Book Reviews

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Book Reviews


In 1980, in “What Do Feminist Critics Want? Or A Postcard from the Volcano” (*ADE Bulletin* 66: Winter 1980, 16–24), Sandra Gilbert addressed the chairmen of the Association of Departments of English, lamenting that men were not reading feminist criticism. Instead, feminist critics are “left to speak more and more to one another rather than to those of you ‘out there’ whose minds we passionately wish to reach” (p. 21). But scarcely a year later, Claire Pajaczkowska wrote in *Screen* (22:1 [1981]), “I am tired of men arguing amongst themselves as to who is the most feminist, frustrated by an object feminism becoming the stakes in a displaced rivalry between men because of a refusal by men to examine the structure of the relations between themselves.” In *Tradition Counter Tradition*, Joseph Allen Boone is passionately engaged with feminist literary criticism, but he also examines the structure of relations between men in texts ranging from medieval love literature to Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*. Boone writes as a male critic who wishes “neither to elide my own gender nor to reduce the centrality of feminism to my critical practice” (p. 25). In addition to the now classic texts of feminist literature and criticism, his critical practice is informed by Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogic theory of the novel and by Peter Brooks’ psychoanalytic analysis of narrative desire. Boone examines love, sexuality, and marriage as social ideologies which are perpetuated in narrative structures ranging from pre-Richardsonian novels to the present. This topic is the focus of Part One, “Tradition: Marital Ideology and Novelistic Form.” In Part Two, he relates the dismantling of the ideology of marriage to the formal innovations in nineteenth and twentieth century British and American novels.

Boone begins with an historical overview of the transformations in the institution and ideology of marriage dating from the courtly love tradition in the late eleventh century. From a discussion of the legacy of adultery on the Continent, he moves to the synthesis of love and marriage in Renaissance and Puritan England, and discusses the relationship between the rise of the middle class, the (so-called) “rise” of the novel, and the bourgeois ideal of companionate marriage in the eighteenth century. Throughout, he draws on Althusser’s definition of ideology as a system of representations that constitute the sphere of social relations into which each individual is fitted; he then links textual representation to the constructions of gender in the novelistic marriage tradition. While most literary historians tend to praise their particular epoch—whether Late Medieval, Renaissance, or the eighteenth century—as bringing about the most revolutionary changes in sexual politics, Boone argues that short-run innovations must be measured against larger transhistorical formations. One of the considerable values of Boone’s study is that by taking the long view, he exposes the fundamental conservatism of each epoch and of the novel as a genre, noting that “what is genuinely revolutionizing tends to get absorbed in the fabric of society, a process which the novel mimes” (p. 33).
Boone shows just how the novel mimes this process, noting that "the history of the English-language novel cannot really be separated from the history of the romantic wedlock ideal whose rise we have been tracing; the new genre gained its formal coherence in part by becoming the repository of the marital ethos increasingly cultivated among Protestant middle classes in England and America" (p. 65). He focuses on three paradigmatic plots: courtship, seduction, and wedlock, comparing Pamela and Pride and Prejudice in terms of courtship; Clarissa and Tess of the D'Urbervilles in terms of seduction; and Fielding's Amelia and Howells's A Modern Instance in terms of wedlock. In each chapter, the pairs of texts selected for detailed analysis are supplemented by a discussion of less familiar works of the period; one is thus informed about many more novels than are featured in the Table of Contents. I particularly liked the section on seduction, because without sentimentalizing Victimized Womanhood, Boone stresses the voyeurism that makes the reader complicit in the textual design of mastery and submission. Thus while novelists like Richardson and Hardy lament their heroines' fates, they preserve the sexual values intrinsic to patriarchal order and participate in "the ideological indoctrination common to the novelistic marriage tradition" (p. 130).

The second part, on "Counter-tradition: Demonstrations in Form Breaking," is even more interesting than Part One, for here Boone discusses novels whose formal innovations are a means of subverting the myth of the happy marriage, including Wuthering Heights, Daniel Deronda, The Golden Bowl, and To the Lighthouse. These juxtapositions yield provocative and original insights into Catherine Linton's desire and destruction, Daniel Deronda's destiny, Maggie Verver's calculated manipulation of both adulterous spouses and narrative resolutions; and Virginia Woolf's modernist dismantling of the Victorian marriage ideal and the conventions of realism. Marriage in these novels is a battle, an interior emptiness, a psychological constriction, mirrored in narrative experiments in "writing beyond the ending of the traditional love-plot" (p. 224). These texts, Boone argues, have the potential to be revolutionary, since by exposing the alienating effects of uneasy wedlock, they reshape the dynamics of narrative desire. Revolutionary potential, however, is not the same thing as revolution. Like Peter Brooks in Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative, Boone occasionally elides the difference. Again like Brooks, Boone tends to avoid the more radical implications of Derridean post-structuralism regarding being and identity, and of Lacanian psychoanalysis regarding desire and the linguistic construction of the subject. But Boone's debt to Brooks does not prevent him from cogently critiquing Brooks (as well as Terry Eagleton) for hypothesizing a male reader; the pattern of narrative desire they evoke "follows a linear model of sexual excitation and final discharge most often associated, in both psychological and physiological terms, with men . . . [thus] fostering the illusion that all pleasure (of reading or of sex) is ejaculatory" (p. 72).

In his last two chapters, Boone breaks the boundaries of the marriage plot altogether, devoting a chapter each to separatist communities of men and communities of women. Focusing on the American quest narrative as a counter-traditional genre, he examines the hidden sexual politics in Moby Dick, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Billy Budd, and The Sea Wolf. But far from lamenting the lost Eden of a world without women, Boone examines
the brutalizing effects of male supremacy—on men. Thus in each of these texts, a man is subjugated to an erotics of domination; he takes the place of Woman as other, alien. In contrast, by escaping from a marriage-oriented culture, characters like Ishmael and Huck escape not from women, but from a dominant sexual order which is the focus of the novelists’ critique. Since Ishmael and Huck achieve a “transgressive sense of identity that . . . is multi-form, fluid, and affirming in its integrity . . . the male bond presents a conceptual alternative to the gender inequality institutionalized by marriage in heterosexual relationships” (p. 272). Ironically, Melville and Twain turn out to be less conservative than Hemingway and Mailer, who each reinscribe the taboo against homosexuality and capitulate to the male fantasy of a world without women.

Boone concludes by comparing male counterplots to female counterplots and communities of women in Millenium Hall, Cranford, The Country of the Pointed Firs, and Herland. The emancipatory joy in these female communities, the counter-traditional plotting and structural innovations which so deviated from conventional love-plots may, Boone speculates, account for the willful scholarly neglect of these novels when they first appeared. He ends by relating these early visions of feminist utopias to texts by Djuna Barnes, Gloria Naylor, and Pat Barker. These models make “the materiality of woman’s existence . . . the material of the text itself” (p. 329), thereby suggesting a new novelistic paradigm of écriture féminine. Feminist criticism thus not only recognizes old paradigms, but actively participates in the creation of new ones. This marks the end of the “novelistic marriage tradition and the sexual ideology embedded in it, when challenged by the transforming presence of the counter-traditional text, be it the undermining dialogue of uneasy wedlock, the male quest into a world of alternate possibilities, or the sustaining fiction of female community” (p. 330).

In contrast to such books as René Girard’s Deceit, Desire, and the Novel or Denis de Rougemont’s Love in the Western World, Boone’s study demonstrates the enormous difference that feminist criticism makes when analyzing narratives of romantic love. Boone’s lively and far-reaching book is a significant contribution to novel studies, one that deftly combines literary history with cultural critique, formal analyses with feminist politics. It is a persuasive study of the relation of social ideology to narrative structure, and a provocative presentation of both the ideologically coercive and potentially subversive strains in love and the form of fiction.

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Linda Kauffman


In the nineteenth century, “nostalgia” was a medical term denoting a specific form of mental disease—a yearning for one’s home or country. For twentieth-century readers, the term has acquired a rather different cluster of
meanings; it implies now a particular set of attitudes towards history—the longing for a state which has passed, whether in one’s own life, or in that of society as a whole. No longer is nostalgia considered a form of mental pathology, a disease which should be subjected to medical correction, but is viewed rather as a fairly harmless attitude of mind to which we are all more or less prone. In Nostalgia and Sexual Difference, Doane and Hodges examine the invidious operations of nostalgia within contemporary discourse, as writers from a whole spectrum of fields attempt to deflect the challenge of feminism. Coming at a time when the new right is gaining an increasing ideological stranglehold, both in Reagan’s America and Thatcher’s England, the study is particularly welcome.

The authors have chosen an interesting series of figures to examine, ranging from novelists such as George Stade and John Irving through to such influential literary and cultural critics as Christopher Lasch, Harold Bloom, Ivan Illich, and Peter Berger. Although the list is necessarily eclectic, and cannot hope to be inclusive, one very surprising omission is that of the work of female writers. The study looks neither at the work of avowedly anti-feminist female writers (with the exception of Brigitte Berger), nor considers in depth the more problematic category of feminist writers who themselves employ nostalgic modes of thought. Although Hodges and Doane frequently refer to the work of feminists who endorse fixed models of sexual difference (and thus qualify, according to the authors’ definition, for the nostalgia camp), they do not focus on their work directly, or examine the reasons underlying their particular choice of theoretical position. The project as a whole suffers in consequence: “nostalgia” emerges as a loosely-defined term, associated preeminently with a desire to maintain patriarchal authority, and the cultural and political complexities of the feminist struggle are glossed over.

In their discussion of the representation of the figure of the feminist, or “monstrous amazon,” in contemporary male fiction, the authors point astutely to the ways in which social ideologies of “fun” are used to disarm serious feminist critiques. The authors’ own tendency to adopt a sanctimonious tone, however, does little to help their argument. Of Ishmael Reeds’ work, Reckless Eyeballing, they observe, for example, that “‘naturally,’ we have an author who is also supposed to be outside all the cultural codes he is so obviously reproducing, despite the fact that these books, as even their authors must realize, are consumer products” (p. 43). Here as elsewhere, the author emerges in comparison with the sharp-eyed critic as a very blinkered creature, endowed with a critical naivete about his own work which is almost touching. Are novelists really the last people in the world to realize that their works are consumer products? The supposition, in this case, that Reed believed himself to be outside the cultural codes he was reproducing seems to be entirely that of Hodges and Doane.

Throughout this study the authors tend to overplay their hand. Although the foundations of their arguments are usually good, they weaken their case by attributing to the subjects of their study a particularly simplistic belief in the realist illusion which they then proceed to debunk. A potentially interesting discussion of John Irving’s The World According to Garp, for example, is marred by their insistence that “for Irving, narrative structure is a natural way to achieve and reflect the truth” (p. 73). This assertion rests in turn on
the rather curious claim that the novel follows a traditional narrative sequence. Although *Garp* cannot rival the experimentalism of the modern French novel, it clearly departs, with its several embedded narratives, from a conventional linear format, and far from unreflectively endorsing notions of narrative "truth," it takes the issue of narrativity as one of its subjects. Irving, like Reed, is turned in this study into a strawman, representative of an indefensible position. Theoretical debate ceases to be productive, however, if it is conducted on the grounds of attributing to one's opponent the weakest position possible.

The framework of Doane and Hodges' critique of nostalgia will be familiar to readers of contemporary critical theory: realism's belief in a stable referent (a position here aligned with nostalgia) is set against a commitment to the philosophy of linguistic "play," a belief that identity and difference are constructed in language. It remains unclear, however, whether this framework is adequate to the political exigencies of the contemporary struggle against a right-wing backlash. With its insistent, reiterated demonstrations of the illusions of referentiality, the Derridean and Lacanian position could itself be convicted of a form of nostalgia (albeit expressed in a displaced, negative form): a yearning for lost plenitude, for the moment of full presence, whose absence can only be adequately compensated for by renewed assertions of its impossibility. If such demonstrations are to be rendered political useful they must be treated as the beginning, rather than the self-sufficient end of inquiry. In their treatment of Ivan Illich, the authors contrast his commitment to sexual stereotypes and "going backwards" to their own, more open belief in the linguistic construction of difference: "If differences are in the making, real surprise is possible. We look to the future" (p. 113). Such a simple assertion bypasses all the problems raised in the recent complex theoretical debates concerning the relationship between language and the material world, and the peculiar difficulties faced by women in attempting to employ patriarchal language as an instrument of social change. Although the authors would probably disagree with much of this scholarship they need to take it into account, to demonstrate why the perceived problems are in fact illusory.

Of the figures considered in the book, Ivan Illich, together with Peter and Brigitte Berger, offers potentially the most interesting profile. When this erstwhile radical spokesman can speak of women's "flesh" being frustrated when they are thrust out of their normal "homemaking" role, one knows that something has gone badly wrong. Illich and Peter Berger, two of the most prominent cultural gurus of the radical left in the 60s and 70s, are now making pronouncements on gender politics which would seem to proceed directly from the camp of the moral majority. Why is this happening? Could these positions have been implicit in their earlier work? and have they both shifted their political stance in other areas, or is this phenomenon peculiarly associated with the domain of gender? Although Doane and Hodges offer an analysis of the discourse of their two selected texts, this relative narrowness of focus hinders them from raising these larger questions. Nor do they address the issue of why, at this specific political moment, the backlash against feminism has occurred. The Berger text in particular deserves a more complex analysis than it receives: there is frequently a disjunction between the quoted text and the views Doane and Hodges then attribute to the Bergers. Interest-
ingly, Peter Berger does not seem to have shifted too far from the epistemological position he outlined (with Thomas Luckmann) in his influential work, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). Does this therefore mean that this position is not inherently radical but is in fact compatible with a thoroughgoing conservatism? The question is an important one for Doane and Hodges since their own theoretical stance and political platform is grounded on very similar foundations to that of Berger's earlier work. If a commitment to linguistic constructivism can be used to sustain a socially reactionary stance, then clearly any effective political response to the new right cannot solely be confined to an attempt to overturn "realism" and its associated epistemological tenets.

