Criticism

Volume 27 | Issue 2 Article 5

1985

Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

The Turning Key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800 by Jerome Hamilton Buckley. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984. Pp. x + 191. $15.00.

Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes by Paul Jay. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984. Pp. 208. $22.50.

The difference in their titles is a wry indication of the different approaches of these two books toward what used to be called autobiography or the writing of one's life and what now is in discourse theory included in the realm of representations. Buckley's approach is traditional. In his Preface he acknowledges an awareness of "new-critical" positions but states that his concern is not with the form but with the function of the "subjective impulse," that is, the writer's assumption that he or she must display an innermost self to a putative audience. Jay, whose book is a representative sample of new-critical positions, is concerned with the evolution, not categorization, of literary forms and their relationship to adjustments in the changing epistemology of the subject, including theoretical or compositional problems arising in the subject's doubts about her ability to write her experience. Yet despite their methodological differences, their representations of the historical function and evolution of writings about the self bear some similarities.

As is to be expected from the distinguished author of *The Victorian Temper* and *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, Buckley has written a book full of information, wide-ranging, and scintillating with appropriate quotations. In his introductory chapters he remarks upon the rise of self-portraiture in the self-contemplation induced by the invention of Venetian mirrors and traces the fashion of subjectivity as both obsession and mannerism in the nineteenth century, from Hazlitt's assessment of Wordsworth—"He is the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day, only because he is the greatest egotist. . . . He does not waste a thought on others. Whatever does not relate exclusively and wholly to himself, is foreign to his views"—to Gilbert's Ralph Rackstraw in *H.M.S. Pinafore*: "In me there meet a combination of antithetical elements which are at eternal war with one another. Driven hither by objective influences—thither by subjective emotions—wafted one moment into blazing day, by mocking hope—plunged the next into Cimmerian darkness of tangible despair, I am but a living ganglion of irreconcilable antagonisms. I hope I make myself clear, lady?" Unlike Jay, Buckley categorizes the products of the subjective impulse (spiritual autobiographies, inventions, autobiographical fiction and poetry, personal statements) and dissects the categories into elements. For example, he establishes the elements of spiritual autobiography in the remembered details of childhood, a confrontation with parents, a reassessment of the subject's education, a crisis, and a recovery or a discovery of a new self.

Traditional theory of autobiography would concur with these elements, especially those on the "conversion" model, and Buckley illustrates them nicely. Bertrand Russell "became a completely different person" while self-

absorbedly looking on as Mrs. Alfred North Whitehead suffered the paroxyms of a severe heart attack: "She seemed cut off from everyone by walls of agony. . . . Within five minutes I went through some such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless; it follows that war is wrong, that a public school education is abominable. . . ." In *A Georgian Childhood* Cyril Connolly estimates the (and his) public school education as responsible for the "permanent adolescence" of the British ruling class. The schoolboys' triumphs and failures are so intense as to dominate their lives and arrest their development, and the result is that "the greater part of [this class] remains adolescent, school-minded, self-conscious, cowardly sentimental, and in the last analysis, homosexual." Yet because Buckley isolates and emphasizes these elements, he cannot treat with much depth autobiographies not emphasizing them. For example, because Beatrice Webb declares her politically correct allegiance to a general welfare rather than a personal concern—"To me 'a million sick' have always seemed actually more worthy of self-sacrificing devotion than 'the child sick in a fever,' preferred by Mrs. Browning's *Aurora Leigh*"—and does not remember with sufficient detail her privileged childhood, in Buckley's view *My Apprenticeship* is attenuated as a spiritual biography: he does not cite her profoundly unsettling diary entries on "the Unknown One" (herself) which shift to those on "the Other One" when she meets Sidney. Similarly, because Buckley emphasizes—as too many critics still do—Mill's chapter on his mental crisis in what Carlyle called his "autobiography of a steam-engine," he considerably overestimates the small part that that crisis actually plays in Mill's relentless chronicle of "books which had any considerable effect on my early mental development."

In his historical analysis, Buckley sees a major break at the turn of the century. However dramatic and rhetorically resourceful the major Victorian writers, each recognized his role and played it sincerely. The self persisted in the self-images of Wordsworth the dedicated poet, Darwin the scientific observer, Ruskin the critical spectator, Newman the religious leader, and Mill the defender of intellectual liberty. Wilde, Moore, Gosse, and Adams, on the other hand, become the theatrical purveyors of "invented selves," not distinguishing between autobiography and fiction. Although Buckley does not make the point, if this shift is real it no doubt has something to do with the writers' relation to their putative audiences.

After the great divide between sincerity and theatricality—which Jay will see in terms of factual and fictive narratives—Buckley discriminates as well as describes. The autobiographical fiction of Joyce and Lawrence is less dependent on materials outside the fiction and consequently less "variegated and inventive[?]" than *David Copperfield*. Although the modernists render sensation or emotion with sudden fresh immediacy, they often fall into the category of therapy and exercises in self-justification. This emergent solipsism and narcissism culminate in the confessional poets, whom Buckley sees as more intent on personal statement than style. Autobiography, once the search for coherence and meaning, has become the troubled case-history and the disaffected poet's rejection of Wordsworth's ordinary universe for the ills

of the psyche and the maladies of maladjustment. Yet here, too, the self persists (too much), hearing, in Eliot's phrase, the key turn and turn once only.

But by concluding with Beckett's *Company* (1980), which questions whether the past self, the self written, may be no more than a fable, a figment of imagination invented to solace a lonely present, Buckley has moved from the normative, coherent self to fabling and diffused discourse and into the realm of Jay. If Buckley categorizes a large sample of writings, Jay traces the evolution of western self-representation in a small number of consciously crafted texts illustrating its philosophical and compositional problems: Augustine, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Joyce, Proust, Adams, Valéry, T.S. Eliot, and Barthes. His style is more fashionably theoretical than theatrical and quotable, and he argues that the literary-philosophical-theoretical evolution of forms may be seen as a shift from the subject's therapeutic ability to fashion a narrative of past events (a psychoanalytic activity on the model of the talking-cure) to the philosophical and deconstructive situation of the writer in the present moment of composition: the corresponding modes of this shift are narrative and discursiveness, respectively.

Although this shift is historical, the problematic of self-representation was evident as early as Augustine and thematized in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. Augustine's (retrospective) narrative confession and (introspective) discursive self-analysis allow him to fashion a narrative of past events identified in the present as significant. Similarly, despite Wordsworth's disruptive doubts that his poem can represent his achievement of self-consciousness, the poem does continue as a largely factual narrative and a coherent biography, or as Buckley would say, Wordsworth the poet persists. Although the narratives of Joyce and Proust are largely narrative fictions, as is clear in the transformation of *Stephen Hero* into *The Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man*, they retain the therapeutic narrative form, overcoming the malady of history by recreating it artistically. In Proust's case, Jay relies on a notion of Nietzschean forgetting; although the writer remembers, he suffers a liberating kind of death as he transforms his past into fictional narrative.

Outside of this tradition stand, of course, Nietzsche himself and Carlyle, whose fragmented, discursive forms in *Sartor* surface as a philosophical, parodic critique of the eighteenth-century narrative autobiography and whose text was structured to seem manifestly out of control. Similar is the modernity of Henry Adams, who saw the ego as a chaos of "multiplicities" and whose *Education* tried to marry Augustinian narrative and Carlylean discursiveness. In the attempt, the expanding limits of the twentieth-century conception of the self outgrew the limitations of narrative. Although Eliot in *Four Quartets* may have sought wholeness, presence, and transcendence, the poem, like Valéry's *Cahiers*, ends up in its preoccupation with representational problems less psychological and therapeutic than philosophical and deconstructive.

Yet Eliot's religious belief prevents his poem from becoming a conscious intellectual effort to deconstruct the conception of the self that informs it. Not so in Barthes's *Roland Barthes*, a post-structuralist's dream, in which "Roland Barthes" is deconstructed into an alphabetical group of textual fragments arranged under a series of names, topics, and ideas. In his abandonment of narrative as the wish for an illusory past that gives rise to the idea of a di-

vided self, Barthes gives up the traditional autobiographical search, the *via memoria*, for the writer's only possible home-place: "the bed of the imaginary," or the disperson of himself in the present composition of his text. Wholeness, unity, and transcendence are risks to be avoided at all costs.

So although Buckley describes and categorizes and Jay philosophizes and deconstructs, a pattern emerges. For Buckley, the nineteenth-century coherent, normative, and narrative *vita* with its meaningfulness gave way in the twentieth century to the private, interminable case-history. For Jay, nineteenth-century self-representation was typically therapeutic whereas the current status of the self lies in its always apprehending itself in a present moment of danger. In their omissions as well as in their positions, both works finally suggest that within our century the white middle-class professional male appears increasingly decentered or deranged in his texts about himself.

Stanford University Regenia Gagnier

Vision and Revision: Coleridge's Art of Immanence by Jean-Pierre Mileur. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. Pp. xiv + 184. $19.00.

The late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century in England was an era of many kinds of revision: political orders, social priorities, philosophical paradigms, and literary traditions were all being subjected to reevaluation, with the consequence that a wide range of received authority was losing its stable grounding; new, sometimes revolutionary, changes were emerging in the way men and women thought, acted, and wrote. One specific literary manifestation of this phenomenon is the Romantic writer's obsession with revision. Wordsworth's life-long reworking of his autobiography is the most notorious case of such revision in English Romanticism, but that example is nearly matched by the multiple revisionary activities in which Coleridge was engaged: Coleridge revised a great number of his poems, inserting words, lines, or entire stanzas, while cancelling others, changing titles, supplying subtitles, explanatory headnotes, footnotes, prefaces, arguments, and glosses —and adjusting and refining even these over the course of subsequent publication. A few well-known instances are his additions of the marginal gloss to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, his attachment of a Preface to "Kubla Khan," the addition of a "Preface" and "The Conclusion to Part II" to *Christabel*, and his insertion of the famous lines celebrating "the one Life within us and abroad" into the verse of "The Eolian Harp." Moreover, *Biographia Literaria* was written by Coleridge, in part, to supply an interpretive "revision" of his life—read as a "text," and offered as the larger, revised context for reading the poetry he was assembling (and also revising) for publication as *Sibylline Leaves* (1817).

