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Book Reviews

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Vincent Carretta's *Snarling Muse* deals perceptively with the great period of English satire, which he labels for convenience with the name of Pope, and with the transition from this rise to the dying fall of Charles Churchill's "snarling" diatribes. But since he is primarily interested in the relationship of visual to verbal satire, Carretta also explores the Age of Hogarth and the transition from emblematic to situational (we might say novelistic) satire and so to caricature. George Townshend, who joined Italian caricature to English politics, is the cut-off figure. The emphasis of Carretta's book falls on the Pope-Hogarth period and on the reasons for the greatness of its satire and for the change to the later Churchill-Townshend mode.

This is a large subject to cover. While manifestly superior to the comparable books on graphic satire by the historians Dorothy George and Herbert Atherton, Carretta's book, whether discussing poem or print, all too often lapses into the catalogue of titles with brief descriptions we associate with their books. *The Snarling Muse* emerges nevertheless as an important study because Carretta (unlike either George or Atherton) does upon many occasions look closely in the manner of a literary scholar at the poetic or graphic satires, and he does have an intelligent and convincing thesis to argue. His book should be read alongside Thomas Lockwood's *Post-Augustan Satire* or, more obliquely, alongside John Sitter's study of poetic change, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth Century England.* It is comparable to these in both quality and breadth.

An example of Carretta's detailed analysis is his treatment of Pope's *Windsor Forest* as a satire that adapts the principles of contemporary history painting—in particular decorative, allegorical history of the sort Sir James Thornhill was executing at this time on the ceiling of the great hall of Greenwich Hospital. The argument that *Windsor Forest* is an attempt to put Thornhill's *Allegory of the Protestant Succession* into words, or rather to revise it into an acceptable Tory allegory, treads close to the swamp of weak picture-poetry analogies, but Carretta's comparison is a strong one, based as it is on a particular historical moment and Pope's reliance on the tradition of instructions-to-a-painter poems and other versions of ekphrasis.

Approaching the poem from the direction of visual iconography, Carretta convincingly adds to the typology of William I-III (with which we are familiar) the typological relationship of Queen Elizabeth to Anne. I had always worried about the unconscious(?) irony of Pope's depicting the huge dropsical queen, mother of twenty-odd offspring, as the virgin huntress Diana. This was a comparison in which only *huntsress* applied: Anne did love to hunt when she could be sat upon a horse. But Carretta's argument shows that whenever Diana is referred to we telescope Anne and Elizabeth, the truly Virgin Queen who was consistently associated with Diana and all her attributes.
Carretta interprets Pan’s lustful attack on Diana’s nymph Lodona as a reference to “the political excesses that embraced England in the seventeenth century”—or yet more generally to “the evils that befell England when she transgressed the bounds of the original constitution”—rather than as Wasser­man’s contemporary allegory of England’s involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession. But given his own understanding of typology as an almost unlimited telescoping of past-present and general-particular, it seems fair to conclude that Wasserman’s level is as operative as the presence of Anne in Elizabeth.

The principle of telescoping, which Carretta has picked up from Maynard Mack’s chapter on “innuendo” in The Garden and the City, becomes a little bothersome in the central case of Sir Robert Walpole. The issue is whether Walpole is always the reference whenever anyone appears with a Walpolian tag (“Great Man,” “Prompter,” “Screen,” let alone Caesar or Wolsey). I wonder if a distinction should not be made between types (Wolsey), surrogates (Jonathan Wild), and tools or puppets of Walpole. In “The Epistle to Bathurst” Carretta focuses on Francis Chartres (or Charteris), whose equation with Walpole seems based on one line in the poem and a rather elaborate footnote quoting Arbuthnot’s satiric epitaph on Chartres, which echoes some Walpolian epithe­ths. He does not, for some reason, mention Hogarth’s use of the same reference to Chartres in the first plate of A Harlot’s Progress, though it could be shown that every contemporary to whom Hogarth alludes in that series (Gibson, Gideon, Gonson) has a connection of one sort or another to Walpole: the question being whether, as Carretta says, the figure stands for Walpole, as for example Wolsey does, or whether he represents part of the Walpole network of corruption extending specifically from Chartres up to the Bishop of London and—to move on to “The Epistle to Arbuthnot”—Lord Hervey.

For Sporus-Hervey, as “prompter” of Eve (Queen Caroline), cannot be both puppet-master, therefore surrogate for Walpole, and also Walpole’s puppet. I suspect that Pope is interested—as Erskine-Hill and others have pointed out—in the figure of a bad steward or middle-man who mediates between landlord and tenants, king and people. This is a figure (absorbed perhaps from Swift) who can be, like Chartres, a go-between for Walpole, but can ultimately be Walpole himself in that relation to the king or (and this is where Hervey comes in) the queen.

