverse spectrum of human experience rather than out of the narrow spectrum that our culture has labeled masculine. (pp. 175-76)

A short Epilogue states specific proposals for science already implicit in the nine essays of the book.

For Keller, nature is an object of knowledge, the knowing of which is shaped by discursive traditions—our culture's ways of talking about science. The excitement of her argument arises from her exposure of science as discourse, not to denigrate it, but rather to further its role in the definition and transmission of knowledge. This critique is centered in her reading of the historical event which is the founding of the West's subject/object relationship—an event located in the Seventeenth Century.

In the wake of the work of Michel Foucault, the origin of the individual subject in history has been fixed within the Seventeenth Century. Keller's essays on Bacon and the Royal Society confirm the Foucauldian epistemic chronology. Alongside the inquiry into the origin of subjective selfhood has been a parallel inquiry into the rise of the modern gender system. Indeed, the two inquiries are often indistinguishable. Keller's essay on Bacon adds to this enterprise because her critique of Bacon's sexual metaphor from the perspective of object relations psychology allows us to see that metaphor as socially constructed and in the service of an emerging masculinist ideology. Likewise, her reading of the debates which prefigured the founding of the Royal Society shows that the gender system which triumphed in conjunction with empiricist epistemology was not inevitable, but rather the result of competing models, the masculinist model over-ruling the Paraclesian androgynous one. These readings mark significant contributions to the current enterprise of deconstructing traditional versions of progressive history.

I must also comment on Keller's trenchant style. The forward movement of her argument in each essay never loses momentum. The result is a slender volume rich in detail but always focused on demonstrated conclusions. To add significantly to current discussions in fields as diverse as science, the history of science, the history of ideas, feminist theory, object relations psychology and seventeenth-century studies bespeaks Keller's ability to scrutinize discourse systems rather than to be "written" by them; to do so as trenchantly and with as little excess baggage as she does adds pleasure to a reader's experience of her "argument."

*Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* by James B. Twitchell. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. Pp. viii + 353. \$18.95.

This lengthy, detailed book by a professor of English at the University of Florida proposes to examine an adolescent *rite de passage* going on underneath our oblivious adult noses every weekend. Primitive cultures offer their young a variety of elaborate and generally terrifying initiation rituals designed to propel them from childhood into adulthood. We modern Westerners, Twitchell claims, offer our adolescents horror movies to accomplish the same goal. Twitchell draws an analogy between what Bettelheim says fairy tales do for the very young—namely, prepare them for the anxieties of separation from the mother—and what horror movies do for their older siblings: prepare *them* for the “anxieties of reproduction.” These films, he maintains, help adolescents move from genetically useless onanism to a mature reproductive sexuality, show adolescents how to avoid making horrible reproductive mistakes whose issue are monsters, make incestuous pairings taboo (more about this later), and generally insure the “social stability of the culture.”

Those adults who have sat bleary-eyed through the television re-runs of some of these movies or who are accustomed to complain that Hollywood makes films, and bad ones, too, only for adolescents these days, will probably think that Twitchell's claims for the horror movie are too large, too “serious” and “elevated.” And certainly there are faults to find in *Dreadful Pleasures*. His assertion that there is a “concussive family romance” lurking at the heart of every horror movie is simply too reductive. He contradicts himself over important points. For example, he asserts that only a psychological reading of horror fiction—movies and novels—makes any sense. But at the same time, he agrees with Freud's conclusion that certain forms of art, the Gothic included, resist psychoanalytic interpretation. Impatient with critics who make judgments about a horror myth by looking at only one version of it (one *Dracula* movie, for instance, and not the entire genus), Twitchell nevertheless does something similar in his book. He claims that his theories apply to *all* horror movies. Yet he discusses only those films embodying three horror motifs: the vampire, the “hulk with no name” (e.g., Frankenstein's monster), and the werewolf or “transformation monster.” Other horror movies he blithely dismisses, saying they will not last, they are too topical, they cannot be told more than once and thus do not interest him, and so on. One cannot avoid the suspicion, however, that he has eliminated them from his discussion because they do not fit his theories. Finally, fully half of *Dreadful Pleasures* is given over to a detailed examination of scores of *Dracula*, Frankenstein and werewolf movies. The careful recital of the ins and outs of their plots and the scholarly mention of the minute variations on a theme frequently make for tedious reading. (Perhaps it made for tedious writing, too; sometimes Twitchell makes small factual and interpretive mistakes.)

Still, it is hard not to applaud Twitchell's grave attention to his subject. He is one of a new generation of critics and scholars who insist that popular culture is worthy of serious study and not, as many academicians would have it, “just junk.” It might, at first glance, seem surprising that we would unwittingly trust the passing along of crucial sexual information to low-brow, op-

portunistic Hollywood filmmakers, but when we consider America's Puritanical roots—its reticence even today over sexual education of the young—our surprise may fade. Nor should it seem unlikely that such apparently paltry entertainment has things in common with the sacred ceremonies found in human cultures as far back as they go. Who, after all, is more in the myth-making business than Hollywood? That the myths Hollywood generates represent debased versions of "the real thing"—i.e., the "sacred" truths—is undeniable. But what religious rituals (for surely sexual initiation is, or was, connected to religion) are not debased in the secular and scientific West?

Following a conventional practice, Twitchell begins his discussion by drawing a distinction between horror and terror. He is only interested in the former. Terror art, he claims, takes its frightening images from the "real" world, the world of actuality; horror art takes its from dreams and nightmares, from the psyche—indeed (here, Twitchell sounds rather like Jung) from the collective psyche. In addition, whether novel or film, terror art has a sense of closure, an end; horror art does not. The monster, the "it" at horror's center, can never be got under control; it can never be satisfactorily explained. However frightening, the carriers of terror are not "uncanny," are not marvelous, nor are they free of the laws which govern organic life. You can kill a terror "monster" in a conventional way; it is imprisoned by the same biology we are.

In passing, Twitchell notes the emergence and popularity over the last 20 years (30 would be more accurate) of the "psycho-horrors"—films like *Psycho*, *Repulsion* and *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*—and the invasion-from-afar movie, whether the "afar" be defined as extraterrestrial or merely some remote corner of our earth. Included in this category are what might be called "violated nature strikes back" movies. Hitchcock's *The Birds* sets the pattern, he says, for the latter type. But surely *Them!*, a movie which is not mentioned in Twitchell's book, was the archetype. He is not, however, interested in either category of film: not in the "psycho-horrors" because "they always drive away the images of disorder and violence . . . to get at some rational explanation" and thus eliminate, he says, the lingering *frisson* so essential to horror art (recollectors of these films may disagree). And not in the invasion movies, because they lack the power and resonance of the *Dracula et al.* stories, since actual invasion (i.e., sexual violation) is never a genuine possibility in them. Both kinds of film, Twitchell asserts, are really terror, not horror, art. He argues that the most successful recent horror movies (*Eraserhead*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*, and *Night of the Living Dead*, for example) are all versions of the basic vampire, Frankenstein, and werewolf/transformation monster stories.