The sense of "revision" operating in Jean-Pierre Mileur's recent study, *Vision and Revision: Coleridge's Art of Immanence*, does not concern Coleridge's textual emendations and refashionings—his editorial revisions—so much as it takes that activity as the outward sign of the more fundamental psycholog-

ical, epistemic, and metaphysical anxieties by which Coleridge was haunted. Mileur describes these anxieties in relation to Coleridge's uneasy negotiation with "the Protean problem of immanence": the "immanence of the author in his work, of identity in consciousness, of God in his creation" (p. viii). "Immanence," in Mileur's discussion, is the principle of "representation" that "gives the text its distinctiveness, bestowing a human-seeming inwardness and the attributes of intentionality on an object that actually has neither psyche nor will" (p. viii). Coleridge not only worried about what sort of "immanence" his poems revealed, but also about whether such "immanence" represented or betrayed "the self," whether in fact "the self" could be represented adequately, affirmatively, or even at all. Immanence, in other words, is a problem rather than a premise for poetic writing—a problem Coleridge discloses to himself over and again, confronting "his limitations as an artist and the rootlessness of imagination in the natural world," especially in the "distinction, even contradiction, betweeen his identity and his immanence" (p. viii).

Mileur's self-described "task" in this study is the "tracing" of "the development of that implicit or immanent Coleridge who comes into being and lives out his fate in the dialogue of text with text" (p. vii). If at first the disjunction Coleridge confronts signifies a failure of individual will and creativity, or a "belatedness" in relation to literary traditions and their idols (Milton, Wordsworth)—here Mileur follows his teachers, Geoffrey Hartman and Leslie Brisman—Coleridge comes to recognize such belatedness as an inevitable human circumstance, the general consequence of man's existence in a fallen world. The concept of "revision," Mileur argues, in fact exploits this condition; it "is the positive face that [Coleridge] puts on the belatedness of the individual will in relation to simple being, in relation to history, and ultimately, in relation to God's sustaining creativity. Revision indicates the acceptance and active exploitation of a secondariness inherent in our condition" (p. ix). For Mileur, the pivotal moment in Coleridge's engagement with this concept is the famous definition of the "secondary Imagination" he put forth in *Biographia Literaria* Chapter XIII. If Coleridge is willing to posit "primary" Imagination as an "eternal act of creation," the perpetually generative and inaccessible origin of all consciousness, that premise, Mileur explains, necessarily makes any poet's secondary imagination belated. But the concept of "revision" allows Coleridge to convert this inevitable secondariness into a positive resource, that which empowers consciousness itself, and—in a species of ironic reversal—intimates the higher, transcendent unity of which it is the "echo": the secondary imagination may be secondary, but it is in some ways the creator of the primary imagination, insofar as it posits that concept as "its necessary pretext" (p. 8).

This fundamental conception, "textual in nature" (p. 9), is anticipated, Mileur argues, by Coleridge's revisionary strategies in several earlier poems. The Preface to "Kubla Khan," for instance, by placing the original lines as an "object" within a new discursive context, converts a fragment that had originally boded failure into a symbolic intuition "for what is greater but fundamentally inaccessible" (p. 14); it "intimat[es] a self beyond the normal powers of self-consciousness or representation to convey" (p. 30). Mileur's implicit privileging of the Preface, it should be noted, does not consider

whether that document might merely reenact the problem of fragmentariness rather than create "an echo of [the] poem which is completely within the bounds of the thinking, artificing self" (p. 30). Mileur reads "The Eolian Harp," "This Lime-Tree Bower," and "Frost at Midnight" to show other versions of Coleridge's engagement in a hesitant process of self-reading and revision: in these cases, he "'writ[es]' his feelings onto nature, thereby objectifying self and turning nature into a kind of text of his own psyche" (p. 35). Thus, the "subjectivity that is beyond the defining capacities of allegorizing self-consciousness (identity) finds its correspondent in the perception of an immanent unity . . . that gives nature its capacity to be meaningful and makes of the created world—man and nature alike—a vast allegory" (p. 36). Mileur is aware, of course, that such processes may betoken only "a purely linguistic fiction" (p. 36), signifying no more than the limits of "figuration," and he describes Coleridge's effort to escape this threat with a strategy Mileur terms "bestowal," "an expression of love of community reaching toward a shared ground of experience" (pp. 42–43). Neither Coleridge nor Mileur quite succeed with this strategy, however, for there is much in these poems that suggest, as Mileur rightly acknowledges, that "bestowal" is really an evasion or circumvention of the problem, rather than a solution. Indeed Mileur goes on to describe how subsequent poems—*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* in particular—"reveal that there is no necessity in the alliance of figuration with conscious identity nor with any other constructed order" (p. 61). This powerfully repressed awareness, now unavoidably revealed, leads Coleridge to an increasing sense of "alienation" from his poetry. The emphasis on the "supernatural" in these poems—as opposed to the "natural" in that earlier group commonly described as "Conversation Poems"—is significant, Mileur argues, because "its resistance to allegorization argues the inadequacy of the concept of natural order to represent either the order of the self or the order of the text" (p. 72). Deploying his own strategies of deconstruction, Mileur concludes that for Coleridge, poetry can only designate the loss or absence of the originating Word. Coleridge is saved from the nihilistic fate of deconstruction, however, by turning to a text in which the Word is present, namely the Bible itself, and embracing this text as a unique mediator between "the inaccessible unity of the divine Word and the hopeless fragmentation of natural language" (p. 84).

The turn to the Bible corresponds in Coleridge's career with a turn from writing his own poetry to revising that poetry, writing about the poems of others, and revising his reading of both—but particularly his own poems—with a study of the "textuality" of the Bible. *The Statesman's Manual*, the essays on "Method" in *The Friend* and *Biographia*, the *Aids to Reflection*, and the *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* are the chief documents in this phase of Coleridge's writing. In these works, Coleridge subsumes the problems of literary representation—the immanence of authorial intention, the authority of interpretation—into the unique nature of the Bible, where "authorship and authority [are] one and the same" (p. 92), and in which "the incomplete and unsatisfactory nature of all figurative acts" is now no sign of authorial failure, but part of a textual circumstance by which we enter a "collective effort, generation by generation, to expand ourselves" "to the fullness of being intimated in the Bible" (pp. 95–96). Mileur's discussion does not take much note

of the way a contemporaneous Higher Criticism of the Bible (in particular the discovery of the several human hands involved in its transcription) substantially challenged what amounts to a Coleridgean "myth" of the Biblical text. Both his and Coleridge's arguments require an acceptance of the Bible as a "single overarching authority" (p. 97), "function[ing] as a transcendental signified" (p. 99). With its authority thereby immune to suspicion, reading the Bible, Mileur suggests, "initiates interpretation as the mode of our self-conscious participation in the textual form of the revelation" (p. 151)—with a full awareness, of course, "that God's truth is ultimately beyond us" (p. 153).

Mileur's study is intellectually ambitious, with the particular virtue of giving Coleridge's early poetic production a suggestive coordination with the later prose works, and reading those works not just as the secondary effort of a failed poet, but as significant, indeed revolutionary, acts of literary criticism. One admires Mileur, moreover, for seeing what it is in Coleridge that has provoked a host of post-structuralist, deconstructive commentaries, while firmly reminding us that for Coleridge, sensations of fragmentariness, secondariness, intuitions of the limits of figuration and the inaccessibility of the self through writing, were ultimately referred not to the void at the center of discourse, but to the immanence of the Word in the Bible—the text he took as both historical and prophetic, symbolic and literal, present and transcendent. Taking into consideration the entire course of Coleridge's career, Mileur's account is in certain ways more satisfying than writings about Coleridge that seem to refashion him into a prefiguration of Derrida, or an incompletely realized modernist, or an ironist manqué.

Yet even crediting this balanced approach and its worthy goals, *Vision and Revision* could have benefitted from revision of its own. Not the least of occasions is presented by Mileur's prose, which has a tendency to become inert and cumbersome. To wit: "This fictionalization reflects an implicit recognition of the distinction between figuration and textualization, for it involves the contextualization of the figurative act, resisting the tendency of the will to impose its own psychologically contingent demand of the moment on the identity of the self or on the identity of nature" (p. 50). Mileur makes it difficult, even for the willing reader, to sustain interest in an already demanding argument with his frequent descents into such style. At times he seems so unaware of the obfuscating powers of his writing that it is virtually impossible to follow his thinking. Indeed, it comes as a relief to read the passages from Coleridge that Mileur assembles, and remind ourselves that difficulty of thought and lucidity of expression—or at least liveliness of style—are not mutually exclusive concerns.