But Carretta’s main point is a valuable one, that “the real model for ‘Sporus’ is not as important as is the reader’s recognition of the actions and attributes that render this ‘Amphibious Thing’ an emblem for courtly corruption, both personally and politically.” Carretta is arguing that the opportunity for greatness seized by satirists, both visual and verbal, in this period lay in the particular combination of indirection to avoid Walpolian censorship and generality to fulfill the Craftsman-Opposition doctrine of “measures not men.” The Collosus satires, for example, suggest that in Walpole’s situation the presence of a “prime” minister, called “the Great Man,” at a time when political theory did not yet justify such a phenomenon, led in Opposition polemics to a particular kind of generalizing conducive to a less ephemeral literature than ordinarily results from political satire. It meant that Walpole the man, the particular private person or personality, was not singled out, but rather his public persona or position:
They sought to show that England was endangered by Walpole's unconstitutional 'greatness' and not by his personal failings, by his prominence rather than by incompetence. If anything, the prints [and poems] we have been considering enhance Walpole's political stature.

—or, we might add, that of the satirist who is producing this epic satire. Thus Walpole was related to Caesar or Cardinal Wolsey and raised to a dangerous eminence by the comparisons; and this heroic satire was in some ways an equivalent to the missing desideratum of the age, the epic mode. Of course, Carretta forgets, or does not add, that the mode was created by Dryden and others long before the advent of Walpole and that the Craftsman satirists may have fitted Walpole to the model. (It is also worth noting, returning to the distinction between surrogate and intermediary, that Carretta fails to observe that the collosus being worshipped in the print Idol-Worship stands before the gate of St. James' Palace, in other words between the worshippers and the real object of veneration, the king.)

Carretta makes a good case for the importance of The Craftsman and of Bolingbroke in the formulation of satiric objectives and method. (Whether Nicholas Amherst, who does not even get a reference in the book, had as much part in the policy as Bolingbroke has yet to be argued.) Although over-determination is to be expected in the major satires of Pope, the use of Horace we associate with him was programmatically laid out by "Phil-Horatius" in Craftsman no. 182 as early as 1729, on the same Opposition principles of "measures not men." "Pope's life may well have been an imitatio Horatii," writes Carretta. "But from a political perspective, his satiric existence is an imitatio Caleb D'Anvers" (i.e. the persona of The Craftsman). This imitatio included Pope's use of the country as a perspective from which to attack the court (The Craftsman was originally subtitled The Country Journal). In this strategy Carretta shows Bolingbroke emerging at his most brilliant and fascinating (see p. 107).

The strategy by which Pope and the Craftsman writers and artists enhance rather than diminish the figure of Walpole is most obviously absent in the other towering satirist of the period, Swift, far off in provincial Dublin imitating street ballads, reducing Walpole to a comic Punch, and invoking Hogarth to help him depict the Irish parliament as a madhouse. But, as Carretta shows, The Craftsman was also a source for the use of the "people" and their popular iconography. The central statement is Craftsman no. 345: "When the People find Themselves generally aggrieved, They are apt to manifest their Resentment in satyrical Ballads, Allegories, By-sayings, and ironical Points of low Wit." This is the iconography Carretta traces to a summation in The Dunciad, but it appears in a clearer, unheroicized version in the satires of Swift in Ireland and of Hogarth and his followers in England, representing a continuity with the post-Pope satirists that Carretta does not pursue.

What happened with Walpole's fall was that the Opposition leaders turned out to follow the same Walpolian measures, thus reducing the satirist's subject to the more ephemeral and particular one of men not measures. With no real difference between Walpole and the Opposition, "Most of Pope's contemporaries and successors in satire apparently felt that if indeed there were
no differences of principle among political rivals, then only personalities were left to attack." Moreover, while Walpole had ignored and scorned the satirists, Pelham bought them off or absorbed them—including virtually all the vocal opposition politicians—producing a "Broadbottom" government based on personal interest of the sort Namier has described at great length.

This was the period in which Sir Charles Hanbury Williams was the chief figure among satiric poets; in graphic satire this meant on the one hand a turn to caricature and on the other to the dehumanizing imagery of Fox as a fox and Bute as a boot. Churchill was the logical end, a more talented Williams, whose personal vituperation focused (ironically or conveniently for Carretta's history) on Hogarth, the relict of the earlier great period of general satire.