This recent shift to the right in gender politics is not confined to male cultural spokesmen: early leaders of the women's movement are also involved. Doane and Hodges allude to the fact that figures such as Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer and Jean Elshtain have all "expressed concern about feminism's effect on founding structures" (p. 134) but they do not pursue this crucial issue. Why are all these influential figures seemingly turning their back on all our apparent gains? Are their responses particular to the internal dynamics of the women's movement, or are they directly related to the wider political spectrum? Nostalgia seems at the moment to provide the ideological fuel for the entire right-wing political platform. Thatcher's reign in England is grounded on her claims to be returning to the world of "Victorian Values." It is a moot point, however, whether the sentiments of nostalgia are in themselves necessarily inherently reactionary. In the Victorian age itself, for example, the celebration of medieval culture had diverse political connotations: in the hands of Carlyle it was turned into a defence of a fixed, hierarchical society, but in William Morris' writings it formed the basis of a radical critique of industrial capitalism. Even in the works of Marx one can discern the workings of nostalgia. His famous yearning for a time when all men could be hunter, fisher, shepherd, and critic within the compass of a day clearly draws its strength from the nostalgic rhetoric of a golden age. Although such visions are undoubtedly illusory, they nonetheless serve a necessary political function in offering a rallying impetus for action. Could nostalgia perform a similar function for the women's movement? or are all its manifestations necessarily linked to a reactionary political stance?

In their postscript, Hodges and Doane directly confront the problem that many feminist writers actively endorse a politics of sexual difference (whether they perceive this "difference" to be biologically or only culturally grounded). The authors admit that it could be argued that "effective political action depends on women's ability to define themselves as different, as a distinct group" but conclude that such a perception "underestimates the connection between the decentralization of the feminist movement and its strength: because there are many feminisms, the movement does not depend on the fortunes of a single leader or group. We are accustomed to think in terms of the powers associated with accumulation and identity rather than of the powers associated with dispersion and rupture precisely because the conventions of discourse, based on binary oppositions that preserve identity, insist that we do" (p. 141). Is the belief that power derives from unity and coherence solely a convention of discourse? The problem of identity is a peculiarly
tangled one for feminist activists. If one opposes biological essentialism, and the male grouping of "woman," is one left without a constituency from which to fight? To point to the advantages of decentralisation is not to resolve the problem: even within a dispersed group, one still needs a platform from which to speak, an ideological rallying point. To insist on the powers of dispersion and rupture is to view the social through the limiting grid of linguistic theory. Have the strategies of dispersion and rupture ever been effective in a concrete, political struggle? If the thrust of the contemporary backlash against feminism is to be itself dispersed and contained, it must be met by a united front, which extends its activities beyond the domain of language.

University of Leeds

Sally Shuttleworth


For a number of years Michael Baxandall has played an important if discreet part in orienting art historical inquiry away from questions of connoisseurship and iconography towards a more rigorous historicism. Preoccupied with the ways in which extra-artistic pressures,—whether economic, political, religious, cultural, social, linguistic, scientific, or geographical,—have come to shape works of art, Baxandall has suggested new terms by which art, in particular Renaissance painting and sculpture, may be understood as an expression of its time and place. His *Giotto and the Orators* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) revealed how visual taste of the early Renaissance, as exemplified in the notion of composition, was shaped by the conventions of humanist rhetoric, while *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) discussed quattrocento style as a response to popular social and economic practices of the time such as dancing and merchantile systems of proportion. A more recent study, *The Linenwood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) proposed to "look through the sculptures into Renaissance Germany, the carvings being sometimes addressed as lenses bearing on their own circumstances" (p. vii).

Baxandall's concerns with the conditions under which a work of art is produced and consumed have come to be shared by a number of art historians. As yet, however, this "new historicism" does not offer a method, for beyond the general consensus that the intersection between culture and history needs to be more carefully examined, there are significant disagreements about how historical interpretation should proceed. This was the subject of a session at the College Art Association's annual meeting in 1985 entitled "Art or Society: Must We Choose?" Chaired by Sevtlana Alpers, the panel included Thomas Crow, Stephen Greenblatt, Natalie Zemon Davis, and Michael Baxandall: the proceedings were published in *Representations* (No. 12, Fall 1985, pp. 1-43). As that session made clear, the new historicism needs to be exam-
ined in terms of its relationship to what might be called the "old historicism" (history of ideas, social history, traditional Marxism) and to the current debate over critical theory and language. Baxandall’s cautious and at times dissenting voice in the discussion at CAA would lead one to expect that his present book, Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures, would offer an exposition not only of the problems of historical interpretation as he sees them, but also an analysis of these problems within a larger critical framework. Unfortunately, the book is a disappointment on both counts.

Patterns of Intention begins by asking on what grounds we offer a historical interpretation of a picture, how we go about "inferring" intention in a work in order to place it historically. Baxandall’s first task is to explore the language of art criticism. While his discussion of the effect of language engages many of the issues raised by structuralist and deconstructionist literary critics, his interest stops short of pure linguistic hermeneutics, of treating the work of art as a text, for instance, or determining its role as a signifier. His impatience with this kind of theoretical approach is obvious: "the useful role for historians bent on reflection seems to me not to offer loose prescriptive generalizations under the description of ‘theory’ but rather to test quite simple positions against cases as complex as time and energy permit" (p. vii). While one might sympathize with Baxandall’s intent not to turn his book into a meditation on deconstruction, it is nevertheless disturbing to find the important problems of language and representation raised either directly or implicitly by his method dismissed on the grounds of utility. His anti-theoretical pragmatism is not so complete as to do away with the problematics of critical language. He observes, for instance, that the inferences we make about a picture when we describe it are "less a representation of the picture, or even a representation of seeing a picture, than a representation of thinking about having seen a picture," hence our description will not refer to the picture but to the "effect the picture has on us," and will depend "for such precision as it has on the presence of the picture" (p. 11). Unfortunately this process of cognitive representation, the fact that such language is by necessity subjective and historically shaped and in this sense radically interpretive, is not subsequently addressed in full.

One of the main purposes of his discussion of critical language would seem to be to discount the relevance of the linguistic and semiological concepts of reflected meaning or connotation in formulating an historical interpretation of pictures. Baxandall observes that "in art-critical description one is using the terms not absolutely; one is using them in tandem with the object ... What is determining for them is that, in art criticism or art history, the object is present or available—really, or in reproduction, or in memory, or (more remotely) as rough visualization derived from knowledge of other objects of the same class" (p. 8). What is problematic in this statement, however, is that reality, reproduction, memory and rough visualization are presented as equivalent forms of imagistic "presence," and that their power to impose a second order of meaning on the image is not considered. Thus Baxandall’s description of the "facts of language that become prominent in art criticism ... that have radical implications for how one can explain pictures" (p. 11) is compromised from the start by an indifference to the complexities of these facts.
In what would seem to be a similar utilitarian gesture toward simplifying the process of historical interpretation, he dismisses the "more structured models offered by various versions of Ideology" preferring instead a "simple model of exchange" to describe the relationship between the painter and his culture (p. viii). Baxandall describes this exchange with the French term "troc," which means a barter or swap. By his own admission the book is not about the "dynamics of culture" and thus if "told that the book is inadequate as a sociology of art I shall be unmoved" (p. viii). Baxandall's use of a utopian model of exchange is a nostalgic fiction that enables him to avoid considering the concrete processes that have historically regulated human institutions and existence. One questions the wisdom of using such an a-historical model as the basis for an "historical interpretation of pictures" when so much of that interpretation depends on accurately illuminating the philosophical, economic, and material relationships that obtain between art and society.

As his indifference to the sociology of art suggests, Baxandall's method attempts to consider the role of culture within art without ever considering the role of art within culture. As a result, the works of art he treats become mere reflections of various aspects of culture rather than agents of culture, and culture functions primarily as an influence rather than as a context. Along these lines, Baxandall has suggested that because, "Art' and 'society' . . . are un-homologous systematic constructions put upon interpenetrating subject matters," in order "to get neat matches" we must "work through derived middles between 'art' and 'society', namely a) 'culture' and b) that element in 'art' that can be seen as institutional or as a function of institutions" (Representations, 12, pp. 42-43). Baxandall's discovery and characterization of some of these middle grounds where the work of art and its historical circumstances interpenetrate in the process of exchange ("troc") has been a major contribution to the study of art in its social context. What has been less helpful is his tendency to reduce all that is meant by art and society in order for his mechanistic model of "troc" to work.

In order for troc to work, differences must become equivalencies, thus Baxandall must ignore the presence in the work of art signs of class and other forms of social difference (gender, race, sexuality). Rather than speak of class, Baxandall prefers to speak of "experience" as if it were somehow uniform and one dimensional. Not surprisingly the book's most powerful chapter illustrates a rare case when an artist's and society's definition of experience repressed questions of social difference in an attempt to establish a universal standard of perception. In Chardin's painting of A Lady Drinking Tea, Baxandall's method finds its perfect analogue in the painter's own empiricism. Focusing on the "relations between the visual interest of pictures and (taking the extreme case) the systematic thought, science or philosophy, of the culture they come from" (p. 74), he begins by observing that certain areas within the painting are less distinct than others, these inconsistencies of focus or visual acuity respond to the new optics of Newton and Lock as they came to be popularly understood in the eighteenth century. Here Baxandall's visual analysis and scholarship is dazzlingly acute. His discussion of the painting and the texts that impinge on it is a model of all that is visually and intellectually compelling in his approach. Under Baxandall's scrutiny, the painting
becomes an "enacted record of attention" which we re-enact when we look at the painting; thus, he concludes: "Lockean pictures represent, in the guise of sensation, perception or complex ideas of substance, not substance itself" (pp. 102-103). One cannot help but wish that this essay had not ended with a meditation on the way this painting may be seen to encapsulate Chardin's longing for his first wife. It is an observation which tends to collapse forgoing analysis of the relation between the painting and its culture into a description of the heroic and stoic nature of Chardin's vision. This sudden shift of focus in the essay from the social to the personal avoids the problem of what the painting's "effect of the real" might mean in the context of Chardin's public and the cultural institutions that supported his vision. By way of comparison, we have recently seen in Thomas Crow's *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985; especially chapters 4 and 5) and John Barrell's *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) how important such questions can be when we attempt an historical interpretation of a painting.

The troublesome limitations of Baxandall's positivist approach to historical analysis are most evident in the chapters on Benjamin Barker's Bridge over the Forth and Picasso's *Portrait of Daniel Kahnweiler*. It is perhaps unfair to be too critical of these first two chapters because they are clearly intended to be rudimentary introductions to Baxandall's basic analytic procedure rather than full orchestrations of it. Yet given the subtlety of the mind at work, they are disappointing. Baxandall discusses the historical intention of the work (its "brief") as something mirrored in the appearance of the object. It is significant that he chooses to start with Barker's bridge since here we have a fairly straightforward example of form following function. Baxandall proposes that paintings, like bridges, are "pieces of problem solving" but is quick to note that unlike bridges their manifest objective (or "charge") is not to "span" but to create "visual interest on the surface of a canvas." In spite of the care he takes to distinguish bridges from pictures, the model of Barker's bridge does color his analysis of paintings, obscuring some of the problematic differences between real objects and representations. According to the bridge model we find, by and large, that formalist paintings are about formalism (Picasso), empirical paintings are about empiricism (Chardin), and religious paintings are about religion (Piero).

His reading of the *Portrait of Kahnweiler* does not differ much from traditional formalist readings of Picasso's work. According to Baxandall, Picasso internalized the general "charge" to create visual interest making it the central intention (or "brief") of his art. Given the limits of this brief, social realities, such as the art market, the public exhibition and the critics, are seen to play a decidedly secondary role in determining Picasso's formal choices. While it would be wrong to argue that Cubism is not a formalist movement within modern painting or that the Kahnweiler portrait does not demonstrate a formal engagement of Cézanne's work, to limit this formalism to a 'meditation on his [Picasso's] own perceptual process' (p. 71) and to offer this as an historical interpretation for the painting is perverse. By contrast, Yve-Alain Bois challenging and perceptive historical explanation of this formalism reveals the importance of Saussure's structural linguistics for Cubism ("Kahn-
weiler's Lesson,” *Representations*, No. 18, Spring 1987, pp. 33–68). Bois analysis does not do away with Cubism’s formalism it simply sets out its meaning in the context of larger historical and epistemological developments. If we see Picasso’s Portrait of Kahnweiler only in terms of Picasso’s meditation on his own perceptual process, we may have reconstructed an aspect of the work’s intention but we remain in a state of mystification if we mistake this for the work’s historical meaning or significance. Too often what Baxandall would seem to be performing is what Croce would call archaeology (the sorting and ordering of primary data) not history (the interpretation of that data).