One also regrets the rather limited range of reference Mileur engages for his study. Although he does describe *Vision and Revision* as an "essay" (viii), that ploy does not quite justify Mileur's failure to develop his arguments in relation to the work of other students of Coleridge. Essays by Brisman and Hartman are credited to be sure; and there is some brief mention of the books by Elisabeth Schneider and Elinor Shaffer. But Mileur gives no indication of having read I.A. Richards' seminal study of Coleridge, nor that Jerome Christensen, Raimonda Modiano, Frances Ferguson, Reeve Parker, Laurence Lockridge, Thomas McFarland, and Thomas Weiskel had been publishing work throughout the 1970's that has helped shape our modern understand-

ing of Coleridge. Not only does Mileur's scant bibliography disengage him from the arena of contemporary discussions of Coleridge, it also produces a rather one-dimensional view of Wordsworth. Mileur means to align Coleridge's reading of Wordsworth with the way Coleridge comes to understand his role as a reader of the Bible, namely to assert the "priority of interpretation." Coleridge as interpreter shows more advanced, more capacious powers than Wordsworth as poet, Mileur suggests. He is entitled to his argument, but a more careful investigation of critical discussions of Wordsworth (and of Wordsworth himself) may have helped Mileur to avoid some of the regrettable oversimplifications he indulges for the sake of making that argument. Mileur asserts, for instance, that an important "difference" between Wordsworth and Coleridge is "that Coleridge is not so much interested in validating one identity over another as in reconciling the conviction of identity with the diversity of competing, sometimes contradictory, voices in which it finds expression. . . . The multiplicity of voices heard in *Biographia* suggests that identity emerges not only out of a Wordsworthian resolution into a single voice but out of the mutual interrogation and revision of many voices" (p. 102). While this seems true about Coleridge, it would also strike a sensitive reader as worth saying about Wordsworth too. Mileur's blunt comparison seriously reduces the rich rhetorical and vocal texture of *The Prelude* —an insensitivity to Wordsworth's tonal complexity that allows Mileur to claim, one page later, that "At the very end of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth achieves the prophetic conviction of his vocation and, at the same time, finds the voice proper to that conviction." David Ferry, Geoffrey Hartman, and Richard Onorato, among others, have shown us a Wordsworth whose affirmative postures and voices are frequently, indeed characteristically, shadowed by doubt, equivocation, and contradiction.

Mileur's contrasting acceptance of Coleridge's "Wordsworth" at face value is particularly evident in his reading of "To William Wordsworth," the poem Coleridge composed after hearing Wordsworth recite the entire "Poem on the Growth of an Individual Mind" to him. Mileur wants to argue that—all the praise notwithstanding—Coleridge's wording suggests that "there is a limit to Wordsworth's understanding of his own poem" and hints at "some connection between Wordsworth's poetic greatness and the limited nature of his self-knowledge" (p. 123). Mileur's evidence is Coleridge's awe at Wordsworth's power to tell "what within the mind / By vital breathings secret as the soul / Of vernal growth, oft quickens in the heart / Thoughts all too deep for Words [*sic*]." Here Mileur finds it "curious" that Coleridge should say that a poem "speaks of things too deep for *words*" (Mileur's emphasis) and thinks that Coleridge means "to point up the necessary incompleteness of the genuinely prophetic poem" and its necessary "fulfillment" "in the heart of the reader" (pp. 122–23). Well, yes, but it seems likely from Coleridge's quite apparent echo of the closing line of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"—the poet's confession to "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears"—that Coleridge is acknowledging a shared value, rather than hinting at an understanding of Wordsworth superior to Wordsworth's own. Moreover, to cite Coleridge's description of Wordsworth's "tendency to mistake 'The light reflected[,] as a light bestowed' " as conclusive evidence of Wordsworth's limited understanding of himself seems to me to ignore what

is most obvious, namely that Coleridge is imposing his own phenomenology on Wordsworth; or at least as he laments in an early draft of "Dejection" (another reply to Wordsworth's Great Ode), there is *only* "light reflected": "O William! we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does Nature live."

My two bracketings in the paragraph above of rather minor errors in Mileur's quotations reflect another, truly distressing, problem with this study—Mileur's frequent carelessness with quotations and citations. *Vision and Revision*'s text is only 180 pages long, but a by-no-means-exhaustive check revealed well over 250 errors. Sometimes these were matters of missing capitals, invented capitals, forgotten plurals, dropped commas, neglected italics, and incorrectly transcribed punctuation and spelling—inattentive errors of transcription that produce bothersome distortions. But quite often Mileur misquotes words, or presents without ellipses quotations that omit words, phrases, lines, or entire sentences. As crucial as the Preface to "Kubla Khan" is for his interests, for example, Mileur misquotes it on pages 26 and 84. Elsewhere he gives erroneous line and page citations for passages under consideration. He makes a hash of the quotations from *The Statesman's Manual* on pages 93 and 97; he drops important clauses from his quotations of *Biographia Literaria* on pages 103, 142, 163, and 164; his misquotation of Coleridge on translation (pp. 112–13) is misleading, as is his misquotation of a line in "To William Wordsworth" as "Life's joy rekindling caused a throng of pains," instead of Coleridge's "roused a throng . . . ." Mileur even misquotes the most famous line of *Lycidas* (p. 125) as "Look homeward Angel, melt with ruth" and he gives the wrong line citation for "Weep no more!" (p. 128). Even if one is willing to agree with Mileur that the immanence of authorial intention in the text is always problematic, such an argument is not sufficient to excuse the embarrassing mishandling of texts that Mileur displays throughout his study. One expects higher standards and more rigorous attention from those involved in critical dialogue and scholarly publication.

Rutgers University, New Brunswick Susan J. Wolfson

Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative by John M. Ganim. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. Pp. x + 178. $23.00.

John Ganim's *Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative* is one of the best books in its field in twenty years. Ganim writes with straightforward clarity and has a literary sensibility so keen that he can make you gasp. He has taken six narratives from three centuries—*Havelock the Dane* and *King Horn, Sir Gawain* and Chaucer's *Troilus, The Siege of Thebes* and *The Testament of Cresseid*—and by examining their styles has come up with a new and altogether convincing thesis about the literary history of the period. In the thirteenth century, he argues, poets assumed a sense of community with their audience and did not question shared values. But in the fourteenth century the best poets reveal a tension between themselves and their audience: by representing fleeting, mundane experience in close detail they create a

reader separate from themselves whose range of response they limit, and they continually surprise and violate that reader's expectations. The poems draw us into the experience of the characters, but there is a differential and dialectic between the narrator's and reader's perceptions of that experience. In the fifteenth century this dialectic disappears. Poets, without returning to the thirteenth-century idea that truth exists in a fixed moral order, become more moralistic: they assume not an imagined audience or reader but an unseen "public" which they address in a didactic tone.

The focus of the book is on style, and its method is based (with appropriate homage) on Erich Auerbach's manner of picking passages almost at random and analyzing them in a delicate, searching, personal way. But Ganim does not make Auerbach's assumptions about historic evolution: he observes change from century to century without anticipating some Hegelian development. And he picks not passages but works, looking for moments in them that force us to "an inferential and subjective response." His emphasis is on the reader, the imagined or interiorized reader that we sense in a literary work. If this makes your heart sink, if you're as tired of the reader as you used to be of the narrator or persona, never mind: Ganim treats the "reader in the work" with such insight and so much common sense that it never seems like theory or methodology, it seems natural. You only know from the questions he's asking, and from his footnotes, that Ganim is totally in command of current critical ideas and controversies, so in command that he can put them behind him.

His argument begins in an effort to explain the rusticity or naiveté we sense in *Havelock* and *King Horn*. They both announce epic themes but then pull back. They are filled with mundane details, of food, of clothes, of the weather: urban and mercantile cultures have crept into them, and they strain to keep the tone away from high seriousness as if they want to "harness energies for which the literary means have not yet been perfected" (p. 35). In *Havelock* the battle scenes have vigor and zaniness, says Ganim, the way cartoons do; in *King Horn* the speeches repeat over and over who the hero is, where he is from, what his duty is, so that his triumph seems inevitable. The scenes in both poems are static, the interesting characters are not the heroes but the minor figures who help them. The audience of such poems was being lulled: the poems "end in a sense of happy and not at all ironic community" (54).

After the Black Death (though Ganim doesn't mention it) all this has changed. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Troilus and Criseyde* challenge, even threaten, the shared values of their audiences. The Gawain-poet depicts an outmoded ideal of chivalry; he betrays a fascination with beginnings and endings—a fascination, as it actually is, with the archaic and the decadent. The poem deals in themes of decline, dismemberment, disorientation; it moves from indoor to outdoor scenes, a movement emblematic of the hero's movement out of the role of perfect knight into the puzzling vistas of self-confrontation. And the narrator? He starts out playing epic bard, then shifts to "the relative of fiction" with qualifiers like "as I haf herde telle." The new age of Arthur's court, the opulence of Bercilak's castle, all of it invites skepticism: the poet likes to throw the audience off balance, confuse and puzzle it, "forcing us to search for some frame of reference to orient ourselves, which

he graciously provides" (65). We're never sure we can trust the poem's techniques or our own responses—whence the narrator's obsession with eyes (oddly, Ganim fails to note the same obsession in the last two books of *Troilus*). The meaning of *Sir Gawain* isn't in its action or its symbols, but *in this style*: in the beginning poet, characters, and audience are celebrating a common set of values, as in a thirteenth-century poem, but when that beginning is echoed at the end we are neither comforted nor enlightened. It is almost the case, by Ganim's account, that the meaning of the poem is that there is no meaning.

Chaucer, too, in the *Troilus*, puzzles us, but in a different way. We are given a double vision, which will produce our "double sorrow": we watch the love affair unfold in time, yet we know from the narrator what is to be its outcome. This is why we are fascinated by Pandarus: his warning the lovers about Fortune makes him seem a man of common sense and experience. At the beginning, the narrator addresses us as if we were courtiers and lovers; in Book II, with its magnificent proem about historical relativity, we are "in the scriptorium," are "humanists rather than courtiers" (88); in Book III, courtiers once more, we recover our protectiveness towards the lovers. In Book IV we are plunged back into history. The efficacy of language and reason is qualified, the action is static, the character of Criseyde becomes questionable. In Book V, as things begin to happen, the narrator becomes cold and objective: the events he describes are "self-consuming" and we the audience question the validity of what has gone before.