A Romantic scholar, Twitchell argues that it was only during the Romantic period that a horror monster different from all that had preceded it in literature was born: a monster who would not die, who could not be vanquished, and who was far more memorable and fascinating than his opponents. The three featured creatures of Twitchell's book are rooted in European folk-lore but have their essential stories set down in the Gothic novel, whether early in the nineteenth century (Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) or later on, when it began to edge toward the twentieth (Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*). These writers' nightmarish

visions are born again and again in the movies, where, appropriately, one can dream with open eyes.

What the adolescent "dreams" in the movie theater, Twitchell says, is a "tale of sexual confusion played out with implicit sexual directions." The horror movie terrifies, even sometimes sickens, because it offers sexual "scenarios that are possible, but forbidden"—incestuous scenarios, to be precise. The fear of incest "underlies all horror myths in our culture that are repeatedly told for more than one generation." It is incest, and incest alone, that so horrifies the adolescent audience. Noting that incest occurs in all societies, however, and that it has been openly practiced in some, and thus cannot be an instinctual taboo, Twitchell argues that "the 'grisly horror' of incest is socially learned"—at the movies. (Drawing on Freud's primal horde theory—described in his 1913 work, *Totem and Taboo*—as well as on the ideas of modern anthropologists and biologists, Twitchell asserts that a culture makes incest loathsome and terrifying not because it leads to genetic weaknesses and abnormalities but rather because it destroys the social order.)

The primary flaw with Twitchell's argument is its circularity. If the incest taboo were not already deeply embedded in the adolescent's psyche, he or she would not find the violation of it in the movies such a "grisly horror." It may well be, in fact, that incest is not what is going on in all the horror movies adolescents undeniably hunger for, or not the only thing that is going on. Twitchell's thesis may ultimately say more about our society's current preoccupation with incest and the sexual abuse of children than about the psychological subtext of the horror film.

Twitchell sees, as I have said, incestuous themes all over the horror art he examines. But it seems to me that, without incest's being thrown in, sexuality contains, for the teenage audience, horror aplenty. For example, the adolescent body alone—changing, uncontrollable, messy, leaky, plagued by anxieties and urges, lacking the sturdy physical self-sufficiency of childhood—can be frightening and occasionally even loathsome to its possessor (an area of anxiety, as Stephen King and others have pointed out, powerfully embodied in the 1957 schlock classic, *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*.) To some American youngsters (as well as to some of their parents), sex itself has its horrifying aspects. And certainly, as a number of observers have pointed out, many horror movies are infused with a Puritanical morality—the sexual transgressions of the characters (especially the females) are instantly punished by slashings, dismemberment, disembowelment, etc. In addition, horror movies often reflect the teenage audience's antagonism to the adult world and a sense of being victimized by it. Nor does Twitchell's thesis have room for other taboos violated by some of the most popular of these movies—necrophilia, for instance.

*Dreadful Pleasures* nonetheless offers many pleasures to its readers. Twitchell's writing is lively, metaphorical, and skillful, and his breadth of reference impressive. His many asides—about the influence of Darwin on fin-de-siecle writers of horror, his logical (and unanswerable) question about why the gate in King Kong's wall is so large if he is not supposed to get out—are interesting. Indeed, these asides may be the most interesting thing about his book. But students of the movies who want a pithier discussion of adolescent sexuality and the horror movie might prefer to turn instead to Walter Evan's

1973 essay "Monster Movies: A Sexual Theory" (*Journal of Popular Film*, Fall, 1973). Despite its brevity, it manages to be more comprehensive than Twitchell's work. It discusses, to take only two instances, marriage as an important theme in horror movies and connects menstruation and the flowering of adult female sexuality to the Dracula myth. And it at least gives a nod, as *Dreadful Pleasures* does not, to other "readings"—political and philosophical—of the horror movies that adolescents, for a time, swarm to so compulsively.

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Jonna G. Semeiks

*Reconstructing American Literary History* edited by Sacvan Bercovitch. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. Pp. x + 351. \$20.00, cloth; \$8.95, paper.

In a paper titled "America as Canon and Context: Literary History in a Time of Dissensus," published in *American Literature* (58 [1986], 99-107), Sacvan Bercovitch spells out some of the goals and assumptions that went into the making of this collection of twelve essays. He tells us that ". . . it seems likely that we will not, thank God, arrive at some sweeping new synthesis. I hope our History will set directions in American literary scholarship for the next generations; but I think it's safe to say that it will not lead them, like the fabled pillar of fire, out of the wilderness of difference, partiality, and debate into a Canaan of unmediated truth" (p. 107). When anyone speaks about setting "directions in American literary scholarship for the next generations," especially in a turbulent critical period like our own, we naturally may confess to some healthy skepticism. How is it possible to direct future generations when our literary theory and the history it inspires seems so directionless? In this collection of essays, Bercovitch anticipates this question and offers an ingenious response. In his Preface, he admits that ours is an age of "dissensus," a time when ". . . consensus of all sorts has broken down—broken down, worn out, or at best opened up. . . . It will be the task of the present generation to reconstruct American literary history by making a virtue of dissensus" (pp. vii-viii). By making a "virtue of dissensus" or, in this case, making a volume of dissensus, Bercovitch's response to our question suggests that future generations of American literary scholars will be directed by what has come to be called after Bakhtin "dialogism," the dialogic chorus of voices that speak the different languages of social life. In Bercovitch's literary history, we should not expect direction from a single, unitary voice, for reconstructing American literary history—a postmodernist literary history—is a process radically different from anything we have encountered in the tradition of American literary scholarship, a tradition perhaps best represented by critics like Parrington and Spiller. Bercovitch seeks to displace the traditionalist notion of a unified and centered literary history with the post-modernist representation of a dialogic history that refutes closure and totalization. This volume, then, may be seen as a tentative first step toward a new kind of literary history, a history centered—if this is the right word—in discontinuity. In

a sense, Bercovitch reconstructs American literary history by deconstructing it.

Each of the essays in this collection reflects Bercovitch's concern with the discontinuous nature of both history and historical discourse. Bercovitch tells us that the twelve contributors to this collection ". . . represent no particular approach, school, or set of principles except the principles of excellence and balance. They were chosen for the quality of their work and for their diversity of views and interests" (p. viii). All the contributors to this collection are well-known scholars. All already have made significant contributions to literary studies, and Bercovitch has succeeded admirably in finding contributors who are producing some of the most influential and important work in the areas of American literary history and literary theory. In fact, many of the essays in this collection represent the very best work yet produced by some of these scholars.