Baxandall’s reluctance to involve his analysis in any form of second order interpretation, (discussions of representation, connotation, ideology, myth, “meaning”), and his tendency to dismiss their relevance by trying to establish a model for historical intention that excludes them does not set him very far apart from the formalist and iconographic interpretive traditions in art history. It is interesting then to find that, in the last chapter, Baxandall’s attempts to distinguish his process of inferential criticism from iconography by contrasting several iconographical interpretations of Piero della Francesca’s *Baptism of Christ* with his own analysis of its historical intention. The chapter is intended to show how we can explain “the intention of an artist living in a culture or period remote from our own” (p. 105), and the fault he finds with the various iconographical readings of the painting is that by falling back “into the habit of looking for ‘meaning’ one sought ‘signs’ and of course immediately found them. The second source of error was to attend too little to Piero’s peculiar pictorial idiom . . .” (p. 125). Piero’s “brief,” as reconstructed by Baxandall, consisted of “producing in his idiom an altarpiece image (with all that implies) in which the main heads of the matter of Matthew 3 are effectively treated in an active relation to a pictorial tradition itself constituting part of the problem” (p. 131). This conclusion does not in the end seem any less reductive than the various iconographical interpretations of the painting which Baxandall rightly questions. The reason for this has to do with the limitations Baxandall has placed all along on the notion of “intention” which he sees as “an analytical construct about his [the artist’s] ends and means, as we infer them from the relation of the object to identifiable circumstances” (p. 109). What such a definition refuses to consider is the possibility that a painting as a representation of historical intention may ultimately exceed that intention in ways that its original purpose and meaning could neither anticipate nor control. Baxandall’s basic confidence in the denotive power of the image skews his analysis of historical intention in such a way as to reduce nearly all questions of meaning to mechanistic descriptions of formalist causality.

My emphasis on the theoretical implications of Baxandall’s treatment of the works he discusses has not allowed me to do justice to the many provocative and profound insights contained in these interpretations. One admires the depth and range of knowledge that he continually brings to a topic, and even more so when it results, as in the Chardin chapter, in a new and important revelation about the cultural context of a work. One is also continually struck by the sensitivity of his eye and the veracity of his visual analysis even when his method prevents him from fully developing the historical implications of an artist’s formal choices. Thus his refusal to openly engage the cur-
rent debates over representation, ideology, and language seems all the more unfortunate given the strength of his intellectual powers and the subtlety of her visual perceptions. Nevertheless, because this refusal would seem to confirm the relevance of this debate to the formation of his own intellectual position, his aloofness from the fray finally appears to disguise a rather aggressive guerrilla attack. One might ask: “What is Baxandall’s brief?” The problems with which he deals are fundamentally linguistic, so his evasion of them by alternately insisting on his lack of expertise in this area or their inconvenient complexity has the unhappy effect of elevating this “ignorance” and “expediency” to the level of a method.

While Baxandall may not care to deal with the problems of modern linguistic theory, modern linguistic theory is only too ready and able to deal with his. For instance, in aspiring to a straightforward approach to historical intention, one which scrupulously avoids the terminology of contemporary critical discourse as surely as it avoids its concepts, Baxandall must invent a jargon of his own. Merely to use the old language of art history would not register his awareness of contemporary theory or his reaction against it. Thus the terms “brief,” “charge,” and “troc,” come into play, terms that clearly describe the denotative relationship Baxandall wishes to reassert between the work of art and its historical intention. In aspiring to the level of linguistic transparency and universal legibility, his terminology evokes a mythic homogeneous audience who share this language. Just as the realities of class and social difference are suppressed in his historical interpretation of pictures so too are they silenced in his discourse. While it is certainly not his intention, it is unfortunate that Baxandall’s book will appeal most to those who wish to preserve the status quo in art history by holding the field against any further incursions from other disciplines (especially literature), and who will now have a new way to naturalize their position as historicism, art history, and perhaps even history itself.

University of California, Irvine

Ann Bermingham


Theatrical Legitimation is an insistently, self-professedly challenging book; its quarry is the “new historicism” and the discipline of comparative literature, and the charge against both is their submission to “master-narratives” of continuity that permit the recovery of a past-without-difference. To these disciplines, the book’s title offers its answer, a legitimization of theatricality as criticism—or, better, as theory, since the etymological connection of theater and theory is taken to guarantee the enterprise. “Allegory” is (thanks to Walter Benjamin and Paul deMan) another word for theory in this study, which reads instances of seventeenth-century theatricality through the discourses of anti-theatricality mounted by the “puritan” and Baconian opponents of the English stage and their Jansenist counterparts in France. Murray
aims to demonstrate how the antitheatrical charges were met by strategies to contain theater and to show the limits of these endeavors. Since containment is what he studies, his evidence is taken from the margins that police the drama—the textual apparatus of Ben Jonson's *Workes*, the epistles that frame French theater texts, the theory of d'Aubignac. The first aims to secure the genius of the author, the second the genius of Richelieu, the partron, the third, the genius of the spectator. In the readings of these frames, Murray argues for a deconstructive play an abime, a phantasmal allegoresis with unbounded energies that refuse stabilization. If these are the frames of reason, continuity, coherence, they are disrupted by what they mean to secure—theater and rhetoric. They offer "the phantasm of legitimate interpretation" (p. 17) that haunts the 'new' historicism and comparative literature, heirs of the antitheatricality and rationalism of the seventeenth-century. Murray reveals the "epistemological impurities" (p. 7) that undermine the frames; they legitimate his practice by overturning the norms of legitimation.

Such, crudely stated, is the argument that prefaces the book, summarizing it. And, occasionally, as the book proceeds, these claims about the status of the book (its relation to the prevailing disciplinary practices) are reiterated, but not developed. Rather, by the last chapter, Murray tilts with Ernst Cassirer as the evil genius of comparatism, and suggests a Kantian genealogy for him that arrives at Habermas and notions of rational consensus. In those final pages, and occasionally earlier (usually at the beginnings or ends of chapters or sections) the banner of theory is waved, normally by a flurry of citations, or an honorific rolecall: "contemporary readers from Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe to Louis Marin and Michel Foucault delineate carefully and laboriously the paradigms upon which French neoclassicism is often understood to depend" (p. 193). What they have done so "carefully and laboriously," Murray does not stop to do. Theory is invoked throughout the book, so that to criticize it would be to criticize theory. The book, rather, "carefully and laboriously" delimits its activities to the margins. The gesture is no doubt theoretical, sanctioned by *Margins of Philosophy* or "Parergon" or "Cartouches," or, perhaps better, the book simulates the gestures of theory. Yet its aim, to reveal the ruin of truth, goes no further than an overturning. Its truth is the charges of the antitheatricalists—the theater cannot be secured against its demonism; its truth, then, within its self-proclaimed terms, is antitheoretical. And saying this is not just to play with words; for theater, banished from Murray's text as it would be for any antitheatricalist, is, by its absence, secured as a locus of energy, freedom, sexuality, imagination. In the thinly disguised misogyny of this text, theater might be (is) called woman.

"Carefully and laboriously," Murray devotes his first hundred pages to a reading of the textual apparatus of the first Jonson folio, to the design of the title page, the layout of the catalogue of contents, the disposal of text and editorial apparatus in the masques. The point of the argument is that Jonson's antitheatricality manifests itself in his move from stage to page, and that print, with its enforcing frames, attempts to reposition theater as text, with all the stability that Elizabeth Eisenstein has claimed for the technology. Murray cannot be faulted for demurring from this mythos of authorial genius or its supposed enshrinement in the book, the "figuration and fetishization of authorial genius" (p. 65) manifest through a technology that is not merely a
mode of mechanical reproduction. Under suspicion, he reads Jonson’s “textual sovereignty” (P. 73) and its allegory of the authorial mind fully in control of text and reader. The critical consensus that Murray plucks from this configuration he calls “Jonson & Johnson,” a corporation devoted to reason and scandalized by theatrical excess. Murray’s figure embraces Cleopatra.

I have no desire to argue against this representation of Jonson; it is compelling. It is also familiar, as Murray acknowledges, citing Jonas Barish, Richard Newton, Richard Helgerson (although work along these lines by Thomas Greene and David Quint is ignored). What Murray adds to this work is an animus directed against it and an elaboration of the protocols of legitimate reading. Thus, glancing at the catalogue, Murray secures his argument that the patron is subordinated to the work of art by the typography of the second line of the catalogue, where the columns of names of works and names of designated patrons virtually meet; “Every Man out of his Humor, To the INNES of COVRT,” the line reads, and Murray reads it: “Unlike the other sets of title and dedication, this pair’s textual spacing is contiguous, thus stressing the title’s minimizing the difference between play and dedication. Spatial contiguity here catalyzes the nominal association of Jonson’s plays with the ideal reading public of courtly society” (p. 75). Similarly, pausing over the titlepage, Murray ponders the presence of the PASTOR that seems so out of place on the theatrical scene; and, not surprisingly, he emerges as a figure of Jonson the critic. These are strained arguments. The textual apparatus is read as if every point must deliver the thesis. This is “allegorical” reading indeed, but it is not deManian; rather it is a dogged point-for-point allegorism. And the theory that it manifests is just the sort that those who proclaim themselves against theory decry: global and universalizing abstraction. Such theory is complicit with the project of the dehistoricized corporation that Murray calls Jonson & Johnson.

Jonson’s textual sovereignty banishes the sovereign from Murray’s pages; with the French theater, Richelieu comes to take that place. Within the professedly anti-‘(new)’ historicist aims of this theoretical reading, Murray transports Stephen Orgel’s readings of Jacobean court theater to the French scene without considering the legitimacy of that move. As a theorist his concern is anything but the master-narrative of continuity or the comparatist’s reiteration of the same. Thus, claims that have been made elsewhere are transported elsewhere as if they were only true in France. As Murray reads the epistles prefacing French drama of the mid-seventeenth century, he finds them portraying an allegory of legitimacy for the theater through the portrait of the patron. Richelieu is constructed through this discourse, so that his performance as spectator of theater legitimates it: “Richelieu’s face reflected the vision of his perspective. And the actual depth of the cardinal’s perception was not as significant as the allegorical image of perspective—reason, judgment, and power—which the viewer was asked to perceive, indeed, was asked to acknowledge, as Richelieu” (p. 122). Again, I would not quarrel with this description but with the dehistoricized procedures it means to legitimate. (The margins of my copy of Theatrical Legitimation are littered with queries—how is this ‘eyeing’ related to English absolutism, for example; how is the constructed face related to that trope in Shakespeare; questions declared illegitimate by a comparativism that will not compare, and by the privilege of rupture; authors there, patrons here, and never the twain shall meet).
These procedures are even clearer in the final section of the book, a "lecture exacte" of D'Aubignac's *La Pratique du théâtre*. Here Murray shows his colors (that's his trope for troping), revealing that the licensing of the pleasures of the spectator in D'Aubignac 'deconstructs' (that's his word for critical demurr) the ideology of legitimacy, for the pleasures are—ultimately—a woman's passion, over which 'reason, judgment, and power' cannot prevail. The true theater is an invisible one, and what the spectator sees, moved by the rhetoric of theater, is the primal scene. Mommy—or Julia Kristeva. "Energetic spectating always already critiques or, more specifically, deconstructs the mechanisms of reason and taste sublime" (p. 216). In *Theatrical Legitimation*, energetic spectation occurs on the margins, watching a scene that is at once never produced and over-produced.

*The Johns Hopkins University*  
Jonathan Goldberg


This is a timely collection of essays whose unusually high quality and whose disciplinary and methodological breadth will serve well the very broad academic audience for which the collection was clearly conceived. At the same time, the methodological variety may well raise a practical question about the utility of this as a collection and a critical question about the collective theoretical consequence of these essays. A glance at the table of contents indicates that the essays do not follow a theoretical or thematic progression. (There is thus no preferred order in which to read the essays and the reader is better off inventing her own.) The introduction by Heller and Wellbery notes that the "arrangement of the essays[...jis necessarily contingent, reflecting one of several possible readings (pp. 2–3). This fact is apparent enough, yet it is also one which draws attention to the lack of cumulative force in the volume. The introduction's recourse to Richard Rorty's vague and facile language about "an open and evolving conversation in which voices from many disciplines work out shared views and differences in a common labor of edification" does not compensate for the absence of a firm sense of what is at stake in "reconstructing individualism" (p. i).

Possible doubt about the volume's theoretical consequence follows from doubt about its usefulness as a collection. As its title suggests, the volume proposes that it is time to reopen discussion of the concepts of autonomy, individuality and selfhood. Although the contributions do engage these issues, and some surprisingly, they all do so in application to a quite discrete topic and without agreement as to what is at issue in concepts like individualism and autonomy. The reader will miss any discussion of the relation of subjectivity and individualism in the modern age. This is a metacritical point which may well go beyond the objectives of the contributors as well as the editors, yet it is one that needs to be made given the scope and weightiness of the matters considered.
Cavils and questions do not detract from the individual distinctions of this volume. By contrast with many recent volumes dedicated to the representation of a school or theory of criticism, this one allows differences plainly to emerge. It is impossible to give all sixteen essays equal attention, but by making clusters of a number of them I hope to elicit their peculiar contributions and differences.