After these triumphs of fourteenth-century poetry, spare Henryson and dreary Lydgate are a come-down. But Ganim treats them for their strengths, not their weaknesses: as he made the naiveté of the two thirteenth-century poets seem artistically valid, he makes Lydgate's and Henryson's poems seem interesting literary phenomena produced by an age of transition.

Lydgate's technique is almost the opposite of the Gawain-poet's. His images are vague, less visual or tactile, and he endues actions with a generalizing quality as if he were writing an allegory; from such an ongoing narrative he retreats to moral certainties, tells us the lessons we're learning, "as if a romance were being preached at us rather than told to us" (110). Good-bye to play or indirection or irony, and to the class basis of romance: Lydgate describes action with abstract words that project timeless and stable values, and in this laborious way reveals the world's ultimate futility. Untouched by humanism, he treated the world by using medieval forms and conventions while his own century was already thinking in new ways. There's a "leveling tendency" typical of his century, and it existed because the artist was beginning to address not a courtly or monastic milieu but a broader audience, what we call a reading public. Lydgate's style teaches less morality than a love of moralizing, but because he wants to seem factual and authentic he induces in us a historical consciousness, not contempt of the world. In these ways the monk of Bury slouched towards the Renaissance unawares.

Henryson managed, as Lydgate did not, to find an advantage in the shortcomings of fifteenth-century poetry. He used its "leveling tendency" to project a world limited to our scope of vision, a world of enclosed rooms and narrowed vistas: he was a minimalist. The possibilities of his poetic world are limited, and he limits our responses to it. The audience needs "extreme sen-

sation," and Henryson contrives to provide this by narrowing and focusing the need itself—he prods our responses but restrains his own emotion. Because his *Testament* supplies an alternate ending to a known story, it has an anticlimactic effect. It makes memory a required part of our reading experience. Cresseid's tragedy isn't just her deformity but—as in Dante—the memory of what she was before. And some of the scenes of the poem, as for example her dream of the planetary gods, are like the bizarre visual constructions of the *ars memoriae*. The poem is grotesque and manneristic. It describes decay in mellifluous language with unstinting metrical ingenuity: we see the set portrait of the courtly lady "dismantled before our eyes" (140) in what amounts to a kind of antiform. Yet all this is merged into an imitation of order: the poem was, for the fifteenth-century reader, a "corrective reading experience, an antidote to a century of excess or defect" (123).

Ganim's account of Middle English narrative depicts a fleeting moment of literary greatness, the late fourteenth century, developing from a more primitive kind of native verse and then collapsing into rigidity and moralizing. Not a new picture, but a quite accurate one that Ganim paints with great panache, giving it a new center, the "reader" of the writer's imagining. His best critical flights are naturally with the best poems, the two fourteenth-century poems, but his candor and insight make his treatments of the weaker fifteenth-century poems possibly the most interesting in the book. Your average critic writing about Lydgate wants to make him seem more of an artist than has been thought. Ganim knows he is dull (who didn't know it?) but he shows how and explains why he is dull, shows what he was striving for, or bumbling after, and shows how in limited ways he is effective. Ganim, depicting the fourteenth century as a fleeting bright moment, has opened up a whole new way of looking at the fifteenth century.

This is Ganim's first book. In it he arrives on the scene as a new critical presence in the study of Middle English literature, one who reads texts with sensitivity and learning, speaks with style and authority, isn't afraid to take risks. Some reviewers, I suppose, will find him "unscholarly." He likes to generalize. His book is a set of general observations about three hundred years of poetry based on analyses of just six poems. He hasn't *proved* anything, but he has presented what he has observed with such vividness and intensity that we know it's real. Couldn't someone find a poem written in the late fourteenth century that had the rustic faith of *King Horn*, or Henryson's spareness or Lydgate's soporific garrulity? Yes, I suppose they could. But it would only invalidate Ganim's thesis if one could find something like *Sir Gawain* or the *Troilus* written in the thirteenth or the fifteenth centuries—and one can't. Ganim likes to make analogies. Here he is on Lydgate's moralizing: "The aim of his style is to remind, instruct, and emphasize, to keep moral categories continually within our vision. It is as if a building had grown weaker and weaker and had to be supported by more and more buttresses, to the point where the buttresses interfere with the uses of the building" (120). It isn't science, that's certain, but such passages are tools to make the reader ask himself, "*Is* it like that?"

Ganim is thinking and reacting every minute and making *us* think and react. What else is criticism supposed to do when it is practiced as an art? If he's "impressionistic," he is so in the best sense. He wants to describe and

communicate the inner principles and cast of the various styles he is studying, as Auerbach did. There is no way to do this but to get impressions and describe them, and the vividness of the impressions is what makes them provocative. Ganim remarks that Henryson has taken Chaucer's poem "and put it into a moral context that resembles nothing so much as that of the Old Testament" (140). I can imagine readers bristling at this remark, and I can't myself make up my mind if it's right; but it was worth saying and is worth thinking about.

I can't end this review in a better way than to let Ganim's eloquent last sentences be the last word. He concludes by mentioning the effort of twentieth-century criticism to "correct an earlier condescension towards the moral and religious dimensions of [medieval] literature," and allows it has been useful, "even if the result has been occasionally to bury the text beneath marginally useful citations or to regard the poem as an alien and only barely decipherable code." A more serious problem is "the assumption of a unitary moral and ethical program" that some critics have wanted to find in all medieval works:

> My effort here . . . has been revisionist, to stress the impossibility of the unity celebrated by some admirers of the medieval world view and to argue that the real complexity and significance of medieval narratives lie in the gap between meaning and image, in the tension between mimetic detail and mythic structure, in the effort of style to dance towards at times and to evade at other times the great central questions almost necessarily avoided by the text. The performance of such poetry justifies by its very energy its own partial and peripheral existence, and like the poor juggler who has nothing to give to Mary but his skill, achieves a certain sanctity if only by its sense of distance from the center.

Stanford University Donald R. Howard

Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction by Ross Chambers. Foreword by Wlad Godzich. Theory and History of Literature, Volume 12. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Pp. xxii + 255. $29.50 and $14.95 pb.

Ross Chambers's new study of narrative offers close readings of six short fictions so as to elucidate one neglected aspect of narrative: the many ways these narratives seek to situate themselves for reading, so that they win a common "point" from their reader. This "point"is not a specific meaning, but something more general like a collective sense of the purposes in view of which the communication unfolds. How is this done? Through some of the many ruses of seduction: active enterprise, "simple" invitation, a calculated "refusal," by promising disclosure of a secret, and denying the seduction that is being practiced. This self-situating allows the narrative to "inhabit the space of the other without possessing it" (214). The inevitable duplicity in

narrative seduction manifests "the 'gap' between discourse and its presumed recipient, of the assumed otherness of the instance that has the power of determining the success or failure of the cummunicational act" (218).

According to Ross Chambers these self-situating narratives inhabit a particular moment "in a continuous historical evolution of the literary text." His account echoes the Marxist interpretation of modernism: no longer serving the transmission of experience or information, these texts operate in a more impersonal society, and a more problematic communication situation. They "undergo the process of reification, becoming specialized as 'artistic' communication and more particularly autonomized as 'text,' . . . . literature becomes interpretable and as such productive of meanings, rich in significance. . . . If literature no longer has use value (as direct communication) . . . its significance is a function of its interpretability as a complex sign for which other dicursive signs can be substituted. However, in order to realize this potential value, the alienated text must first be read, and its seductiveness appears, then, as the necessary means whereby such a text succeeds in acquiring a readership . . . . such seductiveness is the sign that, like other commodities that must find a place for themselves on the market of exchange, literature is aware of its alienated status and seeks to realize the potential for value that that alienation confers on it" (11–13). Since the six texts that Chambers reads closely are located at the interface between earlier narrative, and the alienated text we associate with the avant garde, his readings offer an interesting new way of tracing the emergence of modernism, or, to use the terminology he adopts from Barthes, the movement from a more "readerly text," which circulates a limited plurality of meanings, to a more "writerly text," which postulates writing "before the infinite play of the world."

It is not difficult to see how Chambers' book echoes some of the main currents of contemporary critical theory. 1) It deflates the most romantic goals of pure theory: in his rich range of theoretical borrowings, Chambers consistently turns away from sweeping wholistic propositions, and instead extracts elements of theory which will aid him in elucidating a particular aspect of narrative. Thus in his treatment of Lacan on Poe, what is paradoxical and uncanny in Lacan's reading gets little play. 2) He historicizes his argument: although the devices by which a narrative seeks to situate itself are formal elements of text, Chambers avoids the anti-historical tendencies of structuralism and narratology by giving his argument a specific historical frame. 3) Finally, a particular goal and desire seem to guide the theoretical work of this book: if one could define that in the text which is "self-situating," then criticism could begin to diagnose and correct the way modernism has isolated both text and the reading subject in themselves and from each other. By Chambers' placement of them, structuralism and deconstruction have, in their different ways, had the effect of making an alienated modernist hermeneutic all the more pervasive. By contrast, a "self-situating" narrative is a text poised toward an outside, concerned in its very weave of words with the social exchanges and acts of relating it hopes to precipitate. The problem for this theory, and Chambers understands this very well, comes when one asks the simple and inevitable question: is a narrative's self-situating authoritative for actual readers? Chambers' answer is ingenious, complex, perhaps evidencing some of the duplicity he ascribes to seductive narratives.