The essays are arranged chronologically beginning with a discussion of Colonial American polemical writing and ending with a discussion of Eliot's and Pynchon's historicism. This chronological arrangement may be somewhat deceptive in that the order might imply relation and continuity when no relation or continuity exists among the essays; they might have been arranged alphabetically or in some other order just as easily. Although no thematic relation or overtly diachronic relation exists among them, the essays do share some fundamental similarities. As Bercovitch points out in his Preface, all are concerned with the problematics of history; all agree that textual analysis should be grounded in history; all seek out the underlying forces that give rise to critical debate and conflict, and all resist the totalizing, easy answer to complex historical questions. For the sake of our discussion here, the essays may be divided in three broad segments that follow Bercovitch's chronological arrangement: four essays concern Colonial American literature and the American Renaissance; five essays treat modern American literature beginning with Whitman and Dickinson; the final three essays discuss aspects of contemporary American literature.

The first four essays in this collection establish the diversity of both critical methodology and subject matter that give this volume its character. The first essay, Robert A. Ferguson's "'We Hold These Truths': Strategies of Control in the Literature of the Founders," takes what Ferguson calls a "textual approach" to the writings of the Founding Fathers, primarily the writings of Franklin, Paine, Jefferson, and Dickinson. Ferguson's textual approach attempts to demonstrate how language serves a "hegemonic function" in colonial America. He argues that "Theories of hegemony are useful because they stimulate descriptions on a different level. They resist the surface appeal of political rhetoric to concentrate on its pressures and limits. . . . We see how belief becomes language" (pp. 27-28). Ferguson's analysis, somewhat similar to Fredric Jameson's recent work, is an excellent example of what has been called "dialectical" criticism at its best. Morris Dickstein's "Popular Fiction and Critical Value: The Novel as a Challenge to Literary History" discusses canon formation and argues that the American literary canon should be expanded to include the popular novel. He traces the appeal of the novel to the popular fiction of texts like *Robinson Crusoe*, and he shows how literary texts depend in part on popular literature for their conventions. Dickstein tells us

that "Not all popular culture is art, but no conception of how art and culture have interacted over the last two and a half centuries can be complete without understanding the role it has played . . ." (p. 66). In the third essay, Barbara Packer in "Origin and Authority: Emerson and the Higher Criticism" reads Emerson against the background of the "higher criticism" represented by the tradition of German biblical scholarship. In her provocative reading, she understands Emerson to be a kind of nineteenth-century deconstructionist: "With the notion of a poetry consisting of a perpetual play of tropes . . . Emerson is finally weaning himself from the concept of origins that had tantalized him for so long" (p. 87). In his poetics, Emerson "explodes" (Packer's term) the idea of origin and, to some extent, authority, too. The final essay is this segment, Eric J. Sundquist's "*Benito Cereno* and New World Slavery," analyzes *Benito Cereno* within the context of the great slave debates of the 1850's. Sundquist explains: "*Benito Cereno*'s general significance in the debates over slavery in the 1850's is readily apparent . . . Even so, the full implications of Melville's invocation of Caribbean revolution have not been appreciated, nor the historical dimensions of his masquerade of rebellion completely recognized" (p. 94). In his reassessment of *Benito Cereno*, Sundquist shows how this text appropriates history while, at the same moment, it comments on history.

The next segment of five essays treats issues within the broad period we usually refer to as Modern American Literature. The first essay, Sandra M. Gilbert's "The American Sexual Poetics of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson," argues that Whitman and Dickinson were similar in that both wrote "not poetry," but their alienation from traditional poetic forms and themes reflected greatly different attitudes about the possibility of artistic expression, especially through what Gilbert calls "male-defined genres." "Clearly," she tells us, "the composition of 'not poetry' has facilitated composition for both male and female Americans during the last century. But it seems just as clear that that work has been structured for men through allusions to genres whose contours reemphasize the winning of art" (p. 153). Gilbert demonstrates that a sexual poetics possesses a diachronic dimension that helps explain the evolution of genres as well as reveal the restrictive and constraining role that generic thinking plays on artistic consciousness. Philip Fisher in "Appearing and Disappearing in Public: Social Space in Late-Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture" also investigates the latent social forces that guide artistic creation. He argues that "appearing" or "conspicuousness" and "disappearing" or "privacy" helped to guide both aesthetic and economic endeavors during the era of capitalist expansion in America. Fisher's analysis of this era, like Foucault's history writing, uncovers a social dynamic, a dynamic of difference, that opens up history to show new relations among seemingly disparate social acts. Like Fisher, Walter Benn Michaels in "Corporate Fictions: Norris, Royce, and Arthur Machen" offers yet another provocative cultural critique. He shows how naturalism, especially the naturalism represented by the writings of Norris, Royce, and Machen, actually conspires with the corporation while it seemingly protests against the social injustice perpetrated by the corporation. He explains that "Here is perhaps the deepest complicity between naturalism and the corporation. In naturalism, no persons are natural. In naturalism, personality is always corporate and all

fictions, like souls metaphorized in bodies, are corporate fictions" (p. 219). In his discussion of the inherent contradictions within naturalism, Walter Benn Michaels supplies us with an important rereading of texts that have been read for too long as straightforward critiques of social injustice. Frank Lentricchia in "On the Ideologies of Poetic Modernism, 1890-1913: The Example of William James" finds James to be ". . . particularly invaluable for the contemporary scene in critical theory because he is capturable by no one of its orthodoxies and because he is a counterforce to the antitheoretical opportunism that is being promoted in his name by those in theory who are weary of theory and by those outside theory who have hated theory from the beginning" (p. 248). Lentricchia argues that James, through the influence of Emerson, developed a "radical pragmatism" that rejects the "imperialist imposition" of much contemporary American literary scholarship. In the final essay in this segment, Werner Sollors in "A Critique of Pure Pluralism" argues against a *pure* pluralism in literary studies. Through a discussion of the life and writings of Horace Meyer Kallen, Sollors addresses the problem of ethnogenesis in relation to canon formation, especially the "monoethnic myths of origins" that result from a traditional "mosaic of ethnic stories." Instead of the pure pluralism of the American literary tradition, Sollors advocates a dynamic ethnogenesis: "If we approach American literature, ethnic or mainstream, with an awareness of the dynamic nature of ethnogenesis, we might arrive at an understanding of writing as more than a reflection of ethnically diverse 'experiences' (p. 275). It is through the "dynamic nature of ethnogenesis" that American literary history may "go beyond pure pluralism."

The final three essays in this collection address topics concerning contemporary American literature. Robert Von Hallberg in "American Poet-Critics since 1945" maintains that "The severing of relations between poet-critics and academic critics has brought the greater loss to the professors. . . ." (p. 296). Poets who are also literary critics in the tradition of Eliot and Pound have much to teach us about the act of criticism, especially in the area of evaluation. The second essay in this segment, Robert B. Stepto's "Distrust of the Reader in Afro-American Narratives," employs an insightful reader-response analysis to show that ". . . distrust of the American reader prompted Douglass and Wright to write, and affected the choices they made regarding what they would write about" (p. 303). Stepto argues that the reader helps to author the text, and he attempts to move beyond Stanley Fish and Steven Mailloux by providing a model for the classification of the Afro-American framed tale. Finally, in what is perhaps the most inspired essay in this collection, Wendy Steiner in "Collage or Miracle: Historicism in a Deconstructed World" sees *The Waste Land* and *The Crying of Lot 49* as companion texts where "*The Crying of Lot 49* is a wholesale rewriting of *The Waste Land* for the purpose of reopening the issues that that poem raised and recasting them in the postmodernist context" (pp. 323-24). She maintains that "Eliot's history involved the recovery of determinate knowledge, a sense of culture that only the right immersion in past culture could create. . . . But for Pynchon the quest is not to be imagined as a determinate beginning-middle-end structure, but a continuity of ever enlarging hypothesis and data, punctuated by miracle" (p. 350). Steiner's reading of *The Waste Land* and *The Crying of Lot 49* is a fast ride, exciting and exhilarating.