Four essays in this volume, John Freccero’s “Autobiography and Narrative,” James Clifford’s “On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning: Conrad and Malinowski,” Christine Brooke-Rose’s “The Dissolution of Character in the Novel” and Martha Nussbaum’s “Love and the Individual” all center on the creation of self or character in narrative. The first, Freccero’s, is also the lead essay in the volume. Understandably so, in that his is an inviting, yet also keen analysis of the difference between narrated and narrating self in autobiography, principally in Augustine’s Confessions. Freccero points out the difference of Augustine’s linear narration of conversion as one definitive temporal sequence from the mixed narration of Theresa of Avila, for whom there is no final turning point from which the self is only the redeemed writing self and no longer the self of conflict and historicity. Where Augustine projects the moment of conversion into a whole temporal sequence and hence into an ideal narrative of an ideal self, as faithful an imitator as Teresa is unable to reiterate strictly his allegorization of self-history as salvation history. Hints like this are not completely developed, yet they also need not have been. Freccero gives us matter enough for reflection. The remaining three essays do not attain Freccero’s level of insight and clarity. Of the three, Brooke-Rose’s, though more a survey and proposal than an argument, is the most intriguing. On the one hand, she seems to wish to honor the achievements of “postmodernist” fiction, that parodistic genre whose subject matter is previous fiction and its characters verbal structures. On the other, she apparently thinks there is no future for fiction in meta-fiction. Instead, a regeneration of fiction will entail an aspiration of prose to the dense verbal texture of poetry and a renewed interest in character. The reader may only wonder whether such fiction is not already among us. I think of the late Pier Paolo Pasolini’s prose as one which has the evocative power of poetry and the live presence of character without being mistaken for traditional fiction.

Clifford’s essay sets for itself the promising task of tracing to c. 1900 the emergence of a “distinctive ethnographic subjectivity” marked by “participant observation” (pp. 141, 142). The task is well formulated and includes insights on “additive, metonymic empiricism,” on “abrupt movement in imagery” and on “incongruence” as aspects of Conrad and Malinowski, yet its execution is in the main a somewhat plodding back and forth comparison of the two.

Nussbaum’s essay stands out as the most idiosyncratic. Occasioned by the discovery of a manuscript which had plagiarized her own work, Nussbaum proceeds to use that ms., labeled a “hybrid of fiction and philosophy,” to embed her own reflections on the individuality of the love object and the identity of oneself from one love object to the next (pp. 253, 257). The reader wonders whether Nussbaum herself escapes the label she has applied. The multiple framing of narrative within narrative and philosophical reflection within and on narrative requires an unusual finesse and skill in mediation of
discourses. Proust, who receives significant mention in this essay, was the master of that. Nussbaum does not reproduce his lesson.

One is on more even terrain with the essays which treat from several perspectives self-identity: Carol Gilligan’s “Remapping the Moral Domain,” Nancy Chodorow’s “Towards a Relational Individualism” and Natalie Davis’s “Boundaries and the Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France.” Gilligan’s essay continues her widely recognized investigation into predispositions to autonomy and justice on the one side and to care and interaction on the other, predispositions to which distinct versions of moral agency belong (p. 241). In tracing these oppositional tendencies her concern is to break down oppositions altogether. For Gilligan, the central metaphor of identity formation should not be mirroring, with its connotations of isolation and exclusive attachment, but dialogue (pp. 250-51). Although this approach leads Gilligan to reject the vocabulary of object relations as exceedingly separatist and “mirroring,” as grounded in self-reflexivity rather than interaction, it is Chodorow who makes a strong case for the object-relations model as a means of “reconstruct[ing] a self [. . .] fundamentally implicated in relations with others” (p. 199). Using Freud’s “On Narcissism,” Chodorow sees at stake in the object-relations model not an insistence on the preserve of the individual but “internal as well as external relatedness to the other” (p. 203). Chodorow’s constructive sense of self-reflexivity deepens Gilligan’s argument without undermining it.

Natalie Davis’s essay, the one strictly historical contribution, is a lucid representation of how the social embeddedness of the individual, particularly woman, in sixteenth-century France not only did not preclude self-discovery but prompted it (p. 63). While it is true according to social convention that women were “given away” in marriage, Davis makes the case that in practice women could reverse this “cultural formation” and give themselves away (p. 61). The idea is of historical consequence, since its truth entails conceiving of a correspondingly greater self-consciousness among women and greater sense of ownership of their own bodies. In the fine overlap it cuts between the socio-cultural and the psychological Davis’s essay refers both to Gilligan’s and Chodorow’s work and to Stephen Greenblatt’s “Fiction and Friction,” the recounting of the “prodigious” history of Marin le Marcis, a person of ambiguous sexual identity whose want of proper sexual individuation aroused among clerical and medical authorities of the early seventeenth-century awe, disbelief and, most instructively for Greenblatt’s ends, a blind insistence that Marin be one sex or the other. If Marin himself was regarded as marginal or worse, the discourse about him is representative of the way in which the prodigious was not only used to articulate the normative but also to “reintegrate” the prodigious into “normal structures of gender” (p. 45). Like Davis, Greenblatt is clear about the historical and cultural specificity, hence contingency and instability, of such structures. A difference between them is the rhetorical finesse with which Greenblatt puts to methodical use a metaphorical term like “friction,” a term he shows was constitutively operative for Renaissance “knowledge” of sexual identity (pp. 38ff.).

The matters of identity and gender are cast in a different frame by Michael Fried’s “Courbet’s Metaphysics: A Reading of the ‘The Quarry.’” In a series of highly discriminated analyses which trace a pattern of “displaced or meta-
phorical self-representations,” Fried argues that the “the primacy of self-representation” in Courbet does not privilege the artist but constitutes a dispersal of the self among objects and perspectives where no hierarchical order rules (pp. 91,95). Fried calls this effect one of “equivalence of translatability” and sees it informing an ideal of the “absolute continuity of nature” (p. 99).

So if ‘The Quarry,’ as a scene of silenced violence, thematizes the reassertion of such continuity even in the act of breaking it, the later canvas ‘Death of the Stag,’ in narrating violence and pathos, reveals the fissures at the heart of Courbet’s enterprise.

Once one enters the philosophical region of this collection, any threads one may have been able to pull together are likely, predictably, to unravel. The essays of J.B. Schneewind and Ian Hacking on “The Use of Autonomy in Ethical Theory” and “Making Up People” have this much in common, that they warn us against the dangers of totalizing criticism (Schneewind) and totalizing explanation (Hacking). Schneewind does recognize the limitations inherent in the concept of individual autonomy: it does not presuppose, much less demonstrate, the existence of a substantial self or transcendental ego. Yet the concept of autonomous criticism and action is necessary if one is to think of society as self-legislating. (The editors’ version of this argument in their introduction is quite different, pp. 5–6.) Hacking’s essay is appealingly provisional in conception and tone as it pursues the argument that what I call myself and what I do, or what others call me and what I do, depends on “the possibilities of description.” This dependence is neither chronological nor ontological but has the structure of simultaneity: possibility and descriptive structure “emerge[d] hand in hand” (p. 225). Hacking wisely stops at this. He declines to predict that any general theory of making up people is to be had and thus avoids any massive generalizations on the nature of social control and power.

The essays of two other philosophers, Werner Hamacher and Stanley Cavell, are both the longest contributions and both equally unsuited to summary, albeit for altogether different reasons. Given the current interest in the continental sources of contemporary literary and critical theory, Hamacher’s reading of Nietzschean individualism as a thing beyond all category and concept, as “unaccountable surplus,” serves as an exemplary lesson in thoroughness and rigor of argument (p. 110). In fact so thorough is Hamacher’s exposition that one occasionally has the sense, also acquired from reading Foucault, that the expositor has been impersonally absorbed into the exposition. Hamacher writes wholly without the mannerisms—punning, tentativeness of assertion, self-regarding playfulness—which have marked much recent writing on Nietzsche. Still, for all its sobering rigor and consequence, Hamacher’s essay does not entirely shun the declamatory pathos of Nietzsche’s own assertions: “... monological art... is theocidal. It knows no other and recognizes no God who could betoken its determinate destiny” (p. 128). (For another view of Nietzsche one must turn to Paolo Valesio’s brilliant but aphoristically discontinuous essay “The Beautiful Lie.”)

Finally, Cavell’s “Being Odd, Getting Even: Threats to Individuality” contains remarks on the reader’s obedience to and enactment of texts which strike me as truly important for any theory of interpretive understanding. The essay as a whole, however, will prove somewhat recalcitrant to anyone
not already initiated into the peculiar discursivity of, say, *The Claim of Reason*. Though Cavell’s essay may be an extreme case, it points up a drawback of this volume: despite the very high quality of the essays, taken as a group they presuppose both too much and too little: too much of the contexts out of which they individually come and too little of a common ground or set of questions. This book will be highly valued, if chiefly according to the individual needs readers bring to it.

University of Tulsa

John Jay Baker


This is a richly informative book, wide-ranging in scope and lovingly detailed in exposition, which sustains and is sustained by an argument that no scholar of Romanticism, British or Continental, can afford to disregard. With this argument—that we misinterpret the Romantic movement by supposing it to involve the dissolution of traditional genres—I shall wish to express measured disagreement on several counts, but with no intention of undercutting Curran’s solid achievement.

The sheer diversity of what he has done is best shown, perhaps, simply by listing, as a litany of praise, a few of his most instructive semi-detachable arguments: One finds here the best pages yet written on Leigh Hunt, whom Curran treats as the first English Biedermeier poet, a pioneer in the conscious adaptation of bourgeois values to serious art. The “Whig political ode,” dating from Collins and culminating in Shelley’s finely-appreciated “Ode to Liberty,” is usefully isolated by Curran as a legitimate subgenre. In the chapter on “Pastoral,” which is arguably the best, there is a splendid historical discussion of the “proletarian anti-pastoral” from Gay to Crabbe (this connection in itself bespeaks an impressive alertness to the affinity of oppositions) and then on to Wordsworth, “the greatest of England’s pastoral poets,” with fine readings of “Michael,” the appropriate Lyrical Ballads, and much else.

Perhaps most interesting of all is the emphasis Curran properly and originally places on the machinery of Robert Southey’s quest-romances, which needed only to be rendered a little more subjective and suggestively obscure, he argues, to become the Visionary Cars of the major Romantic narratives and closet dramas. Anyone who has ever struggled to explain the literary-historical background of a poems like *Prometheus Unbound* or *Cain* to students, knowing that it is not enough to cite the precedent of classical and biblical machines, will discover in Curran’s discussion of Southey a mystery solved.

To turn to the thesis which propels these and the rest of Curran’s observations: he, Curran, is anti-Schlegel and, more subtly, anti-Abrams. That is, over against the early nineteenth-century Continental interest in the novelistic genus *universum*, with all the polyglossal pan-generic irony modern readers suppose to have been discovered by Bakhtin, and over against M. H. Abrams’s canonical reading of Romanticism as a metaphysics, as a restitution
of the subject vis-à-vis the object (leading to such pan-generic concepts as "natural supernaturalism" and "the greater Romantic lyric"). Curran maintains that the major poets of British Romanticism, not to mention the circumscribed literati of that era, continued to use the traditional literary "kinds" they inherited from the Humanists, the Pléïade, and the Neo-Classical writers in order to signal as precisely and intricately as possible their estrangement from that very inheritance. Thus in place of any emphasis on the pan-generic (the novelistic from Schlegel to Bakhtin, the "hieropoetic" [Michel Beaujour] from Novalis to Blanchot, the anti-Aristotelian from Plato to Deleuze), and in studied neglect of these issues as one finds them discussed in *L'Absolu littéraire* (by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy) and in a special issue of *Glyph* (7[1980]) he consigns to a footnote (p. 222), Curran proffers his own emphasis on the "countergeneric," with wonderful practical results, especially in the discussions of pastoral and romance I have mentioned, but with considerably less theoretical success.

In the first place, he runs the danger of oversimplifying period concepts. It is doubtful whether the Romantics themselves presented a solid front on this topic. Are Blake (for whom the genres conveniently modify the unvarying vocation of prophecy) and Wordsworth (whose pointed internalization of generic concepts constitutes an apology for the organization of his 1807 collection of poems) really to be understood as literary-historical allies of Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats, whose versatile and exuberant adaptation of existing genres is unquestionably a shared trait and does indeed merit Curran's compensatory emphasis? More troublesome still is a tendency in Curran that one finds in all Period apologetics, namely, the need for a contrastive under-valuation of earlier periods: thus a Pope scholar will not gladly hear that the "hegemony of neoclassical rules, with their simpleminded and impossible clarity" (p. 8) awaited the sophistications of Romanticism to find their true justification. Even if we provisionally accept the hermeneutic guidance of generic determinacy (the obvious practical value of which this book everywhere demonstrates), there remains the question whether this determinacy is best treated historically: granting the implausibility of a post-generic text, can we name any literary text worth thinking about that is not already counter-generic? It might be safer to isolate as an historical constant what the Russian Formalists called "parody" (within which generic reorientation may or may not be an aspect of change), a constant already firmly in place, as the best recent commentary shows, in Homer, Pindar, and Theocritus.

But it is not in fact safe even provisionally to promote generic signals to a privileged place among the guidelines for interpretation. What one then too frequently falls back upon is a wholly undemonstrable antinomy conceived as the tension between tradition (genre) and the individual talent (counter-genre). Thus in sentences like "[i]t could be argued that the particular tradi­tion associated with the pastoral elegy wholly determines the thrust of the poem, but that would be to deny Shelley's creative independence and personal involvement in its issues" (p. 123), the rhetoric of scrupulously apportioned latitude cannot conceal the sheer element of undecidability in the whole matter which is not just a local discomfort but in fact challenges any and all category-based approaches to interpretation. While there is something exciting and suggestive in the epigrammatic assertion that Byron's success in
Childe Harold "came not from his contemplating himself in the poem, but from his contemplating a genre in himself" (p. 157), the excitement is gnomic rather than clarifying; and the arbitrariness of the choice between initiative and regimentation becomes obvious when Curran writes, of The White Doe of Rylstone, "if there can be no question that [Wordsworth's] own suffering over the death of his brother John is reflected in the poem, the primary impulse behind it is generic" (p. 142).