Chambers begins a) by announcing that he adheres to the common sense model of a situation of a teller and hearer preceding discourse (rather than both hearers and speakers being produced by discourse); b) but he then adds that the main thrust of his readings is to show how "certain types of literary storytelling consistently produce by textual means a narrative situation that gives point to the narration, a narrative situation describable in terms such as 'speaker,' 'hearer,' 'narrator,' 'narratee,' and so forth, but indistinguishable from discourse itself" (22). c) However, Chambers then concedes that there *is* a difference between the "situation" projected by the story and an interpretive "situation" of actual readers. d) But, he then attempts to finesse this difference, by suggesting that the "situation" of "seduction" referred to in his subtitle describes fictional situations with which his stories try to control or guide their own reading, but which "it would be naive to mistake for realities" (23). At this point Chambers falls back on the distinction readerly-writerly to defend the effectiveness of these stories' efforts to control their own reading: their "restrictive acts of self-definition" "limit the range of their interpretability and restrict their literary 'point' to a quite strictly channeled form of meaningfulness" (23). Fiction has "the power to control its own impact through the act of situational self-definition" (24). Chambers offers one more reason to justify readings of narrative around its "self-situating" devices: this is an essential first step in a reading which could open the way to a more pervasive critique of the ideology endorsed in a text's attempt to control its own reading (27).

Throughout this analysis, I think Ross Chambers consistently underestimates the power of history, or the culture, or a turn in collective thought to turn newly significant "contexts" into new coordinates for reading. At such a moment, the "situation" which a story tries to make normative for its reading will be put under suspicion, and collapsed back into the text. (Chambers makes note of this possibility at one point.) Such a violation of narrative intention, or its more indirect seductions, does not seem to me to be a perverse interpretive act, but the very way that culture changes. Thus, most of the premodern texts of the European literary canon are quite explicit in situating themselves within the frame of Christianity. But our modern history has, with considerable violence to this attempt at "self-situating," made these texts the object of not a religious but a secular attention, made them a guide to learning about "literature" instead of God, and turned them into "narratives" which will have certain qualities (like those Chambers elucidates) worthy of our study. Such a shift in reading has enormous persuasive force; it appears, for example, as both cause and effect of the "disappearance of God" the nineteenth century experienced.

My reservations about the efficacy of a narrative's "self-situating" does not challenge what Chambers' study shows about the interpretive *desire* of narrative, and especially narrative that appears at a certain historical turn in our ways of writing and reading. And the fruitfulness of Chambers' theoretical focus becomes most evident in the splendid readings he offers of a series of pivotal texts of the 19th and 20th century: Poe's "The Purloined Letter," Balzac's "Sarrasine," Nerval's "Sylvie," Flaubert's "Un Coeur Simple," James's "The Figure in the Carpet," and Joyce's "The Dead." All the readings are carefully conceptualized and dramatically plotted. The readings draw upon

but effectively subordinate the readings by other critics of each text. Each reading has a density and specificity which allow it to touch the key scenes, moods, and events of the narrative. At the same time, they continually develop a theoretical perspective upon the way narrative works in relation to story and situation, and the hero's gradual journey toward wisdom. In short, these readings are aided by the book's guiding theoretical horizon, but not too confined to it. These readings will be as useful to anyone teaching these texts, as they will be to critics writing upon them.

I can demonstrate the force and interest, and some of the recurrent preoccupations of Chambers' readings by asking a question which seems appropriate given the general thesis of this book: how does this book about self-situating narratives situate itself? The answer to this question can be found in Chambers' reading of "The Figure in the Carpet," Henry James' oft-read allegory about a critic's (the narrator's) quest for the essential truth of an author's (Vereker's) work. Chambers offers a most effective description of the dynamics of this game of interpretation: the author's initial mystification of the object of the quest—as a truth which is illusive, but formulable; which is not evident, but will seem so once it is found. This secret confirms the author's mastery in relation to the critic, and precipitates a rivalry with other critics (a friend, Corvick, and Corvick's wife, Gwendolon) who become launched upon the same quest. At the end of the story the narrator recounts this interpretive adventure to Deane, Gwendolon's second husband, in the hopes that he knows the secret from Gwendolon, who had evidently learned the secret meaning of Vereker's art from Corvick before his death. Chambers points out that the narrator's narrative to Deane is a *mise en abyme* of the act of narration that constitutes the tale of "The Figure in the Carpet." This is so since this telling inscribes the story we read as a story told and heard in this final scene of the story. It also reenacts the main way a reader can be infected by this story: by becoming preoccupied with the obsession with finding the answer to the secret. And this, Chambers shows most adroitly, has been what most of the critics of the story have proceeded to do: from those who say that the secret is a hoax, to those who focus upon some moral quality of the successful questers (like love over egotism), to those of a post-structuralist persuasion who make the story's secret a parable about the impossibility of a univocal critical truth or answer. Chambers will not escape from these issues, but will begin a displacement of them by noting the way all jostle each other for Corvick's crown or critical laurel. Chambers attributes this obsession to "center of consciousness" technique, which is the way James's text "self-contextualizes" itself in a crucially limited way (169). This helps to produce an "unreadability" within a general readability "that is here the marker of the literary text" (169). A privileging of the isolated consciousness and the isolated text is a way of articulating a certain bourgeois ideology which suppresses class and history (171).

In what is perhaps the decisive turn in his reading, Chambers analyzes the narrative and insists that the narrator is not completely trapped in his obsession, for he goes from living that role, to seeing (others), to writing (172). There is a subtle self-irony directed against his own role: all due to "the salutary impact of a failure" and his "impotence" (172). Then the tone is ironic too. But Chambers only gets to this point by crediting the fictional narrator

with writing every word of this text, instead of imagining a James writing behind him, and at the narrator's expense, with these words. By this argument the comic strain of the tale evidences the narrator's liberation from the grip of the obsession. Now the narrator postulates an audience outside of the preconceptions and obsessions of the literary crowd, one that the narrator now writes for. In a strange way the moral suggested here is remarkably traditional, and one that weaves its way through most of the readings of this volume: the highest truth of the hero's story, and one that is embedded in the most subtle turns of narrative, is the necessity of forsaking the illusions of some passionate attachment (not only that of the narrator of James's story, but also Dupin's, Sarracine's, Felicite's, Gabrial Conroy's, etc.). In "The Figure in the Carpet" it is to the idea of a final interpretive *trouve*, the figure in the carpet that the narrator seeks most of his life. To some extent Chambers' moral is a reading-effect of the insisting upon the superiority of the standpoint won by the narrative (rather than any character, or author that one may posit as a function of the narrative). From the "top view" of life offered by the narrative, any one position of attachment will seem false and illusory; the balance of opposing positions in a fiction will breed irony at the expense of characters or author. This reading is all the more problematic, in the case of James's tale, for the slim evidence which Chambers must invoke to make it convincing. (After all, the narrator still avows his "obsession" at story's end.) In a sense this basic way of arguing the "truth" delivered by the stories comes quite close to the new critics' insistence that the artwork (here read "narrative") brings the alert reader to a higher and more complex truth than any stated in the text by either character or narrator. This would be the self-situation for the language of the narrative—a situating which is missed by those contemporary literary critics who fail to catch this irony, and fail to think the possibility of this larger context. And this discovery of the delusive quality of believing in any final interpretive resting place, or expending one's self in an isolating professional rivalry to get there, also seems to be the way Chambers projects a situation for the reading of his own story about narrative.

SUNY/Buffalo William Beatty Warner

Literature and Insubstantiality in Later Eighteenth-Century England by Fredric V. Bogel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Pp. xi + 226. $22.50.

Fredric Bogel's *Literature and Insubstantiality in Later Eighteenth-Century England* is an ambitious, thought-provoking study that perhaps raises more questions about the literary culture of the period than we can legitimately expect it to answer in 220 pages. Under the rubric of "insubstantiality" it explores a number of literary phenomena, from the presentation of self in autobiography to the imaginative recreation of the past in elegaic verse. What is valuable about the book is that it offers a sustained approach to the literature of the period—a new metaphorics, in effect—that establishes a philosophical basis for examining the formal and thematic structures of works by Johnson,

Boswell, Burke, Smart, Gray, Collins, Home, and Macpherson, among others. Although in his preface Bogel acknowledges his "skepticism about periodization—so deep as to be, at times, paralyzing—"(p. ix), *Literature and Insubstantiality* verges on being a literary history of England between 1750 and 1800, a comprehensive account of why poetry, fiction, and non-fiction took the forms and promulgated the values they did. But the history it describes is deliberately narrow. Unlike other recent critics of the period—notably John Barrell, Terry Eagleton, and G. S. Rousseau—Bogel seems content to work within the critical traditions we might associate with the works of Martin Price, Frank Brady, and W. K. Wimsatt; the contexts he establishes are literary rather than historical. His readings of individual works leave implicit the relationships between the rhetoric of substantiality that he studies and the material reality that it imaginatively describes. The result is a fascinating study of insubstantiality, though less as the "cultural phenomenon" (p. 70) that Bogel claims it is than as a literary manifestation of cultural and historical trauma.

"Insubstantiality," in any context, is not easy to discuss. For Bogel, it is less a concept or "a shared set of literary assumptions" than "a common attitude toward human experience" (p. 24) evident in eighteenth-century literature. He relates this "attitude" to R. D. Laing's "'ontological insecurity'"—the "'total loss of relatedness with self and other'" (p. 25)—and then goes on to describe the quests of later eighteenth-century writers for "a rhetoric of substantiality" or "a sphere of significance and weight, of substantiality, capable of supplementing the perceived inadequacy of common experience with materials drawn from that very experience" (p. x). As this last phrase suggests, a good part of Bogel's study is devoted to analyzing the strategies that writers employ to create value in what they suspect or fear is valueless. This "rhetoric of substantiality" is based on "material metaphors . . . : metaphors of fullness, wholeness, weight, solidity, density, texture, complexity, sometimes of opacity and three-dimensionality, or of intensity" (p. 55). In this respect, *Literature and Insubstantiality* is a study of rhetoric as well as history, of the ways in which writers use their literary and philosophical languages to compensate for their "ontological insecurity."