Taken as a whole, this volume's contribution to literary studies is two-fold. First, each essay in its own right constitutes an important contribution to specialized scholarship. For example, I cannot imagine that Pynchon research or research concerning the Afro-American narrative or research in naturalism or research in any of the specialized areas covered by this collection could be complete without reference to the individual essays offered here. These essays will stimulate literary and historical debate for many years to come, and I predict that some will become standard critical texts in their areas of specialization. Obviously, more needs to be said about each individual essay than I have said here, and I feel certain that in the years to come, they will collect their own, more complete critical histories. The second and perhaps greater contribution of this volume is the example it provides for a postmodernist literary history. Certainly, great debate will follow this book in both the interpretative communities of literary history and literary theory, and this volume's value as a literary history that may "set directions in American literary scholarship for the next generations" will be settled there. However, at this particular historical moment, I do not believe that it is exaggeration to say that this book has set the standard by which other literary histories will be measured, and for Americanists, it is one book that accurately fits the accolade "indispensable."

Iowa State University

Thomas Kent

"A White Heron" and the Question of Minor Literature by Louis A. Renza. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984. Pp. xxi + 221. \$19.95.

Louis Renza's study of Sarah Orne Jewett appears in the new University of Wisconsin Project on American Writers. Edited by Frank Lentricchia, it will consist largely of post-structuralist revisions of American literary history and interpretation, and promises to incorporate a range of Marxist, deconstructionist, semiotic, new historical, phenomenological, and psychoanalytic perspectives. Its first two books, in fact, one by John Carlos Rowe on Henry James and now one by Renza, are most valuable for the new questions they raise, for the kinds of re-focusing of a tradition they invite, for their implications about the canon beyond the particular texts they address.

The most useful context for the series is probably the set of English Institute Essays, *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, recently edited by Walter Benn Michaels and Donald Pease. Although Wisconsin has begun with post-Civil War writers, F. O. Matthiessen's definition of the American Renaissance, which the Institute essays take as their problematic, has for a half century governed to a great extent the academic vision of nineteenth-century American literature. The kinds of questions raised in that collection by Michaels, Pease, Tompkins, Arac, Sundquist, and Grossman are the ones that have been reshaping the re-vision of classic and canonical frameworks in American studies for the last ten years. Renza himself contributed a brilliant and clever essay on "Poe's Secret Autobiography" to that collection, and its message and method are of a piece both with his earlier UC-Irvine disserta-

tion, "The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography," and with his study of Jewett in this recent book. In both cases his writer hovers on the boundary between minor and semi-canonical status (Matthiessen excluded Poe). As he says in his Prologue, "only a critical perspective able to focus on minor literature as a question" could address its quest "to elude such criteria." Renza thereby can also address the kinds of rhetorical, ideological, and marketing issues that position American literary study within a fuller historical framework.

Renza is as self-conscious about his own effort as he says Jewett and Poe are about theirs. On his first page a derogatory reference to the Twayne Series of United States Authors not only dismisses to a "critical limbo" the kind of categorization that that series encourages but also implies an intellectual superiority for the new series Renza inaugurates. The next reference—to Leslie Fiedler—is not only part of Renza's analysis of earlier perspectives on "minor" literature but also an explicit connector to a strong predecessor of another day who tried to alter radically the established assumptions for American studies. Similarly the analysis of Northrop Frye is partly a signal for superseding an earlier system in which minor writing was part of "a non-competitive mode of literary production."

The critic to whom Renza seems most attached, however, is Roland Barthes, for in one sense "*A White Heron*" and *the Question of Minor Literature* is a kind of post-structuralist S/Z. Renza begins by reprinting a semi-canonical tale, and then systematically explores a series of codes by means of which the tale communicates. Instead, however, of explaining a set of codes as a structure for literary communication in the 1880s, Renza shifts to a series of critical frameworks and codes by means of which academic critics of the 1980s are changing the very questions to be asked about "A White Heron." After a theoretical introduction on "the question of minor literature," Renza writes four chapters revolving sequentially around regionalist, feminist, pastoral-generic, and rhetorical issues (all cleverly titled—"A White Heron" as a Maine current, as a nun-such, as a rare bird of pastoral, as a pre/text). By problematizing canonicity and "minority," he of course runs the risk of slip-page between academic critics' establishment of major/minor distinctions and writers' sense of their own projects. Because he wants to address both issues, or really to turn scholars' continual awareness of the former into a new awareness of the latter, he freely moves between the two. A reader may feel the categories themselves have been idealized, as in a sense they have while Renza seeks to undermine a competitive process of canonicity, not merely to canonize "lost works" by minority writers but to establish "a minor criticism of minor literature [which] entails the critical intention to deny canonicity unself-consciously."

While being ideologically more eclectic than it might at first seem, Renza does draw on Marxist theory to develop a model in which "minor" literature can elude its commodity status, as a debased article of exchange, in bourgeois culture; but also he tries to avoid when possible conventional Marxist exploitation of minority stories as ideological prettexts. Perhaps Renza's favorite model is the Deleuze-Guattari study of Kafka, which posits minor literature as a "third-world" sort of thing, alienated from its dominant culture, a "schizo" literature that "sabotages whatever social or systematic code happens to

control the means of major literary production at the moment." The Deleuzian model, however, may be the least appropriate for Renza's own project.

Overall the theoretical introduction and four interpretive chapters mesh well, perhaps since not the tightness of the book but its serial insights are its strength. Nor does it need to suffer from the usual disease of books on minor writers, apologetically arguing for canonical status. Renza is good at analyzing the unresolvable tensions and equivocations beneath the apparently placid text, the ways in which allusions and images and characterizations induce their own misreadings, and Jewett's deferral of social meaning through, for example, use of a child protagonist. He puts the text in a feminist context without reducing it to the status of feminist document, and effectively uses Lacan's notion of "writing" to illustrate the story's dispersal of an otherwise explicit paternal position, understood most clearly by comparing the story to Jewett's novel, *A Country Doctor*. Renza connects the tale with pastoral predecessors such as Thoreau and Audubon, showing how it both "affiliates" itself with that tradition and also "demotes" its own affiliation. Finally, with reference to Hawthorne as a significant sketcher-predecessor, he examines Jewett's techniques and ambition to realize a freedom to become a "minor" writer (in a non-competitive sense) of a nondialectical species of literature. It is only in this final chapter that one begins to feel the Jewett of the 1880s may have lost her self in being taken over by the Renza of the 1980s.