In the final chapter, this mediatory position expands into a thoroughgoing discussion of the liberation-in-constraint paradox. (Surprisingly little thematization of form had been commented upon in the "Sonnet" chapter, where those self-referential sonnets of Wordsworth and Keats which insist on this very paradox were passed in review: is it accidental that Toussaint L'Ouverture is a "revolutionary leader of the newly independent Haiti now ironically languishing in prison" [p. 47]? But here more than ever an explicit theoretical model is called for. What finally constrains discourse? Extrinsic or "intrinsic" (Hirschian) genre? Personal feeling? Sociolect? And for Curran, moreover, who allows some room for all these determinants as occasion arises, to what extent can they be said to coexist without open conflict?

The problem is largely resolved, as far as Curran himself is concerned, by his steady and extreme intentionalism. As he handles it, the notion of counter-genre blossoms into a celebration of that conscious artistry which his readings tautologically both assume and demonstrate. Together with the emphasis on genre one finds here an attempt to revive the Modernist discrimination among poetic personae, not as a means of rendering the poet irrelevant (as in Wimsatt and Beardsley) but rather as an expression-oriented (hence still "Romantic") confirmation of the poet's creative control. Plainly, a critic can be expected to invoke genres and personae alike with the forensic purpose of refuting doctrines of passive inspiration (as if that could not prove to be more rewardingly complex than any imaginable formal control!) or of the wild warbling of native woodnotes. And sometimes it works. But Romanticism is difficult to recognize when it is carried by critics who have assimilated their Pound and Yeats to extremes of Modernist craft, and it is just in the degree to which Curran does this, more here and less there, that one finds him more devoted to singing hymns in praise of artistic unity as such (his hidden agenda being a rebuke of current emphases on the disruption of form by intractable forces) than to delineating the intentional structure of a certain body of literature. For him the rhetorical guarantor of formal control is "dialectic" (frequently the give and take between personae), a word he overuses at just those interpretive junctures where others today might overuse "mise en abîme" or "aporia."

Because Curran starts with formally definable genres and moves on to thematically definable and hence much more capacious—not to say baggy—genres, the later chapters are less satisfying than the first ones. As one approaches something disarmingly called "Composite Genres" in the penultimate chapter (The Prelude and Don Juan are reserved for this chapter, making the preceding chapter on "Epic" disappointingly thin), one comes to feel that the Germanic tripartition of genres into narrative, dramatic, and lyric which Curran had begun by rejecting would be at least as serviceable at this very general level and perhaps less in need of special pleading. After all, whatever
else one may say of it, "the modern critics’s faith in an abstract lyrical moment" is at least as old as Goethe’s notes to his Westöstliche Divan and becomes canonical in Hegel, hence can scarcely be thought either anachronistic or "a spurious distillation from Romanticism" (p. 11).

Not that special pleading is confined solely to those occasions when it has become obvious that to speak of genre and to speak of theme are the same thing: Wordsworth does not "misperceive" Gray’s poem on the death of West even incidentally because he fails to grasp its "dynamics" as a sonnet (p. 30); and it is not helpful to say that "the One Life within us and abroad" is "the essential principle of pastoral" (p. 110; perhaps it is, but why then of pastoral only?). But these are increasingly petty cavils. Curran’s is a grandly conceived and elegantly sustained work, from the preliminary abecedarium of generic subtitles to the last gracenotes on the generic encyclopedia of Goethe. At its very strongest perhaps in the opening pages on historical background in each chapter, the book additionally furnishes an excellent and varied series of brief readings. Without inflation or grandiosity, in fact, Curran has found a way to write the sort of book surveying all the canonical Romantic writers that was every Romanticist’s ambition at the time of Bostetter and the early Bloom but seemed to have been exhausted—as a genre—by Abrams. By his own example Curran proves the durability of kinds.

Yale University

Paul H. Fry


To readers of The Poetics of Plot (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), Pavel’s most recent book may come as a partial surprise. The earlier book seemed content to work within the boundaries of narratology, refining some of its established models, tentatively taking plot grammar one step beyond the Proppian-structuralist legacy. Fictional Worlds tries to outstep the narratological domain entirely, relocating fiction theory "at the crossroads of literary criticism and philosophy" (p. 1). Pavel’s plot grammar capitalized on those (trans)textual regularities that advanced thematics; Fictional Worlds openly critiques the structuralist quest of formal regularities or the kind of "mythocentric" emphasis that Pavel’s own Poetics of Plot illustrated in part. The main polemical task in Fictional Worlds is to raise the "moratorium on representational topics" implemented by formalist poetics.

But upon closer examination, the two books prove to be part of the same theoretical continuum. In The Poetics of Plot, Pavel opened the field of poetics to semantic concerns, examining the ontological and epistemic assumptions underlying plots in Renaissance dramas. His prime operational concept (that of move), inscribed Pavel’s plot grammar in the praxical field where linguistic regularities obtain in a complex interplay between social practices and individualized tactical decisions. Fictional Worlds emphasizes even further this pragmatic aspect of fictionality, borrowing concepts from speech act theory,
modal logic and coordination games. The resulting perspective successfully foregrounds those aspects bracketed by structuralist poetics, but occasionally creates unwarranted repetition, repositing "problems" already solved (see Pavel's recourse to Kendall Walton's notion of reading as an act of "impersonation" through a "fictional ego," where current psychonarratology and Rezeptionsästhetik have devised a more complex explanatory model of how readers project themselves into textual worlds). In his notable effort to reorient narrative studies, Pavel is forced to overlook certain refinements in recent narratology, or to sometimes collapse structuralism and poststructuralism, reducing them to formalist "textology."

Pavel's immediate plea is for a nuanced integrationist approach to the question of fictional discourse and its boundaries. Taking issue with both the formalist and the Russellian versions of segregationism, that doggedly dissociate "actual worlds" from "fictional" texts, Pavel attempts "to show that fictional texts employ the same referential and modal mechanisms as nonfictional uses of language, and that the logic of such texts is better understood when considered in relation to other cultural phenomena, in particular myths and religious beliefs" (p. 136). This thesis is backed up—and contradicted partly—by the claim that fictional discourse is best served by a kind of flexible, internal approach, that will make "the distinction between fictional and nonfictional lose some of its bluntness" (p. 53).

In chapters 2 ("Fictional Beings"), 3 ("Salient Worlds") and 4 ("Border, Distance, Size, Incompleteness"), Pavel argues this point from various angles, convinced that rigid borderlines are not only counter-intuitive, but also historically limited to our post-mythic, rationalistic period that sets fictions in opposition to reality "sub speciae veritatis." Pavel prefers a more archaic ontological model to this modern partitioning, one that postulates fluid boundaries between the sacred (symbolical), and the actual and the fictional. He calls this model a "salient universe" and ascribes to it a dual, structure, with the "secondary" domain of the "make-believe world" and the "primary" domain of the actual world.

As upon other occasions, Pavel is first to point out the problematic areas in his composite model, derived from the possible world theories and their applications to the domain of fictionality. To begin with, the world of fiction may appear in this perspective as a weaker and degraded form of dual structure: it reverses the magico-mythic model which located the sacred space over and around the "actual," by subordinating fictionality to actuality. Fiction seems to lack that energy which, in the case of mythic rites, "may leave the fictional mode and cross the threshold of actuality," turning mimesis (mimicry) into "reality" (p. 60). And yet, a quick examination of Don Quixote leads Pavel to conclude that fiction may engage a much richer salient structure, with two concepts of "actuality" competing and no frame of reference finally prevailing. What Pavel is less willing to concede, is that the "actual" and "fictional" may converge in a more essential way, both being narrative and ideological constructs; or that the fictional domain may strongly impact the "actual," displacing or reversing the dual structure.

Another problematic aspect involves the notion of "correspondence." After amending Plantinga's concept of strict correspondence between book and world, Pavel still defines reading as an allegorical operation that "relate/s/
each object in the story to some object in our world, by virtue of the relations of correspondence, whose role is to ensure the correct grasping of the structure of the secondary ontology as both different from and based upon the primary ontology” (p. 59). Here and elsewhere, Pavel grounds reading in a process of inference, without further inquiry into the difficulties a reader may encounter in “maximizing” textual intentions and “construing” fictional worlds. He also ascribes a curious noninterventionist status to reading, or locates “the fictional exchange within the secure precincts of the imaginary worlds,” with author and reader impersonating roles therein.

This model of reading may suit some of Pavel’s literary preferences: medieval allegories, Renaissance dramas, realistic literature with its “remarkably courageous project” of bridging the gaps between actual and fictional worlds (p. 73). And yet Pavel cannot ignore those “puzzling” fictions that debilitate inference or “lay bare” the contradictions of fiction (and of “actuality,” he might have added). Fictional worlds are best described as heterogeneous, mixed systems that “resemble the worlds of . . . premodern, uneducated common sense; worlds where a highly structured central area is surrounded by increasingly dark, fuzzy spaces” (p. 95). Unlike the abstract “possible worlds” posited by analytic philosophy, fictional worlds cannot be expanded to their utmost limits. They are not entirely inferable from the books that describe them. In one of the most captivating sections of the book, Professor Pavel “recapitulates” for us a “half-forgotten legend” on the relationship between fictional worlds and texts. His imaginative narration introduces us to a “fallen world” of texts that only fragmentarily reflect the fictional worlds outlined by the heavenly Books. In their “whimsical, inattentive and forgetful human” way, these amalgamated fragments gradually corrupt and supersede the “pure ontology” mapped by angelic scribes. “Heteronomy . . . blurs the purity of correspondence between the texts and compendia,” or “between worlds and heavenly books” (p. 70). It even throws some doubt on Pavel’s title concept: the “fictional world” remains at best a utopian or abstract project, always imperfectly reconstituted in the textual economy transacted by author and reader.

Regrettfully, the mythopoetic spirit infusing these pages is subdued in later chapters of Pavel’s book that try to restore substance and teleological purport to the title concept. In equating fictional teleology with “the referential purposes of fiction,” Pavel draws heavily on speech act theory and the causal definition of names (Kripke, Kaplan, Donnellan), though again he dilutes these theoretical positions to fit the economy of fictional worlds. The result is an interesting critique of the problem areas in Searle’s theory of assertions: its idealized locutionary rules, strictly governed by the axioms of existence (“only what exists can be referred to”—Searle); the positing of a “well-individualized,” Cartesian subject-speaker “in full control of his voice . . . ;” the marginalization of fiction as a form of “non-serious,” “pretended” discourse (pp. 20–24). Pavel would like to set more fluid boundaries between the two discursive practices: “normal” and fictional discourse could thus be regarded as part of the same discursive continuum. But he steers clear of a more radical critique that would compromise, in Derridean fashion, the foundations of referentiality. He even wonders why Derrida takes issue with such a “more open-minded and tolerant variety” of logocentrism, even though a simple
observation like Searle's "It is after all an odd, peculiar and amazing fact about human language that it allows the possibility of fiction at all" (p. 27), could well put Pavel and the whole fiction-theory establishment out of business.

One of the test cases summoned by Pavel in support of his qualified theory of referentiality is that of miming: not unlike Derrida in "The Double Session," he highlights the ambivalent relation between simulation and reality in the mime's performance. But two chapters later he rediscusses miming in stronger representational terms, pointing out how the mime's "body and movements, as they exist in the actual world, serve as a primary universe, as a foundation for the secondary universe in which the mime becomes the saintly priest blessing the crowd" (p. 60). Pavel is no Derridean deconstructor: he does not deem the fictional world powerful enough to trigger an "ontological crisis" in the "base" or "actual" world. But the tension (distance) between the two worlds is not overlooked; a separate chapter (4 "Borders, Distance, Size, Incompleteness") investigates the creative potential of ontological distance and diversity.

Pavel's own book maintains an active tension between a historicist approach (that sees fictions as secondary, demythicized versions of "salient structures") and an internal approach that emphasizes the contribution of fictional texts to an alternative ontology. Not surprisingly for someone who has experienced the paradox of "Central" European marginality, Pavel proposes a map of the imaginary in which "peripheric" fictions manage to challenge and renew the established ontological domain: "'Marginal' referential practices such as myth and fiction manifest the innovative side of referential processes and are perceived as marginal only in contrast to some culturally determined ossification into normality" (p. 27). Pavel's dynamics of "referential behavior includes a creative, risk-taking aspect, as well as a tendency to settle down into conventional patterns."

Chapter 5, "Conventions," examines closer the second aspect: that of the canonization and regularization of fictional worlds. Chapter 6, "The Economy of the Imaginary," tries to redress the balance by focusing on the creative, functional aspects of fictionality. Instead of regarding fictions as fallen mythic worlds, "dwindling to a secondary reality," Pavel decides now to integrate them in the foreground of "ontological planning." By briefly considering Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Kafka's Castle, Borges's Aleph, etc., he redesigns his concept of ontological landscaping: what we see emerging now is not a carefully trimmed Elizabethan garden, but a kind of theoretical overgrowth, a composite remodeling of the world of fictionality. While testing such "unfriendly" texts "that introduce us to puzzling worlds, lead us to inadequate hypotheses, and encourage us to hesitate and to project a perplexed fictional ego" (p. 93), Pavel's fictional theory is forced back into "the dark, fuzzy areas." Fortunately Pavel's construction is sufficiently pliant and open-ended to withstand such confrontations with "the unusual states of affairs" that go by the name of "fictional worlds." Pavel's book at its best purports to do what he recommends to postmodern fictionists: "acknowledge gracefully the difficulty in making sense of the world and still risk the invention of a completeness-determinacy myth" (p. 112).