Bogel's argument takes shape, though, less as a precise theoretical program or a detailed historical account than as an analytical rhetoric that emerges in his readings of individual texts. Although in the second half of the book Bogel suggests (primarily through his footnotes) possible connections between his analyses and the work of postmodern critics such as Barbara Johnson, Neil Hertz, and William C. Dowling, he restricts his theoretical (and historical) framework in his first chapter to an elaboration of the differences between the Augustan Age and the "Age of Sensibility." These "centers of gravity" (note the material metaphor) are established thematically rather than historically; they are "literary configurations" (p. 3) that, to my mind, are more convenient than enlightening. Yet the flexibility of his theoretical framework provides opportunities to re-read the literature of the later eighteenth-century in new and often provocative ways. In his fourth chapter, "Past and Poem," for example, Bogel examines the attempts by Gray, Collins, Johnson, Cowper, Home, and Walpole to invest their literary and mythic pasts with significance, weight, and substantiality. By studying the ways in

which these writers recreate the past as "the product of present [eighteenth-century] needs," he is able to demonstrate that the past in their writings becomes "as much a fictional object to be entertained by their imagination as a repository of facts to be mastered by the intellect" (p. 114). This complex response to the past Bogel characterizes as "the triumph of a partly demythologized imagination" (p. 114), marked by the tension between writers' skepticism and their need to believe in an idealized past. But these general statements only hint at the complexity of his analyses; they are sustained not by their theoretical weight (to borrow one of Bogel's own metaphors) but by the ways in which they are applied to specific texts.

Literature and Insubstantiality, in this sense, explores the literary implications of "material metaphors" rather than the materiality of metaphor or language. The past and present, the self and other, and the signficance of everyday experience emerge in Bogel's study as themes that structure much of the period's literature. Bogel sees these themes as ontologically and historically significant; they offer us ways to distinguish between different kinds of literature, different kinds of experience. He argues that the later eighteenth century was "a time when human experience, progressively less reliant on metaphysical or transcendent authentication, was itself becoming the source of the terms in which it was to be considered: a time when the sphere of experience itself was invested with new value, new explanatory power, and heightened interest" (p. 71). His analyses of various writers' attempts to redeem "common experience," particularly his remarks on Burke's *Enquiry*, call attention to the ideational underpinnings of the "material metaphors" that he discusses elsewhere. Yet characteristically Bogel discusses experience—like the past—as a formal or philosophical problem for eighteenth-century writers, more "substantial" than material or historical. It is, in other words, treated thematically by Bogel as a subject to which writers were drawn rather than historically as a description of the cultural conditions under which they wrote.

The value (and limitations) of Bogel's approach emerge, as he recognizes, in his interpretations of specific texts. In his discussion of *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (to take one example), Bogel argues that Johnson's skipping trips to the Catholic (and therefore presumably primitive and superstitious) islands of Egg and Canna represent "nothing less than a deflection from his principal goal"—observing "old traditions" and "antiquated manners" (p. 85). This decision to bypass what he came to see strikes Bogel as a reflection of Johnson's "ambivalence" to the past, the "characteristic" complexity of "primitivist and progressive images of the past" (p. 85) that he finds in the later eighteenth century. But Bogel's literary reading—his investing of this brief episode with weighty significance—downplays more mundane explanations for this trip not taken: fatigue, unpredictable weather, and Johnson's belief that he had already seen a good deal of the "traditions" he had come to observe. In one respect, then, Bogel produces a challenging—and plausible—reading of this part of the *Journey* by considering Johnson's "experience" as intellectual or imaginative rather than historical. One could argue that Johnson himself sees the dialectic of "primitivist and progressive images of the past" in material terms; what impresses him about Scotland is the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty, of linen sheets and straw bedding

on dirt floors. His interest in "old traditions" and "antiquated manners" is cultural as well as historical; "traditions" and "manners" in *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* refer to a range of economic, agricultural, and political practices, to a specific historical "experience." In this respect, Bogel's valuable reading of the Egg and Canna episode might be expanded—and enriched—by a consideration of Johnson's encounter with the material culture of the Scottish Highlands.

My comments, though, are intended not as an attack on Bogel's critical rhetoric but as a drawing out of some of its implications. The unwritten chapter of Bogel's study, in this regard, might be called "The Politics of Insubstantiality"; its subject would be the question of why a generation of writers —from Boswell to Gray to Collins—experienced their lives as empty, impoverished, or insubstantial. One answer may lie in his own metaphor of "impoverishment." The "material metaphors" that Bogel analyzes in the literature of the late eighteenth century suggest that their creators were quite aware of the materiality of their works—of their poems, essays, and books as marketable, money-making objects. Johnson's ambivalence, for example, toward the literary marketplace appears in the "material metaphors" that crop up repeatedly in the *Lives of the Poets*, particularly those of Dryden and Pope. In commenting on his methods of biography, Johnson asserts: "To judge rightly of an author, we must transport ourselves to his time, and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries, and what were his means of supplying them. . . . Dryden at least imported his science, and gave his country what it wanted before; or rather he imported only the materials, and manufactured them by his own skill" (*Life of Dryden*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill [Oxford: Clarendon, 1905], 1: 411). In one sense, these images of trade and manufacture constitute an implicit critique of the commodification of literature in Dryden's era; in another, they suggest how closely Johnson's perceptions of "common experience" are tied to concrete cultural and political realities. Bogel's critical language seems more suited to explicating the thematic implications of Johnson's "rhetoric of substantiality" than to analyzing how his "material metaphors" may be ideologically derived. This is not to suggest that Bogel replace sound literary analyses with Marxist generalities about a monolithic bourgeois ideology but that we, as readers, ponder the implications of his economic metaphors of "impoverishment."

Ultimately *Literature and Insubstantiality* raises important questions about what eighteenth-century texts we read and how we read them. One of Bogel's accomplishments is that he directs our attention to writers who are too often ignored or dismissed: Macpherson, Monboddo, Cowper, and Collins, to name only four. That Bogel's approach is capable of taking these "minor" writers seriously without making extravagant claims for their literary worth is one measure of the value of his study. By effectively demonstrating what these writers share with Johnson, Boswell, and Burke, Bogel offers a new rationale for discussing the later eighteenth-century as a distinct era. Like all good scholarly books, then, *Literature and Insubstantiality* allows us to reassess our reading; it returns us to works we have read with new perspectives and new questions. Its real contribution to eighteenth-century scholarship lies in the opportunities it offers for further study.

Georgia Institute of Technology Robert Markley

Biographical Truth: The Representation of Historical Persons in Tudor-Stuart Writing by Judith B. Anderson. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984. Pp. 243. $22.50.

Twenty years ago my geography teacher began the year by making us write, on the front covers of our exercise books, "Geography is about Maps; History is about Chaps." By maps, of course, he meant scientifically describable phenomena that obeyed specific and verifiable laws rather than the cultural artifact. And by chaps he meant that unreliable stuff—human nature—of which humanists have for so long been so proud. He was, in short, varying the two-culture theory once popular in disputes between F. R. Leavis and C. P. Snow. The ideas, we all know, were never quite that simple; the arguments never quite that straightforward. But the debate concerning the relative merits of the human and the social sciences has changed considerably since then. Fashionable French philosophers and argumentative Anglo-American marxists have done as much to destroy our confidence in the borders separating academic disciplines as they have done to challenge the values once espoused by humanism. In dismantling the epistemological grid of the human sciences in early modern Europe for us, Michel Foucault and others have been seen to threaten institutionalized humanism by casting doubt upon the verifiability of the human subject. What's the purpose of the human sciences if there's no such thing as "man"? That's not quite what Foucault says, but some humanists feel anxious at being told that they are no longer the true subject of their investigations and have tended to read him and his disciples that way. The broader challenge to the human sciences, though, is serious enough. How can, say, the historian justify studying Renaissance England?

Judith Anderson's study of *Biographical Truth: The Representation of Historical Persons in Tudor-Stuart Writing* takes sides in this debate but is primarily a learned collection of detailed readings of selected instances of life-writing. Consequently it does not address the general theories and broad categories upon which it bases its analyses and conclusions. It is appropriate to do so here since these general questions have direct bearing upon the nature, range and contribution of *Biographical Truth*.

The study of English history of the Tudor-Stuart period is especially important since those dynasties cover that transition from feudalism to capitalism which we may designate as absolutism in the political sphere, or as the bourgeois revolution in the social sphere. Since the English bourgeoisie was to effect the industrial revolution, the better we understand the social and cultural origins of democratic capitalism, the better we will be, perhaps, in responding to its collapse. The historian's task is made the more rewarding since, as Alan MacFarlane and other social historians of the period have pointed out, England's legal records stretch back to the thirteenth century almost without interruption and provide an invaluably detailed account of the daily social, legal and political life of most people. The culture of the time too is rich and varied, as we would expect from a period of expanding economic activity. More importantly, cultural activity in general at the time was directly socially constitutive; the theaters, for example, which opened in London during the 1590's were to command their audiences' attention and transform them into a conscious class by offering ideals and standards of how

they should behave. If the entrepreneurial "public" theatres helped to create the public, the press helped that process too. For the first time the arts of writing went public in all their various forms. Poetry, history, philosophy; the old Aristotelian categories were debated and exemplified throughout their many modes and kinds in print to a reading public who evidently felt that they needed to know these things. Social prestige and power demanded a certain degree of literary cultivation at the time, especially among those anxious to maintain or legitimate their professed status. And again, it is worth insisting that the ideas by which the emergent English bourgeoisie came to know themselves in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries demand our attention since the class to which they gave shape was, in a generation or two, to establish that world empire from which the world has yet to recover.