Renza's book is not primarily an introduction to Sarah Orne Jewett, nor really a resolution of questions about minor literature. His categories would hardly hold if Robert Grant or John William DeForest or Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth were under the microscope. In fact, "A White Heron" at times seems to Renza's essay what *Oedipus Rex* was to Aristotle's *Poetics*—the uniquely suitable text for an innovative critical model. Renza's book, however, does provide intelligent, original insights into relationships between important, once culturally marginal texts and both the culture in which they were produced and consumed and the cultures that have continued to read and mis-read them. Renza's book is also a useful paradigm for remapping relationships between canonicity and marginal texts in America, and despite Renza's frequent delight in his own cleverness, it is one of the more thoughtful recent post-structuralist essays on American writing.

North Carolina State University

John E. Bassett

*The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation* by Charles Newman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985. Pp. 200. \$24.95, cloth; \$9.95, paper.

This is an important book, for a number of reasons; still, reading Charles Newman brought to mind a favorite saying of my father's—one he applied to chronic complainers. "Some people," he used to say, "wouldn't be happy if you hung them with a new rope." In some ways, Newman is one of those people, and he's not happy, for all the old familiar reasons: "Our real ene-

mies remain the old-fashioned, intractable ones: concentrations of economic and political power which have become inflexible; careerism and boredom; the cynicism of the producer of cultural goods, and the genuine bewilderment of the consumer." The question is what one ought to do for our sick society until the doctor comes. And in this respect, *The Post-Modern Aura* will remind readers of Gerald Graff, whose *Literature Against Itself* Newman frequently cites. The advice is pretty familiar, by now, to anybody who has lived, or worked, through the Lit Wars of the last twenty years.

Which is not to say that the Newman/Graff analysis isn't any good. Some people don't like it, but the indictment still happens to fit: ". . . both the critical and the aesthetic intelligence often relinquish their traditional claims, preferring to explore what they imagine to be the richness of their own limitations." Given that state of affairs, it's reasonable to adopt a consumerist attitude toward the Franco-American canned goods we've been gobbling in such large amounts. "My point," Newman says, "is not to defend contemporary literature as much as to ask why we have made such a poor case for it. . . . I stick to theory not because I think it conspicuously related to practice or even intrinsically interesting, but because I find contemporary culture so willfully theoretical. This should not be surprising in a culture which is disintegrating. . . ." And the primary cause of this disintegration, as the title suggests, is the sustained, inflationary "rocket ride" we've been on. Over against the ahistoricism, the irony, the textualist posturings of post-modern flux, Newman places the fixed standard of "culture," which he speaks of not in an anthropological sense, but in the anti-inflationary sense of that other Newman—John Henry—and of Matthew Arnold.

On behalf of culture, or its representation, Charles Newman wants, reasonably enough, a reconciliation of formalism and realism, such as Raymond Williams—in somewhat different terms—began asking for at least thirty years ago. And like Williams, he finds it impossible to make any progress except in light of material considerations: "If we are to have a new literary history, it will have to deal with the new agencies of production, transmission, and administration of knowledge as dominant cultural institutions. It will have to be skeptical of all claims to autonomy, as well as the use of literature alone as a means of cultural, much less literary diagnosis." As this description implies, the "critics," particularly academic ones, come in for a good deal of responsibility (and bashing) because "if the literary community is to survive it must reconstitute itself, not in terms of a stylized adversary but by recovering its own structural integrity." With so many people spending so much of their time trying to take the culture and its language apart—in one modish way or another—it's no wonder that we're in our present, post-modern fix, particularly since the de-constructing usually goes on at the place in our society, the academy, which is supposed to represent the coherent "life" of culture. As I said this is pretty familiar stuff, though Newman states his position with a great deal of force; and his discussion of inflation is both new and arresting. He finds no value in the polysemous multiplicity of signification. In place of semiotic richness, he sees merely an empty proliferation, which is the death of aesthetic, as well as fiscal, standards. In such an environment, critical judgment does in fact become a lie.

If that's all there was to this book, no harm done. Culture requires the per-

severance of enlightened, eloquent complainers if it is to be meaningfully preserved, particularly when the ropes we've been given to hang ourselves by all look so used, despite what we're told to the contrary. What Newman offers, though, is a lot more than a mere rounding up of the usual suspects, thanks to the writerly project he has set out for himself: "As this is a cultural history of recent *attitudes*, rather than a specifically literary argument, there is little textual explication." He's as good as his word. A few of the twenty-four chapters do read almost like "regular" essays, though as he says, there's often very little quoted evidence or argumentative "development."

For the most part, Newman has other objectives in mind; he is concerned with his announced—and ultimately post-modern—subject of *attitude*. His pieces vary in length from fifty pages to only two or three, with most being shorter, rather than longer. The discussion revolves around such concerns as one might expect: universities, the novel, contemporary writers, the literary marketplace, criticism, and so on. Typically, Newman does not work to demonstrate his materials, however, in any programmatic way. In chapter ten, while discussing realism, he offers the following insight into his method: ". . . If we are prepared to accept meaning which is not 'immanent' in history or language, and hence not strictly discoverable, but the fruit of an ongoing if finally inexplicable collaboration between the mind and the world, then we can project upon human history the only meaning it can possibly have—which is precisely what literature aims for in its extra-historical, extra-cultural, and extra-psychological assertiveness. In such a situation, the reader is challenged to be sure, but the idea is to *captivate* the reader by whatever means necessary." Newman is a novelist, first of all, most recently the author of *White Jazz*, and he's trying to make the world safe for his kind of work: he's out to change people's attitude, to "captivate" the readers he needs to get his job—the job of imaginative language—done. And more often than not, I think he succeeds.

He manages to turn his text (and surprisingly, with it, lit-crit) into a good, even an important, read. Newman sees through the text, of course, as we all now know we are bound to do, but instead of empty space, he finds the real world (minus quotation marks), regardless of how sorry the sight may be: "A general culture glut opens the present to a limitless eclecticism and disarms taste by making everything 'interesting.' And, as the critic Charles Newman argues in the most provocative book on this problem yet written by an American . . . its net effect is inflation: the permeability the past has acquired is the natural ground of hype in the present." This assessment of the book comes not from an academic, but from Robert Hughes, writing in *Time* magazine (17 June 1985, p. 80). When's the last time you read a "professional" critic who got talked about there (excepting, of course, Umberto Eco and the designer crits from Yale)? It is a measure of Newman's success, and the success of his captivating method, that he should get taken up and used by a news weekly, in an article about the contemporary art scene, which he does not engage directly himself. Of course, he got "real" praise from expectable sources, which is well and good. But usually, such praise serves more as an epitaph than an introduction, particularly for academic publications.