Harvard Center for Literary Studies

Marcel Cornis-Pop

This intriguing but difficult book is a translation of the first volume of a two-volume work on film by the well-known French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. A translation of the second volume is promised by the publishers, and students of film owe them thanks for making available in English a strikingly novel contribution to their subject.

In Cinema I, Deleuze announces his desire to break with the linguistic and quasi-linguistic models which have so dominated film studies for twenty years. Such a break is certainly welcome, and much that is best in the book derives, in part, from the author’s willingness to rethink radically the issue of filmic signification. Nevertheless, it is disconcerting to discover that Deleuze proposes to provide an alternative conception of film and its connection to the world in terms of the metaphysics and epistemology of Henri Bergson. This is disconcerting because the Bergsonian views which Deleuze elaborates have been, since their first appearance, notoriously obscure and controversial. Although Deleuze devotes a fair amount of space to the exposition of these views, it is fair to say, I think, that most of the standard, basic difficulties are left untouched.

For example, especially in Matter and Memory (Deleuze’s principal source), Bergson proposes to dissolve the metaphysical dualism of mind and body and the epistemological dualism of idealism and realism by delineating an ontology of the “movement-image.” There has been a widespread consensus, however, that the problematic character of these dualisms is simply inherited by the postulated nature of the movement-image. As a first approximation, a movement-image is the appearance of a segment of motion or change as it potentially presents itself to intuition. Leaving aside questions about Bergson’s notion of “intuition,” it should be noted that these appearances are conceived of as entities existing independently of any experience of them. Indeed, mind and matter are held to be constructions out of this category of basic entities and the relations that hold between its members. Despite the essentially non-subjective nature of movement-images, their empirical qualities are said to be directly present to the mind—they are the data of sensory awareness. It is easily seen from even this meager summary that various puzzles and paradoxes threaten imminently. Is it intelligible to reify appearances in this fashion? Can there be “images” which are both independent of and yet immediately given to the mind? Deleuze struggles a bit with these concerns but does not succeed in easing the conceptual tensions. In the space of two pages (pp. 59–60) he identifies movement-images with “flowing matter,” “blocs of space-time,” and “lines and figures of light.” Insofar as these characterizations are clear at all, they are not equivalent to one another, and no one of them satisfies the conditions which define the movement-image.

Beyond the difficulties concerning Bergson’s philosophy, there is a global problem about how Deleuze means to exploit this system to construct his positive account of the cinematic image. In Chapter 2, it is asserted that the shot is a movement-image, but since shots are not bits of flowing matter, blocs of space-time, etc., the assertion is a gnomic one. On one reading: 1) The film image is, most immediately, a photographic image of movement-
images. And, on a second: 2) The movement-image, as Bergson describes it, is an apt metaphor for the film image. Neither reading of Deleuze is obviously to be preferred.

Interpretation 1) takes Bergson’s metaphysics seriously and literally, and Deleuze is to be understood as contending that motion-picture photography has the capacity to extract and represent a framed set of local movement-images. 1) would therefore yield an ontology of the film image similar to André Bazin’s except that, for Deleuze but not Bazin, the world is constituted out of movement-images. Interpretation 2) has the attractive feature of playing down the book’s apparent commitment to Bergson’s perplexing theses, and it proposes the working out of various possible analogies. The Bergson material is used, for instance, to explain how the shot, like the movement-image, is neither intrinsically subjective nor objective. It is not subjective because it does not represent the visual experience of a disembodied camera-observer, and it is not objective because it does not render the properties of things as they are independently of the mode of representation. The shot, on this conception, presents the spectator with a momentary view of things—an inter-subjective visual perspective. Such a view or perspective is not a slice of visual consciousness, but it is also not identical with the set of objects and events thereby on view. Rather, it is something like an array of visual information—the information available at a designated point in space and time. Subjectivity and objectivity apply to film images only in virtue of their complex expositional relations to the image-track which contains them. (See pp. 71–6). Naturally, this is just one example of the sort of analogy that can be devised and developed. Still, it is a major weakness of Deleuze’s presentation that it is so difficult to discern the exegetical strategy he has in mind. I believe that the second approach promises more in terms of plausible results, but it is also harder to square with large segments of the text.

The persistence of Deleuze’s attempt to work within a Bergsonian framework generates similar difficulties at almost every turn. Deleuze elaborates a division of movement-images into three categories: perception-images, affection-images, and action-images. Once again, the distinction derives from Bergson, but the nature of the derivation is confusing. For Bergson, these categories refer to stages of the sensory-motor process. The first and third refer to perception and physical action, the second to the mediating activities of the mind. Bergson speaks of the relevant states and processes as “images” only because they, like everything else, are ultimately constructions out of images. For Deleuze, on the other hand, although the basis of his categorization is fuzzy, it is reasonably plain that the categories subsume film images. Very roughly, it seems that the perception-image is a film image which depicts a character’s visual field; the affection-image (paradigmatically a close-up of the human face) presents a bodily expression of feeling, motive, or emotion; and the action-image displays the unfolding of physical agency. However, it also appears that these categories are meant to be, as they are in Bergson’s usage, mutually exclusive, and yet, this constraint will not be met by the conception described above. Suppose a movie melodrama includes a close-up of a character’s hand as she convulsively reaches out and grasps a knife. Apparently, this shot will qualify both as an action and affection-image, and, if the shot is presented in context as another character’s view of the
action, then it will be a perception-image as well. The objection may depend upon a misunderstanding of Deleuze’s intentions here, but the various accounts he offers of his favored categories are not easy to reconcile with one another.

There are sections of *Cinema I* where the Bergsonian architectonic becomes positively mystifying. In Chapter 5, for example, Deleuze claims that there are modes of filmic representation which correspond to what he calls “liquid,” “gaseous,” and by implication, “solid” forms of perception. Unfortunately, I am unable to offer any account of what these forms of perception are supposed to be, and one can only speculate as to the reasons for introducing them. It is as if Deleuze supposed that since matter arises from or is a facet of movement-images, and cinematic images are “extracted from” movement-images, it follows that there should be systematic ties between film representation and the basic forms of matter. If reasoning of this sort were to become fashionable, we can expect to be reading the pre-Socratics as the true pioneers of contemporary film theory.

Bergson’s *œuvre* is not the only field which is mined for an exotic theoretical vocabulary. *Cinema I* is filled with a daunting range of terms from, e.g., Piercian semiotics, physics, and mathematics. Readers will continually find themselves stumbling over “demarks,” “vectors,” “binomials,” “points of accumulation,” etc. and because Deleuze’s employment of this vocabulary is, to say the least, whimsical, they will be little aided by standard scientific dictionaries. One has to question carefully whether Deleuze has evolved a fruitful new set of cinematic concepts or, in Wittgenstein’s phrase, the seeds of the new jargon merely.

Despite the serious reservations I’ve expressed, there is much in this volume to value. It is a major and continuing theme of *Cinema I* that film has the capacity to portray the world from a large variety of metaphysical and epistemological perspectives. Deleuze argues, for example, that human behavior and the situations in which it occurs can be fragmented and reassembled on film into patterns with distinctive philosophical import, and that the shaping action of the world upon those patterns can be portrayed in radically diverse modes. Perhaps the most sustained discussion of such a possibility is found in the discussion of “naturalism” in Chapter 8, but to gain a sense of the diversity of possibilities Deleuze envisages here, these sections should be read in conjunction with his analyses of Dreyer, Bresson and Eisenstein (early and late). Unlike a lot of recent film theory, Deleuze continually returns to a wide spectrum of actual films in an attempt to show how his conceptions illuminate their significance. If *Cinema I* is read simply as “Deleuze’s Notes on Movies” it yields more suggestive proposals than almost any other comparable theoretical work.

Predictably, the quality of the specific commentaries is somewhat uneven. Thus, we are informed that “Hitchcock produces a cinema of relation, just as English philosophy produced a philosophy of relation” (p. x). As a remark either about Hitchcock’s films or about English philosophy (F. H. Bradley?) this is willfully arbitrary, and attributing a delirious panpsychism to Vertov’s *The Man with a Movie Camera* is unfortunate Bergsonian excess. But Deleuze has resonant suggestions to make about many of the major filmmakers, and he is often extraordinarily incisive about fine but relatively little-known films like Nicholas Ray’s *Wind Across the Everglades* (p. 135).
Cinema I makes arduous claims upon its readers, and a just assessment is not easy to reach. Such an assessment will have to deal with the issues I have tried to sketch and with related issues I have not had the space to mention. The most distinctive feature of the book is its bold use of a large-scale metaphysical framework to explicate the fundamental attributes of film, and no evaluation can blink the questions raised by the problematic character of the metaphysics and by the elusiveness of the functions it is, in the present context, supposed to serve. Nevertheless, even in the absence of a final judgement on these matters, it is unquestionable that Deleuze, on film, is original, provocative, and prolifically suggestive.

The Johns Hopkins University

George Wilson


I suppose the worst one can say about Cynthia Chase’s recent collection of essays, Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition, is that throughout it seems deManically possessed. At times the book seems a companion volume to the late Paul de Man’s work. The vocabulary, the familiar set of problems (for instance, “the conflict between positing and figuration,” p. 6), the by now no longer surprising conjunction of “rhetoric” and the “romantic tradition” in the subtitle of her book, all testify to the pervasive influence of a mentor. Of course, to compose a volume of essays that look occasionally as if they could have been written by Paul de Man is certainly no easy task, and I do not mean to detract from the considerable achievement of their author by branding her as an imitator. In fact, one of the triumphs of this book is that it manages to make frequent reference to de Man and to contain a generous sampling of quotations from his work without seeming either slavishly imitative or parodic. In spite of the heavy indebtedness and the borrowed vocabulary (“aporia,” “undecidability”), these essays possess a great deal of vigor. For the most part, the book seems fully alive (to use a metaphor that reverses the implications of the title), actively and intently engaged with texts in a series of readings whose scrupulousness and logical intensity should elicit admiration. Like de Man’s work, Chase’s shows us, by contrast, how hurried and uncritical is most of what passes as critical thinking and writing. In addition, many readers might find it reassuring that in spite of his recent passing the spirit of de Man is alive and well, not only in the (presumably finite) number of posthumous books currently being issued in the University of Minnesota Press’s “Theory and History of Literature” series, but also in the practice of a brilliant younger critic like Chase.

Her voice is distinct from de Man’s. At its best, it seems to me to combine the ludic quality of a Geoffrey Hartman with the rigor or argumentative tenacity of a de Man. In addition, she is constantly attentive to the status, the claims, the ruses, and the rhetoric of her own discourse, and in this respect she resembles Derrida more than she does de Man.
Unlike many critics who take as a starting point the work of de Man and Derrida, Chase does not merely mention their arguments, or accept as established and authoritative the positions at which they have arrived. Most critics who cite Derrida and de Man—and we are now legion, no longer an embattled minority—do so partly to avoid responsibility for working through their positions with the scrupulousness, care, and rigor that they invariably exercise. Most contemporary criticism that is satisfied with simply making gestures toward their work, and many of the recently penned “primers” on deconstruction, give no indication why reading Derrida and de Man should or can be exhilarating. Chase, however, like de Man, works through, in a careful and rigorous fashion, the contradictory logic that informs texts. Unlike most criticism, which favors the shortcut, Chase seems to take delight at the prospect of another “detour ahead,” another country road to explore in her constantly ramifying arguments.

Occasionally she aims in her close encounters with de Man’s work to move beyond the positions last established by the master, particularly in Chapter 4, an essay on de Man’s use of *prosopopoeia* (and the only piece appearing in this collection that has not previously appeared elsewhere), and in Chapter 6, which attempts to move beyond de Man’s own reading of Kleist’s “On the Marionette Theater” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* by reading that narrative in the company of another short piece of Kleist, “Improbable Veracities.” But Chase pursues that “beyond” only in a limited sense, for she always works in these essays within the limits of the critical vocabulary and general problematics of romantic texts identified by de Man. Many of the texts chosen for analysis are themselves, in a sense, chosen by de Man (Rousseau, Wordsworth, Kleist), although Chase also demonstrates the continuity between the problematics of romantic texts and texts that seemingly lie “outside” the romantic tradition: George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, for instance, or Freud.

The apparently necrological title refers to an episode in Book 5 of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, which Chase reads in her inaugural chapter. A drowned man’s “ghastly face” rises to the surface of a lake, and Wordsworth describes its recovery “in a bare, literal language setting it apart from the adjacent passages” (p. 14). The language in which the episode is described, no less than the corpse that bobs to the surface of Esthwaite Lake, is “disfigured.” The apparently bare or literal language in which Wordsworth tells his tale, divested of figurative meaning as the drowned man has been divested of the “unclaimed garments” Wordsworth sees on the opposite side of the lake, “is revealed as effaced figure, rather than a primary, integral, proper condition of language” (p. 22). This episode Chase takes to be exemplary of a difficulty that informs the reading of all romantic texts: “an erosion of the distinction between literal and figurative modes” on which the recovery of meaning and the very possibility of reading depend (p. 14). “An exacerbated sense of the problem of figurative language” that Chase, like de Man, associates with the romantic tradition leads, according to Chase, to the romantic motif or trope of disfiguration. This motif derives from the romantics’ discovery of “the impossibility, coincident with the status of language as rhetoric or figure, of fixing a figure’s referential status” (p. 6), and from a subversion of intentionality in romantic texts that blocks “the emergence of any recognizable ‘face’ or figure as the origin or form of a literary work” (p. 5). In her subsequent read-
ings of texts by Rousseau, Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Hegel, and Keats, Chase locates similar moments in which the logic of figure is disrupted.