The study of the relationship betweeen poetry and history, a much celebrated topic in early modern England, then, is not an arid or pointless enquiry since the class that was, in part, to form its ideas about the operation of social, judicial and political power from this very debate, was to achieve an incomparable degree of control over most of the world by actively seeking cultural hegemony over colonized peoples. Nor is it by chance that the first major statement of English literary theory—Sidney's *Apologie*—should have appeared at this time since, in order not to appear vulgar and have only the political issues of the day to think and talk about, the cultivated and upwardly-mobile gentlefolk of England habitually thought of something else. The relationship between poetry and history, which so often addressed topical political questions by analogy and allegory, was frequently what writers encouraged them to consider instead. In prefaces, prologues and introductions to all forms of book and pamphlet, the changes on the terms "poetry" and "history" are rung throughout the period. Richard Braithwait's *The Scholler's Medley, or, an Intermixt Discourse upon Historical and Poetical Relations* of 1614, a collection of commonplaces on this topic, was directed more forcefully at its market when reissued in 1638 as *A Survey of History: A Nursery for Gentry*. This and similar works made sure that no English reader should be in doubt about the difference between poetry and history and the different kinds of truth which they revealed. Reading such works also provided a means of thinking about politics without seeming to.

It's here that *Biographical Truth* becomes interesting, for the question of biography was central to this ideological debate. From the opening sentence we can tell that the challenges of Foucault's anti-humanism are in dispute but have not been met: "This study examines the ways historical persons were seen, understood, and depicted by writers of biography, drama, and history in Tudor-Stuart England" (p. 1). "Historical persons" we recall from the title, and know ourselves on the safe ground of traditional humanist liberalism. The one thing that "person" seldom ever means in this study is the body; it certainly never means the Foucauldian body. Rather, it stands in for the generic human subject of liberal-humanist discourse, the idealized representation of which is the true subject of *Biographical Truth*—that aesthetic achievement of the "*Life*" for which Anderson rightly celebrates Walton in his "picture of Donne":

> . . . a real seventeenth-century view of a real life lived in historical time. . . . Seen as a skillful contemporary portrayal of a late Renaissance person, Walton's *Life of Donne* is valuable, irreplaceable even by a greater, more accurate body of facts, and within the frame of its own vision, it is true. (p. 69)

I don't think this means very much, but it doesn't really matter since *Biographical Truth* isn't really a generic study anyway. Rather, it is a sustained and exemplary scholarly account of a variety of texts which appeared in Tudor-Stuart England and in some way or other represent someone famous. (Since the latest *Life* considered, by the way, is Walton's *Life of Donne* (1640), the "Stuart" of the title is slightly misleading: Burnet's *History of His Own Times* would make an interesting study here.) *Biographical Truth* often engages in brief polemical asides, but in general offers us detailed assessments of selected instances of life-writing in terms of an otherwise establishable body of historical facts.

Any student of the works under consideration in *Biographical Truth* will have to take account of Anderson's scholarly and informed readings. We are shown how life-writers such as Bacon, Cavendish, More, Roper, Shakespeare and Walton mixed known fact with fiction according to different degrees of artistic design and control. In Part One, Bede provides a typology of conventional devices for the English life-writer; between the irrational subjectivism of Cavendish and the conspicuous authorial control of Roper emerges the picture of "real life lived in historical time" of Walton's *Life of Donne*. Part Two compares versions of the *Life* of Richard III by More and Shakespeare before turning to Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. The final part considers Baconian theory and practice. The argumentative, and sometimes polemical, frame in which these formal analyses are made, is that these texts deserve to be looked at in their own terms and not those applied by modern critics. William Nelson, Hayden White and Stephen Greenblatt are singled out in the introduction. Something of the argument with Greenblatt can, perhaps, be felt in the passage I quoted praising Walton.

Biographical Truth is by no means naive or hagiographical, though. It is resolutely reactionary. Behind metaphysical and aesthetic appreciation lurks always the need to take sides in a partisan battle:

> The presentation, the very form, of Harpsfield's *Life of More*, unlike that of Roper's *Life*, thus seems to work subtly against the unified truth that is, by both these accounts, the deliberately chosen theme of More's being and in this sense is untrue to More's life. Roper's profoundly artful presentation adheres more faithfully to the encompassing idea of unity More himself, by both accounts, embraced. Of the two, it is the more persuasive and, to me, the more truly biographical. It presumes to depict the fundamental principle of More's life—not without a strong sense of conflicting pressures but with an underlying sense of direction still stronger. Roper's *Life* is less nearly complete and more subjective than Harpsfield's, and yet, if it is an idea, an ideal, or a fantasy, it both is artistically and was actually a very real one. If it finally answers to a truth somewhat different from the modern biographer's, the impulse

> Roper takes to be central to More's life is imagined and reconstructed truly in it. (p. 49)

The style is seldom this regrettable. In a study of *Biographical Truth* we might wonder, exactly, what the intended force of "more truly biographical" tells us about either life or art. Being "true-to-life" (p. 50) is obviously an aesthetic virtue in life-writing; truth is about history and life is about, well, that's left a mystery.

Biographical Truth is demonstrably learned but unreliable. It draws upon the writings of Francesco Guicciardini and Niccolo Machiavelli, the obvious and important Italian Renaissance writers on history and historiography, but ignores the French humanists who first linked historical enquiry with social, legal, and political institutions at this time. The work of Pierre Amyot, François Baudouin and Jean Bodin was available and influential in Tudor-Stuart England: by the Restoration, Dryden could assume that his gentle-reader was familiar with all three. Even more sadly, *Biographical Truth* ignores the commonplace works of English writers of the period. Ascham is in there, so are Bacon, Holinshed and others. But Thomas Blundeville's *True Order of Reading Hystories* of 1574 (reprinted eight times to 1623), and other equally important works of the time by writers such as Richard Braithwait, Sir John Hayward and Thomas Heywood are significant omissions that devalue the general range of the book's conclusions. Heywood's translation of *Sallust* (1608), to take a single example, offers a lengthy preface entitled "Of the choice of History," the opening of which, in bold letters in the margin, declares "BODIN" to be the authority for the ensuing discussion. Other historians are mentioned, marginally, along the way, but the Frenchman who taught us that the principle reason for studying history was to be able to reform the existing legal and political institutions initiates Heywood's discussion of how to read history books. One could cite other instances, but suffice to say that *Biographical Truth*'s resolute refusal to engage the overwhelmingly political character of its texts and subjects casts serious doubt upon the general conclusions it offers.

Consequently, the critical language with which *Biographical Truth* engages the texts it considers too often seems opaque. Bacon, the most overtly political life-writer discussed, had "subtler designs," we are told, underlying his treatment of Henry VII that only become apparent once we have noticed his deviations from otherwise establishable facts. Reference to Bacon's sources and noticing when he makes things up provide a grid of answerability by which his achievement is measured. Bacon's political motives are mentioned casually:

> The center of Bacon's initial representation of Henry, the latter's concern to ground his title to the throne on the securest possible base, is basic to these larger designs. Henry's concern and at times his anxiety are among the shaping conceptions of *The Historie* [of Henry VII] and may be its deepest root, even as textually its beginning and, earlier in the present discussion, the beginning of our examination of the work. This concern, for example, helps otherwise eccentric fictions concerning Henry's attitude toward his Queen and the execution of Sir William Stanley, which first seem unrelated, together fall into place. (p. 185)

Once again, art triumphs over politics. We may, by page 185, have grown immune to incompleted modifiers—subtler, larger, initial—but those unresolvable metaphoric structures—center, ground, base, basic, eccentric, fall, place—won't disguise the amazing slide here from Bacon to Henry, from the designs of the historical author to the designs of the historical subject. If this passage makes any sense at all, it is surely to aver a position even more radical than Greenblatt's: here the self-fashioning subject continues to assert his shaping presence over his life/*Life* even after death/Death.

Mystification of this sort characterizes the way Tudor-Stuart writers deliberately addressed the political questions of their times. In order to understand temporal conditions, they argued, we must strive to understand the universal truths that are available only through poetry and history. *Biographical Truth*, at one point, invites us to share the historical perspective of its authors by looking "from the other end . . . of the telescope" and "thus reading history forward rather than backwards" (p. 52) as though to understand the culture of the past we are somehow bound to employ their instruments. Although we are reminded that *Biographical Truth* concerns only a sample "of the best *Lives* written in the period" (p. 69), we might be surprised by the repeated discovery that its chosen texts say some fairly ordinary things about the arts of writing and of painting, for example (pp. 53–56, 170). Any study of early modern English culture cannot afford to ignore the valuable work that has already been done. Modern studies by Donald Kelley and Arthur Fergusson and F. Smith Fussner's *The Historical Revolution* (which Anderson cites but does not seem to have read) might have helped *Biographical Truth* feel that it was less often crossing unfamiliar terrain, charting unmapped territory, discovering new artistic wealth. Of course history is about chaps. But it is also quite often about maps too; the way real people in real historical situations imagine and idealize their way around the world, spreading their power through their ideas in the process of building global empires. One thing that the last twenty years have taught us is that we need history to avoid misunderstanding what we see around us. A history of ideas about ideas about what chaps thought life-writing was about just won't do.

Wayne State University G. M. MacLean

American Theories of the Novel: 1793–1903 by Sergio Perosa. New York and London: New York University Press, 1983. Pp. xiv + 243. $32.50.