That doesn't seem to be the case with Newman, though, and I hope his book continues to succeed, in a more than merely academic way, because the ideas in it matter, along with their mode of presentation. It might be possible to summarize his project in terms of literary modernism, and what has become of it once it got institutionalized in a post-modern, inflationary academy: "In a time when the intellectualization of a society seems to go hand in hand with the bureaucratization of culture, and the Academy has failed utterly as an alternative to commercialism, except to exploit it as a unifying scapegoat, it is difficult for any writer to have much faith in any reinstitutionalization of literature." Nevertheless, Newman's goal, as a writer, is to imagine an alternative, uninflationary space within which the bad faith of the past can be gotten over. If his method is more performative than discursive, that is only to be expected, since traditional, "critical intelligence" is what got us into this fix in the first place, and if we are to get out of it, new methods will be required.

Obviously, the question remains, as to whether middle-class Americans—in or out of the academy—*want* an institutional culture, and a post-deconstructionist canon. In either case, though, the institutions we have now are surely anachronistic, if not an out and out lie, which is Newman's point. Either the university is supposed to represent the best that is thought and said, in something like Arnold's sense; or else it is our job to free society from the arbitrary orthodoxy of traditional "culture." If the first is true, a great many of us are accepting salaries under false pretenses. If the second is true, we are wasting our time, since the average freshman already knows more about post-modern anomie—as lived experience—than we'll ever be able to teach. And she/he—unlike us—didn't have to get over the *Norton Anthology* to arrive at that knowledge, which is what Newman has in mind when he refers to the middle class as the ultimate avant garde of late capitalist society. This may be why academics—still laboring under modernist assumptions about *us* and *them*—remain so vindictively obsessed with the post-humorous dismantling of a "tradition" that doesn't amount to a hill of beans, once you cross the street from the campus. We're like the Victorian "freethinkers" who couldn't stop talking about God.

It is this contradictory state of affairs, I expect, that accounts for Newman's method. He's trying to imagine, to implicate, a necessarily indistinct future; and he's trying to jumpstart the critical idiom he'll need to get from here to there. For the most part, his pieces read like journal entries, the style of which—not to mention their situation—reminds me of Coleridge: there are wonderful insights, great phrases, but comparatively little straight exposition. It's possible to dispute his judgments. For instance, when he gets going on contemporary "big" writers, he confines himself essentially to Bellow, Gass, and Barthelme. The conclusions he reaches fit them, I suppose, but having said what he does about our need for a new realism, I couldn't help wondering why Newman ignores the work of people like Evan S. Connell, Robert Stone, or Russell Banks. But these are minor quibbles.

The real pleasure of this text lies in the reading, and in the suggestiveness of Newman's observations. As an illustration, consider these examples, culled pretty much at random:

Effecting a siege without an enemy, contemporary fiction defensively attempts to reassert its old imperatives, but without mimetic pretensions. This produces not so much the imperial novel, but a full appropriation of a verbal universe which one might uncharitably call hysterification, or the overwrought novel—what we will call *absolutist fiction*.

Against the mindless misappropriation of the metaphors of modern science, we [readers of such contemporary writers as Ann Beattie] get the concrete in the form of tennis shoes and the mandatory beer poured over the head. Against a cost overrun linguistics, we get rent-controlled vernacular.

TV is *total* Aristotle, and it is *story at all costs*, not realism *per se*, which becomes the characteristic expression of contemporary bourgeois society.

What we are dealing with here [in contemporary culture] is the preemption by the media of the writer as *celebrity*. The talk show is, after all, an attempt to create through instantaneous exposure what was once mythology or at least romantic rumor.

One could say that a culture which has so effortlessly assimilated the cultural habadashery of Freud, Marx and Einstein, should have no problem with a few literary fireworks; our century has accustomed us to art which takes off like a rocket and comes down like a stick.

It's not that I wish I could write like Newman, exactly. Sometimes, his allusiveness does become difficult. What I *do* wish is that more of "us" shared his obvious concern for language as something more than special effects, and his admirable wish to make literature, and literary intelligence, more than a purely academic matter.

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*Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality and Advertising in Capitalist Society* by Wolfgang Fritz Haug. Eighth Edition. Translated by Robert Bock. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986 [1971; 1983]. Pp. viii + 185. \$35.00, cloth; \$14.95, paper.

Few people will notice this long-overdue publication in English of Wolfgang Fritz Haug's pioneering study. Still fewer will read it. But *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* has proved to be such a seminal work wherever it has been available that its English-language readers, no matter how few, may find themselves disseminating radically influential conceptions.

Given the philosophic density of the original German, Robert Bock's lucid and sometimes elegant translation succeeds in making Haug's innovative theory accessible. Bock's scrupulous avoidance of sexist constructions (such

as exclusively male pronouns) does, however, introduce occasional solecisms that could have been avoided by using the plural more adroitly.

One reason for the fifteen-year delay in Haug's advent into our discourse may be the staunch resistance of Anglo-American empiricism to such unabashedly theoretical methodology. Indeed, to comprehend his achievement, one must be clear about how Haug's aims and methods differ from more familiar explorations of appearance, sexuality, and advertising in capitalist society.

This is not muck-raking, à la Vance Packard or Wilson Bryan Key. Haug mostly leaves to empirical verification the fact that advertising falsifies its wares, debases and perverts human desires, and manipulates the public. Nor is Haug's approach historical, like Stuart Ewen's fine 1976 account of the emergence and ideology of the modern American advertising industry, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*. Haug's far more audacious goal is to reveal why and how "an unrestrained economic function of capitalism is sweeping across the sensual world with the fury of a natural disaster, destroying everything that does not acquiesce, and assimilating and expanding certain features it comes across into a position of domination in order to strengthen and secure the domination of capital" (p. 108).

The term "commodity aesthetics," which Haug coined in his 1963 essay "On the Aesthetics of Manipulation," yokes two contradictory aspects of the "beauty" or sensual appeal of commodities. From one side, their beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, the prospective buyer whose desires are aroused. From the opposite side, their beauty is an artifice of the seller, who designs commodities to stimulate the desire to possess and the impulse to buy.

But *why* do we find particular commodities sensually appealing, stimulating, attractive, desirable, that is, in the broadest sense, beautiful? If, like a small child, we kept asking "why," demanding deeper and deeper levels of explanation, we might eventually arrive at an understanding of how economic relations characteristic of late capitalism necessarily redefine aesthetic reality. Haug, however, works from the opposite direction.

Instead of beginning with the cultural phenomena he wishes to explore, Haug unfolds them from their fundamental economic relations: "The task I set myself . . . was to derive the phenomena of commodity aesthetics from their economic basis and to develop and present them within their systematic connections" (p. 8). Proceeding rigorously from the Marxist theory of value, he shows how the core of the elaborate global environment of commodity aesthetics lies in the act of commodity exchange itself.