The second part of the book, devoted to readings of narrative texts by Kleist, George Eliot, Freud, and Baudelaire/Rousseau, develops the notion of what Chase terms "the double reading of narrative." A narrative text demands to be read in two contradictory ways, or according to a double logic. George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, for instance, presents itself "not only as a history of the effects of causes but also as a story of 'the present causes of past effects'" (p. 157; that last phrase appears in a letter that Deronda's friend Hans Meyrick writes). In other words, the first (and more familiar) logic of narrative presents events as the effects of causes; a second, interfering logic shows "causes" to be brought about, in a sense, by the events it will purport to explain, its "effects." "Causes" are necessitated by the novel's pursuit of narrative coherence; thus, they are only apparently antecedent facts or causes. They may as justly be termed effects of effects.

While reading Chase's deconstructions of narrative texts in the final four chapters of her book, I found myself wishing for more direct confrontations with the exploding discipline of narrative theory. Perhaps this confrontation with other theoretical discourses could not take place within Chase's text because of her own theoretical disposition to distrust the status of disembodied theory, theory that, because it is divorced from encounters with texts, is usually unaware of problems posed by its own tropes and figures. After defining her term "disfiguration" toward the beginning of her book, Chase writes in justification of her own method: "It is inherently misleading to discuss and define disfiguration in this way, making abstract, ostensibly literal assertions about effects of interference with assertion or representation. It must be encountered instead by way of readings that attend to the vicissitudes of particular tropes" (p. 6).

Still, I kept wishing for a placement of these deconstructions of narrative in the context of other critical discourses, and perhaps Chase's exceptional work on narrative in this collection will lead in this direction. It is easy enough to imagine Chase's response to a semiotics that is concerned with constructing a grammar of narrative; such a grammar in the case, say, of *Daniel Deronda* would be undermined by the text's opposition to its own logic. But other questions arose as I began to pay attention to the narrative elements of Chase's own essays. There appeared to be a greater narrative element in the four chapters that were explicitly about narrative. They achieved some of the fluidity of narrative that the first chapters of the book seemed so deliberately to avoid. The first five chapters on figure and voice, in their continual hesitations, qualifications, involutions and self-correction, like much deconstructive criticism appear to be resisting the logic of narrative. How strongly anti-narrative they are may be gathered by their resistance to paraphrase (they are like de Man's work in this respect). They seem uneasy in the knowledge that it is not possible to write a sentence that is not itself a miniature narrative. Is there a greater antagonism, or on the contrary a greater complicity, between narrative and deconstructive criticism than there is, say, between narrative and structuralist criticism? In other words, is deconstructive criticism itself more narrativistic than most forms of structuralist analysis? Is temporality a more insistent feature of deconstructive criticism than it is of structuralist
analysis? What lies beyond the recognition of the extent to which the exigencies of syntax and the binary, differential character of language enforce a narrative logic? These essays seem more self-critical when they concern themselves with figure and voice (the paradigmatic axis of discourse) than when they discuss syntax or the syntagmatic axis of discourse (causality in narrative, for example), perhaps because it is less plausible to unmask the logic of one’s own syntax than it is to deconstruct the logic of figuration informing one’s critical discourse, and still remain at a comfortable distance from silence.

The influence of deconstruction on academic criticism in this country has been so widespread that it has all too quickly lost much of its alternative status. Consequently, an important collection of essays like this one is in danger of not receiving the attention it fully merits. Like the essays of de Man, however, these deserve to be closely read and reread and they will not soon be superseded. They also demonstrate, at a time when the marketplace is being inundated with pallid works about deconstruction, that deconstructive criticism, when practiced as skillfully as it is here, remains exhilarating.

Eastman School of Music

Jonathan Baldo


Gasché has tried in this ambitious and rich book to present Derridean deconstruction as a coherent system that exceeds philosophy precisely by being so philosophically rigorous that it ends by encompassing philosophy. Now, as soon as that is said it needs to be seriously qualified, since the notion of “encompassing” philosophy could easily be conceived as the most traditional of philosophical projects. Philosophy in its most ambitious forms has always sought the deepest ground, the most universal conditions of possibility, etc. Gasché understands that it is therefore necessary to qualify the deconstructive picture of the “conditions of possibility” of philosophy in such a way as to show that this picture is not just a new, deeper foundation but that it in fact renders impossible the foundationality of any foundation. The distinctive value of Gasché’s book is the scrupulosity with which he details the way in which deconstruction at once “grounds” philosophy and shows that the concept of a ground is untenable. Gasché limits himself to the arena of post-Kantian philosophy from Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel to Husserl and Heidegger (certainly more than enough for any one book to attempt), and within these limits he succeeds to an impressive degree in demonstrating the precision of Derrida’s analyses and the philosophical pertinence of his project.

At the same time, and as if to act out the Derridean scenario so well described by Gasché himself, according to which the condition of a thing’s possibility is at the same time and for the same reason its condition of impossibility, Gasché’s account is as profoundly misleading as it is insightful. Gasché must show the philosophical pertinence of Derrida’s work in a philosophi-
cally disciplined way, so as to show that the teeth of Derrida’s concepts do in fact engage with the cogwheels of philosophical conceptuality, and don’t just spin idly somewhere off on a “literary” side-street. But to the precise degree that he succeeds in proving this engagement on the basis of philosophically respectable arguments, Gasché reduces the radicality and force of Derrida’s work. Derrida’s more “literary” interpreters (as well as Richard Rorty), of course, have fallen afoul of the converse of this dilemma: they have emphasized the radical character of deconstruction at the cost of making it seem largely irrelevant to philosophy (at least as philosophy is conceived by many of those who actually practice it).

The juxtaposition of these two alternatives suggests that neither a simply philosophical nor a simply literary approach can do justice to Derrida’s overall strategy. Gasché soundly reprimands the literary critics for not having understood deconstruction philosophically, and the chapters in which he does so (Ten and Eleven) are essential reading for all students of deconstruction; but by distancing himself so thoroughly from the literary problematic of the text, he deprives himself of any way out of the dilemma I have described. Interestingly, as we shall see, the door which Derrida opens between philosophical and literary textuality Gasché leaves closed because of a strictly philosophical mistake in his reading of Husserl.

The thesis of Gasché’s book is that the system of Derridean deconstruction is organized around a set of what Gasché, picking up hints from Derrida, calls “infrastructures.” These infrastructures are what is named by the familiar Derridean terms “differance,” “iterability,” “supplementarity,” and so on. In what is perhaps the most valuable chapter of the book, Chapter Nine, “A System Beyond Being,” Gasché discusses each of the major infrastructures in turn and then shows how the “general system” of the “chain” of infrastructures can be formulated in terms of a “general theory of doubling:”

... if one considers that iterability, for instance, as a necessary possibility constitutive of idealities, “produces” as much as it “presupposes” alterity; and that the necessary possibilities of supplementarity, differance, and arche-trace broach the identity of a full instant, entity, or moment by establishing an other, a double opposite to them, then multiplicity must appear to be a major feature of all infrastructures. (p. 255)

We need to see the generality of the principle of doubling because it is the principle that strikes at the root-thought of metaphysics in all its forms, the thought of that which is as the thought of something simple and self-present. For Derrida, doubling is not something that subsequently befalls a moment of original simplicity, but that belongs to it originally. This originary doubling is anterior to any dialectical exteriorization, and on Derrida’s analysis, the other of the selfsame is not dialectically reappropriable (p. 228).

So far so good. Gasché is not the first to emphasize these points, but his exposition untangles and systematizes them with a care I have not seen elsewhere. However, at this point a certain ambiguity or vagueness begins to creep into Gasché’s exposition, an ambiguity or vagueness which is symptomatic of the way in which Gasché’s whole reading of Derrida is a misreading.
The problem is most visible in relation to Gasché's remarks on Husserl. The problem of appearing and appearance in Husserlian phenomenology is a notorious thicket, and Derrida himself has gone out of his way on more than one occasion to pay tribute to the complex articulation of Husserl's analysis. But at this crucial point in his exposition, where Gasché is explicating the most general pertinence of the principle of doubling to classical concepts of entity and its appearing he glides past the Husserlian problematic of the appearing of the phenomenon with a few sentences, and those rather puzzling. The whole Husserlian problematic is reduced to the idea that phenomena have "the quality of appearing as themselves to themselves" (p. 229). Here now is the sentence in which Gasché sums up and draws his deconstructive conclusion:

Derrida argues, however, that this difference [between appearing and appearance] is preceded by the originary duplication of which it is but a trace, since the movement of the self-presentation of the phenomenon in pure appearing, in presenting itself as such to an intuitive consciousness, already presupposes a movement of doubling without which the appearing could not relate to itself (pp. 229-30).

Gasché here gestures at the Husserlian problematic of the presentation of phenomena for a consciousness, but he curiously undercuts this schema, apparently under the influence of Hegel, by referring to the phenomenon in terms of self-relation. And this enables him, then, to claim that Derrida deconstructs the Husserlian schema by simply pointing to this self-relation of the phenomenon which precedes its presentation to a consciousness: "In other words, in order to present itself as such, the phenomenon must already have divided itself" (p. 230).

This account subtly misstates the articulation of Husserl's schema and does so in a way that makes possible a telling avoidance of what Derrida himself emphasizes in his intervention into this schema. Gasché obscures the strictly phenomenological character of appearing by speaking of a self-relation of the phenomenon prior to its appearing. But if Husserlian ideal objectivities (what Gasché calls "phenomena") are, as Derrida argues, split in their essence, it is not because they must appear "to themselves" but because they must be capable of appearing for consciousness, of being "repeated" indefinitely many times in any number of acts of consciousness by any number of rational subjects. (That there is genuine confusion in Gasché's account of Husserl here is suggested by his earlier remark that Husserl assumed a reell connection between reflection and its objects (p. 20). Nothing could be more contrary to the spirit of phenomenology, from the time of the "Prolegomena to Pure Logic" onward, than such a connection, which would be merely psychologically real rather than ideally valid.)

The fact that Gasché does not clearly articulate this relation of ideality to transcendental subjectivity in phenomenology is symptomatic of the basic problem with his whole account, which is that he does not make it clear that deconstruction does not apply to beings and to Being but to the constitution of "beings" and "Being" in philosophical texts. This is the meaning of Derrida's "reduction of the reduction," which he describes in his Introduction to
Husserl’s Origin of Geometry as “attentiveness to the ‘fact’ of language in which a juridical thought lets itself be transcribed, in which juridicalness would like to be transparent” (p. 70 n.). Gasché is, we could say, transfixed by the “juridicalness” of Derrida’s thought and fails to pay the necessary attention to its textuality.

Gasché is correct when he argues in Chapter Ten that “writing” and “text” have a strict sense in Derrida’s philosophical work that cannot be reduced to “literariness” in the ordinary sense, but he is wrong to drive such a deep wedge between the “quasitranscendental” (as he usefully terms it) sense of writing and its contemporary literary sense.

Husserl’s phenomenology is the essential midway point between the classical philosophical analysis of entity and the deconstructive analysis of the textuality of philosophical analysis because in “reducing” the entity to its phenomenological manifestation Husserl implicitly “textualized” it, as Derrida has shown (in Speech and Phenomena and the essay “Form and Meaning”). The structure of ideality in Husserl turns out, on Derrida’s view, to be the structure of signification; and this is how the problematic of language and textuality forces its way into the center of the philosophy of presence. Derrida has stated the significance of the structure of the sign as forcefully as it can be stated: the sign is “the sole ‘thing’ which, not being a thing, does not fall under the question ‘what is . . .’ (Speech and Phenomena, p. 25). Briefly: It is part of the “essence” of the sign that it must be repeatable, but all idealties must be repeatable as well, since this repeatability is the condition of their objectivity (that is, their in principle availability to new acts of consciousness in which they would appear). Therefore repeatability turns out to infect the entire field of ideality, and shows that this field is constituted by signitive doubleness rather than by the singleness of self-identical ideality. But the repeat-ability of the sign, though described as part of the “essence” of the sign, is not a self-relation; rather, it belongs to the sign because the essence of the sign is constituted by its relation to a consciousness for which it would appear. Gasché closes off the opening of this problematic at the crucial moment, without even mentioning the question of the sign, and when he comes around to speak of writing and text it will only be in the transparent and juridical form of the “quasitranscendental.”

Let it be said once more that Gasché takes the most meticulous care imaginable to characterize the quasitranscendentals in a way that rigorously maintains their distinctness from any strictly metaphysical construct. Yet Gasché in doing this never lifts his eyes from the conceptual interior of the structure Derrida constructs.

Now, it is true that Derrida himself has on a number of occasions made declarations that appear to show that he thinks of “differance” and his other inventions as “infrastructures” that are more powerful and more encompassing than the structures of philosophy, and that they “constitute” these structures or are “conditions of possibility” that underlie them, and not only has he made such declarations, but much of his writing has sought to make good on them.