Sergio Perosa traces "the origin, growth, and interaction of American theories of the novel" up to about 1900, that is, just before Henry James's prefaces to the New York edition. His method is more descriptive than analytic. He is more concerned with continuities in the theories of fiction as stated by Americans than he is with the intersections between theory and practice or with the social or political function of such theories in America. As a consequence, his chronicle is more or less pure literary history with little to remind one of the ways in which fiction and discourse about fiction were participating in social and economic change.

Perosa sets out to fill a real need. Although scholars have often tried to define the special characteristics of classic American fiction, and America's search for a national literature has been fully chronicled, no one before Perosa has surveyed as a set the many, often self-conscious, American statements about fiction. *American Theories of the Novel* is divided into two parts, one on the Romantic period and the other on Realism. It opens with early defenses of fiction in America by Brockden Brown and others on the basis of both truthfulness and moral purpose, and with the crucial issue of American materials for fiction—the supposed thinness of traditional lore and social patterns. The major issue of the first part, however, is the distinction between romance and novel, the various romantic strategies and justifications developed by Cooper, Simms, Hawthorne, and Melville, and the balancing pull of contemporary and historical actuality to provide both authority and topicality. Perosa shows that what may seem a category, "romance," really describes numerous liberating strategies of pre-Civil War writing.

In the second part Perosa argues that a concern with American materials and the Great American Novel was after the war replaced by a concern with the value and limitations of representationalism, by an emphasis on aesthetics, and later by such post-Realistic tactics for *vraisemblance* as naturalism, veritism, and impressionism. Perosa's strength lies in his clear summaries of statements on fiction made by Cooper, Simms, Hawthorne, Poe, Howells, James, Norris, and others. The greatest value of the book lies in its potential use by graduate students and non-specialists as a guide to American theories of fiction before 1900.

It is less clear that the book tells anything new about American culture. Perosa offers few new insights into the ideas of Hawthorne, Howells, or Norris, although his recent book on James (*Henry James and the Experimental Novel*) suggests he can be a close and insightful reader. Secondly, the almost total absence of social and political contexts for these theories developed during Jacksonian controversies, sectional conflict, and the ascendancy of a new middle-class business culture leaves us with disembodied notions of writers lacking real audiences and clear social functions. One gets little sense of the actual ambitiousness of men like Hawthorne, Howells, and Twain, of the implied readers for their statements about fiction, or of the political dimensions of various forms of Realism. Thirdly, Perosa does not quite define what is peculiarly American about American theories of the novel. He does introduce several chapters by discussing fictional theories of such English writers as Scott, Bulwer, Eliot, and Hardy; but these sections simply provide a backdrop for his discussion of American ideas, not a basis for systematic comparisons. From time to time comments on Goethe, Taine, Verga, and others suggest that Perosa would be able to draw significant comparisons between American and trans-Atlantic theories but has decided not to do so. The result is greater unity, perhaps, but less incisive significance. Finally, Perosa does not thoroughly research discourse on fiction in nineteenth-century America. He certainly goes beyond the statements of the major novelists to include important commentary by men like Lafcadio Hearn, George Lathrop, Sidney Lanier, and Daniel Thompson. American periodicals, however, were full of often unsigned reviews and articles debating issues of verisimilitude, didacticism, characterization, and social themes. Close study of the literary pages of

American Quarterly Review, Knickerbocker, Independent, Southern Literary Messenger, and other at times short-lived journals indicates that writers of serious fiction and discourse about it were not only reflecting American realities and creating models for American behavior and seeking to have political influence, but were also concerned with establishing and defining a significant social function for the writer himself.

These four criticisms do not diminish what Perosa actually does, for that he does efficiently and usefully. Rather they indicate different dimensions that might have provided his study with greater significance—a more probing analysis of the writers' theories, a social context clarifying the unwritten agendas of their programs, a cross-cultural comparison defining the "American" aspects of their ideas, or a more thorough survey of periodical criticism of fiction in the nineteenth-century. Without such a dimension Perosa's survey still remains a most useful guidebook to American theories of fiction.

North Carolina State University John E. Bassett

Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant edited by Jane Marcus. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. P. xv + 281. $24.95.

In this second voume of collected essays on Virginia Woolf edited by Jane Marcus we have many very fine contributions, no duds. Students and teachers of Woolf are given close readings of only two novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Between the Acts;* the other twelve essays concentrate on patterns of influence, ideas and imagery in Woolf's memorably interconnected life and work. When all the essays are assembled in the imagination, we may realize that we have been invited to consider Woolf a revolutionary, virgin mystic fascinated by the alternatives to patriarchy posed by Queen Elizabeth, Egyptian myth, Katherine Mansfield and the women's movement. This collection is so remarkable that, surprisingly enough, only the most programmatically recalcitrant reader will refuse the invitation.

Accepting an invitation is not, of course, the same thing as thoroughly participating in a party. Protected by the sometimes enabling, sometimes unconscionable criteria of academia, we are not required to question the value of inquiry into the life and writing of Virginia Woolf so detailed that we know minutiae about her trip to Bognor at the age of fifteen, about her notes on Queen Elizabeth and about the emotional oscillations of her opinions of Lytton Strachey and Katherine Mansfield. However, the ascension of Woolf to the status of saint whose every action and thought might reveal a previously unacknowledged element of the sacred, or at least the significant, requires questioning. Jane Marcus somewhat lightly dubs her a saint and, with almost annoying predictability, many feminist critics quote *A Room of One's Own* in initiating epigrams to chapters and articles. To appreciate this volume without fetishizing its information, one needs to understand why Woolf is so enthusiastically celebrated and honored.

Perhaps the rationale can be located in the same vexed theme that loosely links a number of the essays: the relationship of art and politics, or, as Diane

Filby Gillespie's essay nominates the problematic, political aesthetics. Prior to contemporary feminist reclamation of Woolf as a pacifist, socialist and feminist who loved women, critical emphasis fell on the Woolf who insisted on "disinterested passion for things in themselves" and art purified of politics. This anthology constructs a different emphasis, as is announced in Jane Marcus' introduction, written in her characteristically acerbic and joyous style. Attention to Woolf's representations of petty patriarchs, effectively transcribed in Beverly Ann Schlack's essay, and to her considerable research for *Three Guineas* as well as responsiveness to correspondence about the book, discussed by Brenda Silver, forces readers to redefine both Woolf's content and aesthetics. Jane Marcus' "The Niece of a Nun: Virginia Woolf, Caroline Stephen, and the Cloistered Imagination" commands respect for the contribution of Caroline Stephen to Quaker theology and for her considerable influence on her niece, Virginia Woolf, who valued a mystical tradition of silence as a source of knowledge and as an antidote to public and professional argumentativeness. Knowing about Woolf's involvement in British feminism, outlined by Naomi Black, as well as what influenced her fosters readings of her work that encompass the important concerns she brought to her writing. Essays on Woolf at fifteen and in her fifties, written respectively by Louise A. DeSalvo and Carolyn Heilbrun, assist understanding of the courage and creativity with which she wrote against the influences that encourage the daughters of educated men to become passively rather than reflectively silent and potentially addicted to the notions of art that isolate anger and polemic as inappropriate. These scholarly investigations make available readings of Woolf's imaginative socialist feminist vision as well as information about what the daughters of educated men have to resist if they are to avoid perpetuating privileges bonded to sexism and warlike dispositions. Ideally, then, close scrutiny of the life and writing of Virginia Woolf transcends simply antiquarian and professional interests because of the ultimate purposes of comprehending the range of Woolf's writing.

Nonetheless, the purposes often stagnate in the realm of the ideal in part because the resurrection of Woolf is often too enthusiastic to include critique. Perhaps feminist critics can serve one another by fostering alertness to the unfair and unnecessarily antagonizing deployment of a double standard by which men are judged for what women receive benign tolerance or even praise. Woolf's fascination with Queen Elizabeth either did not include or the author of the essay on it did not think noteworthy any reflection on Elizabeth's responsibilities for English imperialism. This is a crucial omission of a perspective that, one can speculate, might have dominated Woolf's investigation of a male monarch; perhaps such an omission is unavoidable as well as predictable in a volume dedicated to proving the persistence of neglected issues as much as to elaborating their imaginative and ideological import for the already convinced.

Similarly, questions about the relationship between artful criticism and serious politics are raised by the points at which Jane Marcus stops in her discussion of Woolf's mysticism and pacifism. If we take seriously Woolf's analysis of the causes of war in *Three Guineas*, written on the eve of World War II, if we indeed present it as something of an answer, we are obliged, I would think, to evaluate the strategies of resistance she proposes. How ade-

quate are they to the situation, how utopic are they, how are we to read them? Is mystical distance a retreat from the impurity of politics, breeding answers valid only on a certain level of generality? Should we feel satisfied with a critical presentation of an ideology of chastity so confirming that it does not even consider possible fears of the body and of shattering an artful sense of the self? Are we willing, in other words, at least to consider regarding Woolf as both role model and admonitory figure?

If we ask such questions, we should do so keeping in mind the fresh thinking and hard work involved in, for instance, the act of paying attention to Woolf's mysticism, chastity and politics from her own perspective, of trying to see the meaning they had for her and helped her to create. The richness of the essays collected here is witnessed in the significance of the questions they inspire not only about Virginia Woolf but also about the relationship of feminist criticism to individual women writers who are considered great. It is certainly appropriate to read this volume nettled by some questions, but it is also appropriate to read it unreservedly delighted by the stories told, the information provided and the vision shared. The contributors to this volume imagine Woolf vividly and study her with so much passion that she becomes a living presence. Having read this volume, I too can imagine her; she is nodding with pleasure that she has found so many common readers.

Vanderbilt University Mary Childers