Once the cash nexus becomes central to this exchange, illusion becomes an increasingly important aspect of the commodity. The buyer seeks the commodity to satisfy some real or perceived need, to obtain its use-value. But the buyer is actually motivated by "'the aesthetic promise of use-value,' that is, by the use-value I subjectively promise myself on the basis of what the commodity objectively promises me" (p. 144). To the seller, however, any actual use-value is inconsequential; all the seller wants is to realize the exchange-value of the commodity, that is, to convert it into money. So the seller seeks to maximize the *apparent* use-value of the commodity, and "the commodity's promise of use-value" becomes "the aesthetic illusion" (p. 17). Since only the



appearance of use-value is important in effecting a commodity exchange, "the sensual appearance and the conception of its use-value" become "detached from the object itself" (pp. 16-17). The appearance of the commodity then becomes practically more important than its being: "This is the starting-point, the seed from which the ever-more-complex illusory world of commodity aesthetics developed and from which it is growing daily" (p. 144).

The buyers do have real needs, Haug insists, however much these needs are manipulated, perverted, or even created by commodity aesthetics, and they must *feel* that these needs will be met by the commodities they buy. Indeed, for capitalism to keep developing, the buyers must become needier and needier. Therefore, commodity aesthetics aims to denounce, devalue, and replace all that the buyers already possess, including their own bodies. The human body itself is redefined as a commodity that must continually be re-packaged to satisfy the demands of a fetishistic cult of youth and beauty. Always promising to make life easier and more pleasant, commodity aesthetics keeps creating an exploiting new dependencies (Haug only briefly touches on physiological addiction, such as to tobacco, caffeine, sugar, alcohol, and other drugs). Attempts, particularly by youth, to set up dissenting subcultures are soon expropriated; Haug might have cited the most striking example, the transformation of the work jeans and western jeans of the civil-rights and anti-war protest movements into designer jeans, complete with advertising logo.

Haug argues that this process of constantly remolding human sensuality, with its goal of total control, has "a totalitarian tendency" (p. 91). It is hard to dispute this assertion in the glittering light of the shopping-mall ethos that has been extending its realm in the fifteen years since the first edition of *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*. Illusion and fantasy have come to occupy the center of political life, while the compulsive quest for self gratification through commodities now seems to be approaching outright narcissism. The most terrifying aspect of Haug's analysis is his vision of the "direct anthropological power and influence" of this aesthetic innovation, which "continually changes humankind as a species in their sensual organization, in their real orientation and material lifestyle, as much as in the perception, satisfaction and structure of their needs" (p. 44).

Social needs are trampled as people act out their lives under the illusion that human freedom consists of the individual's liberty to acquire all the commodities one desires. The individual feels and believes that this compulsive buying comes from his or her own free choice, and is blinded to its role in a much larger design. Haug's splendid metaphor for this is the picture on the jacket of this volume, which shows the famous flock of pigeons at St. Mark's Square in Venice spelling out COCA COLA in huge letters. Like the workers and "consumers" of capitalist society, the pigeons are merely satisfying their hunger. However, "the seed was not scattered to feed the pigeons" but to use them in an advertising design "totally alien and external to pigeons": "While they are consuming their feed, capital is subsuming, and consuming, them" (p. 118).

The transformation of human beings into consumers, according to Haug, perfects the alienation and exploitation of the working class: "Now they give up their life and strength in labor, in exchange for an illusory use of their

own life" (p. 96). But here Haug's analysis encounters major problems. Convincing the producers that they are in essence "consumers" has indeed been a great coup for capitalism, as brilliantly dramatized in such literature as Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth's now-classic 1953 novel *The Space Merchants* and J. G. Ballard's 1963 story "The Subliminal Man." But not all consumers are workers, and not all workers can afford to do much consuming.

An accurate analysis of the economic basis of commodity aesthetics must take a global view. After all, the majority of West German, French, British, and U.S. consumers did not in fact expend their lives producing most of the clothing, watches, electronic baubles, housewares, and other goodies they are buying. These were produced largely by "Third World" labor, both manufacturing workers (as in Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Brazil, the Philippines, Haiti, Turkey, Hong Kong, El Salvador, and India) and extractors of raw materials (as in South Africa, Nigeria, Indonesia, Chile, Bolivia, Iraq, and Zaire). Some workers do not fit Haug's description of alienated labor because they materially benefit from the superprofits of imperialism, while many more members of the working class, including the working poor and the unemployed around the world, do not fit this description because they cannot afford to buy the products advertised as essential to happiness. If this is true, Haug's argument exaggerates the role of aesthetic illusion in forming consciousness and ideology, while minimizing the effects of material affluence or deprivation. In simple terms, those people able to buy an abundance of commodities have little material motive to share the revolutionary aspirations of the materially impoverished.

Certainly Haug's intentions are revolutionary. He postulates no idyllic past ruined by capitalist commodity aesthetics. His project is quite contradictory to the reformist message of exposés such as Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* and Key's *Subliminal Seduction*, which assume that capitalist advertising should be truthful. Haug demonstrates that since the economic contradictions of capitalism demand that what is promised from commodities must more and more exceed what they deliver, an aesthetic that negates truth becomes more and more essential to the survival of capitalism. The demand that beauty should not betray truth could be met only by a more advanced economic system that resolves the contradictions of capitalism. So of course socialism is Haug's prescription for a less alienating aesthetic environment.

Even most of those who do not go along with his political premises or conclusions would agree that we live in an environment dominated by commodity production and exchange, and would probably concede that this might have something to do with our sensual understanding of what is beautiful. That helps to explain why Haug's *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* has been so hotly debated in Europe and suggests that this edition may prove equally vital to discussion of aesthetic theory and practice in the English-speaking world.

*Irony and Ethics in Narrative: From Schlegel to Lacan* by Gary J. Handwerk. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985. Pp. ix + 231. \$21.00

One should not be misled by the title into expecting this book to be about the characteristics and workings of narrative. Narrative literature, from Friedrich Schlegel's *Luzinde* to Samuel Beckett's *How It Is* provides much of the subject-matter, but the book is about irony, that elusive topic on which one is well-advised to eschew the desire to have the last word. So it is very appropriate that Gary Handwerk's absorbing and important essay should be without a formal conclusion; for what it most cogently does is to display, with as much clarity as so difficult a topic will admit, why, in spite of our desire for last words and our proclivity for producing them, there can be no last words. Irony will always turn its powers on a last word and ironize it. Irony, in short, is self-generating and limitless; it can only produce local closures at the cost of opening onto endless symbolic networks. As an intersubjective phenomenon, it deals in what I would call the "unreadability" of discourse, and as a result can be understood—this is Handwerk's first major thesis—as a "manifestation of a more basic concern with defining the nature of the human subject" (p. viii). That is why it is ironically appropriate that the book's very title is open to misreading: that meaning is subject to intersubjective negotiation and hence liable to undergo slippage is both the condition of possibility for irony and the reason its critique of the "subject" is so corrosive.