This gesture must, however, be understood rhetorically or performatively, that is, as a situated utterance, with a certain local context and another, larger context; or say, in reference to its staging. In this phase of his work, Derrida is
making war against philosophy, and more to the point, against the texts of specific philosophers, and he plays the philosopher in so doing. I don’t mean Derrida doesn’t really mean it, a view Rorty has been pushing—I mean the phrase here with the weight that “play” has in Montaigne’s “to play the man.” To my mind, Derrida plays the philosopher as well as he has ever been played—and the great merit of Gasché’s book is to show us just how he has done it. But in heeding Derrida’s agon with philosophy we run the risk of forgetting the staging of this struggle, forgetting that philosophy is a genre of writing and that Derrida in writing philosophy, and in obeying (up to a point) the law of genre, is doing what any good writer must do in relation to whatever genre he chooses to write in.

There is operative here something that we could call the fatality of writing, a fatality some of whose aspects have been powerfully evoked by Paul de Man in the final chapter of Allegories of Reading in terms of the heedless compulsion of what he calls the “machine” of grammar. It is absolutely indispensable to remain aware of this textual compulsion when we read Derrida’s most decisive statements of mastery over metaphysics, as in this passage quoted by Gasché: “At the edge of Being, the medium of the hymen never becomes a mere mediation or work of the negative; it outwits and undoes all ontologies, all philosophemes, all manner of dialectics” (Dissemination, p. 215; cited by Gasché, pp. 286–7). If we do not keep this in mind, we will read Derrida in a way that makes him vulnerable to the charges brought by Rorty that this is just more metaphysics. When Derrida reads Heidegger and goes him one better and Gasché recounts to us how Derrida does it, we must remember that so far we are still within the staging of philosophical logomachia, and no amount of precautions of the sort Gasché takes to explain in what way deconstruction exceeds classical metaphysics will suffice to wrench us out of this staging. That is why Derrida speaks of “double writing”, an expression I believe Gasché completely misinterprets. Gasché takes the second “gesture” of writing to be identical with what Derrida calls the “second phase” of deconstruction, the phase of re-inscription; in Gasché’s terms, this phase would be that of the production of the infrastructures (pp. 112–3).

But the second kind of writing of which Derrida speaks is not the production of infrastructures: the infrastructures are the “hymen” between the language of philosophy and the Nietzschean, Bataillean, Blanchotian writing, the post-transcendental text that would flourish outside the house of Being. And this other writing does not simply lie beyond philosophy, as what can happen after the philosophical phase of deconstruction—so that one could give a complete account of the philosophical pertinence of deconstruction, as Gasché has done, without ever mentioning it or drawing on its resources; the infrastructures join as well as separate the two writings. The second kind of writing is the necessary supplement of philosophical deconstruction in the fullest Derridean sense of “supplement” and as such inhabits and overflows the interior of philosophical deconstruction.

In order to evoke the overflowing of metaphysics that Derrida’s writing enacts, the commentary on Derrida must itself engage in a measure of enactment, a measure of overflowing.

Finally, the most striking aspect of Gasché’s reading of Derrida is its style, its tonality, which rejects all such enactment. No other writer on deconstruc-
tion has achieved such a colorless tone—the tone of the mouthpiece of truth. And yet, at a time when nothing is more common than the miming of figures of enactment by writers under the influence of Derrida, this tonality is in a way the book’s most impressive achievement. The voice in this book has great integrity; this writer has worked hard and speaks with well-earned assurance; it is a voice that echoes with what Blanchot calls “the glorious solitude of reason.”

Gasché’s style is thus in its own way an enactment, though not of a deconstructive type. In its very faithfulness to the specificity and precision of the (trans)philosophical infrastructures within Derrida’s text, Gasché’s book acts out a certain warfare on this text itself, and gains a certain victory over it. This has been immediately noticed. In the blurb on the inner sleeve of the dust jacket of Gasché’s book, Wlad Godzich awards Gasché the palm: “Gasché’s steadiness of purpose never wavers and his clearness of mind prevails over Derrida’s textual and scriptorial acrobatics.”

University of Utah

Henry Staten


There seem to be three premises to this volume, a collection of essays promoting a current “return to history” by literary criticism from textualist concerns: that the Slavist theoretical model, long slighted, is of particular relevance to American criticism (and should even edge the French competition); that the frontier of criticism is bound to the revived authority of history; and that these essays represent the cutting edge of this scene. Each is problematic, and each seems questioned by the essays themselves. In the first instance, it may seem to the reader that the most formalistic or precisely ahistorical aspects of Slavic theory are drawn from—involvements of models, systems, typologies, and non-interpretive or quasi-statistical sketches. In the second, while the “prestige” of history appears considerable, one senses a Falstaffian opportunism in the editor’s allusion to it: here “history,” hyper-literal, seems without any social or critical agenda and risks becoming more of a buzz-word than any Derrideanism it was invoked to counter. And third, as most contributions are from more senior scholars (Fanger, Peckham, Belknap, Greene, Holquist), and two from historians proper, the promise of a “radically revisionary” (p. 30) perspective seems at best hallucinatory. The collection might be best regarded as reflecting a problem in the word history as it is now used.

The pieces included do not form a unified field, of course, and I will limit myself to discussing those that seem to demonstrate an agenda as I see it. An exemplary reading of canonical mutations in Milton criticism by Stanley Fish (used, one feels, as a “relativistic” straw man by the editor) and a quasi-Derridean incantation on “The Historical Unconscious” by Arkady Plotnitsky are juxtaposed to Jakobsonian graphs, applications of Bakhtinian typologies by
Katerina Clark, and theoretical divagations by Thomas Greene (on literary anachronism) and Michael Holquist (on a now familiar opposition of Bakhtin to Derrida, where the latter is to learn the way of the social text). If there is a unifying theme it may be imposed by the editor’s policing intent: “How are we (or for that matter, should we bother) to meet the challenges of extreme interpretive relativism?” (p. 28). In fact, when the epilogue is turned over to a professional historian (Richard Wortman) literary theory itself abdicates and Wortman critiques it, as outsider, precisely for not having a narrative (or evolutionary) telos. In continuing to recommend the “book” as social fact rather than as text, it seems the reaction against textuality has resulted in a sheer slippage, or regression.

An aspect of the presentation requires note: not only are there three subdivisions (“Literary Institutions,” “Controlling the Play of Meanings,” and “Narrative and the Shape of Events”), but each is preceded and superseded by unusually generous editorial commentary that takes a tone bordering surveillance or “controlling the play of meanings.” This last theme is even endorsed biologically by Peckham’s romantic behaviourism where a calculation of redundancies would apparently entrap repetition (“we will be able to use redundancies even more effectively in our ambition to establish controls over interpretational uncertainty” [p. 190]), and no idea is allowed to proceed unexplained or unplaced by the editor. Thus a wide-ranging piece by Thomas M. Greene on literary anachronism is praised as “unafraid to reject current orthodoxy” (p. 268), while Fish is repeatedly rebuked for his relativist contradictions and “‘internalist’ premise” (p. 126) (what demonstrates “how to go beyond” Fish is called “immensely sensitive to the facts that institutions do not develop in isolation” yet turns out to be William Mills Todd III’s overarching and formalized exercise in the brave new world of the Jakobsonian sexpartite model, “Literature in Early-Nineteenth-Century Russia”). Donald Fanger explores a “counter-model” to the Russian writer in the asemanticist Sinhavsky that inversely confirms the misleading cliche of the always engage Russian, while Katerina Clark’s appropriation of Bakhtin’s chronotope demonstrates the hazards of reifying Bakhtin’s anti-tropes, here rehabilitating socialist realism and democratizing genre: “socialist realism, if defined as a tradition built on a distinctive chronotope, is not dead. The chronotope has become a national tradition and has, potentially, something for everyone” (p. 246).

One might here recall that academic slavicists have uniquely failed to make the great texts they preside over relevant to recent debates (no doubt a deeply felt lack). Their attempt to capture a moment on center stage (or at least more clout) in the wake of Bakhtin’s popularity becomes a potential subtext, here, and merges smoothly with the trend toward social criticism. Thus in “The Surd Heard,” Michael Holquist’s opposition of Bakhtin to Derrida might appear emblematic in a double sense, conveniently involving the codes of Russian/French as that of Social/Textual. Yet if Holquist’s reading of Derrida is avowedly second-hand (including growls at Derrida’s “epigones”), his reading of Bakhtin appears in ways already antiquated. One is reminded that the Bakhtin the slavicists have produced as an ideological bulwark against the French under the literal reading of “dialogue” may be a weak and rather emasculated one. Holquist’s Bakhtin is itself based on a
strategy of legitimation oriented toward positing meanings, selves, hermetic sources and (biographical) originals that have made the slavicists the less than disinterested "priests" of Bakhtin's word. Thus the "social" of the Russian is supposed to expand and supplement pop deconstructive epithets, while Holquist commodifies a conceit of "self" following Todorov's Buber-esque misreadings of dialogue. Oddly, the social, which for Bakhtin signals a sheer and violating exteriority, is used, here, for a strategy of interiorization. The "self" as commodity promotes a recuperative economics consuming the other in haphazard formulas: "In Freud, the more other, the less self; in Bakhtin, the more other, the more self" (p. 148). Among the several contradictions of the volume—purveying old models as "revisionist," formalism as historical, institutional statistics as the social—that of a rhetoric of interiority wrapping itself, vine-like, about the very terms that threaten it (such as the Bakhtinian "social") seems most emblematic.

Thus when Holquist cites Volosinov's early text on the utterance "Well!"—the model of the discourse scenario—he fails to note where its depiction of utterance as apostrophe makes "dialogue" a theatrical pretext concealing an agonistic series of power plays rather than hermeneutic "immediacy" or "shared being." Bakhtin becomes the signature of a false totalization ("an expressive totality, if not an all-encompassing unity" [p. 155]), marketable as a compromise (he rests, we hear, "between the specter of an absolute absence . . . and the dream of an absolute presence" [p. 147]). Yet the moral tone persuasively recommending "experience" over the bad infinity of textuality fails to see where just the materiality of Bakhtin's "sign" precedes and suspends the trope of experience (as Volosinov makes clear, one reason his signature must be rewritten as "Bakhtin"). Here "the social" and "history" have become polemic devices, and the ever vigilant Morson rebukes Holquist with a Johnsonian bluntness that distracts us from another conceptual void: "the way to think socially is to think socially, not to think philosophically about the need to think socially" (p. 195).

Interiorization returns in Thomas Greene's treatment of "anachronism," which demonstrates the price of not having a conception of figure. Greene cites Yeats' final poem, "The Black Tower," yet where the tower must be read first as an emblem of emblematic language standard in the tradition of Shelley and Stendhal, Greene "historically" explains the opposition of the warriors' oath and the voice's "old bones" as "Yeats' epitaph for himself and his few friends, skeletal relics defending withered codes of integrity in an age of timeservers" (p. 214). The historical interpretation here yields a non-reading more self-mirroring than the textual "narcissism" it disavows ("clairvoyant toward his own outdated quixotism but harsher toward the modern age that dismisses his rigidity" recalls Morson's praise of a Greene "una(rZlid to reject current orthodoxy" [p. 268]). Here it is the description of Proust that is telling: "A la recherche du temps perdu in effect dehistoricizes time by locating its power within the private sensibility" (p. 219). Such privatization appears to reify interiorization as a humanistic icon, now privatized, void of history. Greene's final analogy seems decisive, particularly where "anachronism" stages nothing but comedies: "To stage a tragedy of anachronism is perhaps the most effective way of exorcising it, just as for the critic, perhaps, speaking about obsolescence is a defense against becoming obsolescent" (p. 220).
anachronistic model of “anachronism” becomes universalized, and effaced, as a potential device of control, a literalized perspectivism, itself of the “filthy modern tide” it would defend against.

In a shift from professionalism to prophecy, Stanley Fish predicts a future of (Miltonic) criticism as a return to typologies, the reaction to the aestheticization in the influx of minorities into the “profession,” and an ethics of commitment intolerant of “disinterested inquiry.” Such would be of a piece with the odd intellectual Reaganism subtending much of the collection—neo-historicist and neo-conservative gestures confusing the pretexts of facts with “history” and controlled explanation with engagement, views seldom unrewarded by the professional establishment. One could be excused for depicting the editor’s ethos as that of a Meese Commission report on “history,” sharing its predecessor’s literalist dilemma: if the hyperreal of pornography eludes the conceptual definition, one might say the same for “history.”

While one might legitimately respond to the advances of textualist claims, those need not include a retreat from the text to the “book,” the invocation of formalist “systems” in place of reading per se, or blind appeal to the iconic protection of the historical or its supposed relevance. The collection reminds us of a contradiction in the easily appropriated pass-word “history” and how much truly aggressive labor is needed to make oneself historical. Moreover, it allows us to look forward to a reading of Bakhtin shorn of the priest-like emasculations of his slavicist guardians, and where his figure of the “social” is historically read apart from our recuperations as closer to what Jean Baudrillard terms the end of the social, at least as metaphysical reserve, and where “dialogue” is not a flaccid Buberism or hermeneutic pretext, but what marks an agonistic field in the absence of a trope of “communication” that is the most reified of all. Such might seem a worthy heir of the great slavic theorists, for whom formalist concepts marked radical interventions rather than safe redundancies.

New School for Social Research

Thomas D. Cohen