Clearly what is at issue here is not simply the rhetorical device frequently described as saying one thing and meaning another. What it means to mean, and what the conundrums of effectuating a meaning imply about the "nature" (unironic word) of the human subject are the issues. "Local" ironies immediately open up philosophical questions of the kind that so vex and bewilder contemporary theory; and one understands the force of Handwerk's linking of Beckett, that tireless contemporary disintegrator of certainties, with Schlegel, as the "inventor," if one will, of "Romantic," i.e. modern irony. For it is a very modern, and indeed (whatever the sense of that unspecific and abused term) postmodern view of irony that is taken in this book; so that the other major linkage that forms its intellectual backbone is that of Schlegel with Jacques Lacan. Read against Schlegel, Lacan emerges, not so surprisingly, perhaps, as a major theorist of irony, while Schlegel, with a touch more provocation, appears under the Lacanian *éclaircissement* as an ethical thinker, a thinker of "community." I will not say—that would be too much like a last word—that this is a Lacanian theory of irony; but the book shows what can be made of Romantic irony when it is cast in the light of the Lacanian "deconstruction" of the subject.

Of course, as Handwerk suggests, one should really speak not of irony but of ironies, or of kinds of irony. Not only is there a distinction worth making between local and global—or rhetorical and philosophical—irony (even though such distinctions break down upon examination, each "kind" of irony implying the other). But Handwerk distinguishes, very usefully, between four different "emphases" within the overall concept of irony that one can find in Schlegel. *Dialogic* irony is contrastive, a denial of synthesis; *systemic* irony privileges the incompatibility of the manifold and the systematic; while *negating* (or Socratic) irony uses a tactic of particular negations to destroy the

concept of a structuring center. And then, finally, there is "the sort that is uniquely Schlegelian" (p. 35), *ethical irony*.

Ethical irony arises because, as an intersubjective practice, irony is the locus of a double splitting. "Within" the subject, there is a split between the saying and the said, the meant and the way of meaning; and, just as one can on occasion be witty without intending to, so one can have the experience of being ironic without having meant it. For the irony of a given subject—this is the second split—exists only as it is perceived by another, the act of communication being dependent on the latter's retrieval, in such insecure circumstances, of something "meant" for which there is, and can be, no guarantee. So irony, as Handwerk very perceptively points out, forces recognition that the allegedly coherent and autonomous subject is neither; but it also demonstrates that in the recognition of otherness—the recognition that the other is a subject, and the subject is other than "itself"—lies a possibility, however paradoxical, of "community." And it is the emphasis on this latter possibility that constitutes the ethical aspect of irony: "only in the answer of its You can every I feel its own unity," as Schlegel put it (cited on p. 34). Or, more wittily: "Not understanding comes most often not at all from lack of understanding but from lack of sense" (p. 43).

One sees the relevance of Lacan's stress on the subject as constructed in the symbolic order and as constituted by its place in a network of relationships with others; indeed, without Lacan, I am not sure that Schlegel could have been made to yield so clear, if paradoxical, a concept as "ethical irony" turns out to be. Certainly the chapter on Lacan is one of the most brilliant in Handwerk's book, even though it amounts to a "mere" paraphrase of the master's thought. Handwerk has a breathtaking ability to formulate with clarity the most difficult and elusive conceptions without himself slipping into either Lacanian manneredness or Schlegelian hinting and fragmentariness. The Lacan chapter will, I believe, be widely admired for its lucidity and its supremely "pedagogical"—I mean the word in the best sense—organization.

On literary texts, I find Handwerk more pedestrian. Perhaps an element of excitement is lacking because most of them—apart from those already mentioned, the book discusses *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, *The Prelude*, *Sartor Resartus* and the novels of Meredith—are seen to fall short, in different ways and in different degrees, of "full" ethical irony, this being true even of Beckett and Novalis. But I must in any case make an exception for the delightful chapter on Meredith, the various blindnesses of whose characters are deftly delineated as failures to achieve the forms of relational or (my word) dialogical reality ("reality") that are constituted by ethical irony.

The problem that, to my mind, arises from the book's tendency to grade texts on a scale of ironic realization, emerges from the fact that, if one follows Lacan, ethical irony is not so much an exceptional and rarely achieved mode of communication as it is exemplary of the conditions of (inter-)existence of human subjects. Since "intersubjective encounters will necessarily reveal ironic patterns" (p. 136), the only choice, as Handwerk points out, is between being consciously and unwittingly ironic. The ideal that Handwerk seeks is the consciously ironic text; but it seems strange that he should find it so infrequently and so imperfectly realized in literature (the work of Beckett being

that which comes closest to the ideal). The fact is testimony, of course, to the strength of "Imaginary" perceptions of subjecthood and otherness, and of unironic understandings of communication, such as—incidentally—Handwerk's own extraordinarily orderly expository writing, which is ironic only in subtle ways, seems to subscribe to! But is it not probable that in literature the locus of irony is not so much where Handwerk looks for it—in its represented world of relationships between characters, including of course the narrator-narratee relationship—but in the communicative act characteristic of the literary as a mode of discourse?

Handwerk very rightly takes the Beckett industry to task for recuperative reading, and for succumbing to the temptation to "[master] the irony rustling through Beckett's works" (p. 184); and he is led to ask the all-important question: how then shall we read Beckett, since the Beckett text is not a "coherent whole"? But a prior question might well be: what is reading? Is it not a privileged example of ethical irony in action? Novalis, although his terminology is misleadingly essentialistic, certainly seems to have thought of reading as a matter of ironic intersubjectivity: "The true reader must be the extended author" (cited p. 43). A reader ceases to be an autonomous self and becomes an agency of textual realization, but the text is realized as a mode of meaning in which the "meant" can only be hazardingly produced as a *renvoi de signification* occurring within a limitless symbolic network. The "subjects" here—Novalis' "author" and "reader"—are constituted solely as textual relations and in an "intersubjectivity" that enacts a mutual acknowledgement of otherness. And of course it matters not the least that most frequently reading occurs as an *unconscious* realization of the conditions of ethical irony, and only occasionally—perhaps only ideally, or theoretically?—as a "fully" self-conscious ironic realization.

Or *does* it matter? Handwerk's privileging of consciously ethical irony suggests a certain lack of interest in the unconscious kind, and this lack of attention to difference is perhaps of a piece with his choice of the word "ethical" and the concept of community achieved through communication as the subject's "necessary interpenetration with otherness." Such concepts tend to obliterate *political* differences, a matter of some importance if one understands that unwitting ethical irony is a name for authoritarian discourse, that is, discourse that is either mystified or mystifying, or both, in its suppression of the necessary recognition of otherness, discourse that is consequently both alienated and alienating. To dismantle the assumptions of such discourse is an urgent task, and one for which literary people, to whom the experience of "ethical irony" in the form of reading is an everyday and at least *somewhat* conscious occurrence, are uniquely qualified. To do it, we need Schlegel, Lacan and Beckett; and we need books like Gary Handwerk's. To admit to some disappointment that his book stops at the ethical is not to detract from its impressive scholarly and intellectual achievement. It is only to ask that there be a next step.