Involved too was a changing view of history. The change in English historiography from uniformitarianism to relativism undermined the use of exemplary history. Once again Bolingbroke, in his *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (1752), heralded the change. He suggested that history was to be seen not as recurring types but as "the strange combination of causes, different, remote, and seemingly opposite, that often concur in producing one effect; and the surprising fertility of one single and uniform cause in the producing of a multitude of effects. . . ." Partly responsible was the belief in the uniqueness of the English character, history, and experience; the new facts and interpretations that undermined the exemplary status of Cato, Cicero, and the other Roman paragons; and the advent of a more sophisticated causality and analysis in Hume's revisionist *History of England* (1754–62) based on the depiction of accidents and external causes rather than the actions of heroes. Thus Hume could say that Cromwell was "suited to the age in which he lived, and to that alone"—leaving little room for the use of analogies so dear to the satirists from Dryden through Pope and Hogarth. It was no longer easy to call the past into service of the present, or to call a particular individual in history a hero or villain, or even to generalize a contemporary into a type. Once again, however, I would have to add that the phenomenon Carretta sees emerging with the fall of Walpole, and documents in Bolingbroke and Hume, is already quite apparent in the un-fittingness of historical models in the progresses of Hogarth and the early satiric fictions (and *Joseph Andrews*) of Fielding. None of this emerges tout d'un coup.

In fact, historical parallels continued to be evoked in the conflict over the Bute Ministry in the early 1760s; Bute and the Dowager Princess of Wales were related to Mortimer and Queen Isabel and the Duke of Suffolk and Queen Margaret (and Bute himself to the seventeenth-century Stuarts). But even this example suggests something of the increase in personal abuse. One consequence was to replace historical fact with literary myth, with parallels and analogies from the English pantheon of Shakespeare and Milton (again already broached by Hogarth and Fielding in the 1730s–40s).

Though Carretta's argument is consistently interesting, his ending—the chapter on Churchill and company—is disappointing. For one thing, he omits the popular dimension, the most important phenomenon of the 1760s, in the rise of Wilkes—although it is before his eyes in the writings of *The North Briton* and the late prints of Hogarth. For another, he does not acknowledge the great graphic tradition of Hogarth to Cruikshank—hardly a
decline in the sense that a movement from Pope to Churchill to Peter Pindar might be called a decline. He does not explain how in the graphic tradition, perhaps because of the infusion of popular imagery, there is a flowering that follows directly from Hogarth’s work at just the moment when the Dryden-Pope tradition runs out. Rowlandson develops certain anarchic formal elements of Hogarth and Gillray melds into Hogarth’s emblematic and situational images the Townshend tradition of personal caricature in order to produce a rich heritage that runs on into George Cruikshank and (in terms of the visual-verbal motif) reemerges in the collaborations of Cruikshank and Phiz with Dickens.

If the book ends abruptly, it has given us a good ride. Interesting insights appear in every chapter. We must see “The Epistle to Bathurst” in a somewhat different way now that Carretta has shown how it serves as an extension of the Bubble satires of 1720. Blunt’s vision of a Deluge makes better sense as Carretta explains that “the implications of the scandal are as politically relevant in 1733” as in 1720, and that “England’s present political and financial corruption may be traced back to ‘the famous Aera of 1720’ when Walpole rose to power.” (This may also explain the publication of Hogarth’s South Sea Scheme as late as 1724—a question Carretta does not mention in his thoughtful analysis of that print.)

Although the quality of the reproductions in the book is only serviceable, and often bad (due, I suspect, to out-of-focus photographs rather than bad printing), the text has the virtue of being always stimulating and informative. Behind The Snarling Muse is a strong analytic mind looking at both visual and verbal satire and at the pamphlets and histories that surrounded them. This book is a hopeful sign that increasing sophistication is being applied to the subject of graphic satire in the crucial period of its emergence in England.

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The seeming resurgence of interest in American Studies among scholars of particular fields of American culture has been accompanied by a new understanding of the range of strategies that allow one to “read” culture. Recent theories of literature that have stressed the textuality of the world and sought the intersections among the arts, politics, and beliefs that constitute the fabric of one’s continual interpretive experience have given a different significance to comparative studies of culture. Although neither of these new books exploits the full range of such comparative possibilities, each explores cultural languages that exist in the larger context of interpretive life we take for
granted but seldom articulate—respectively, the language of vision and that of manners.

Bryan Wolf’s stimulating study will no doubt be received with some skepticism, if not outrage, by traditional art historians, though there is every reason to think that his work will be instrumental in redefining a field that, with notable exceptions, has been less than adventurous. He defines his project as a series of “explorations into the modernity of nineteenth-century American painting,” based on the assumption that Romantic painting was in its own right self-conscious of its methods and aware of the manner in which “all vision eventuates in re-vision, an act of interpretation that alters what it beholds.” This would not seem especially challenging, but Wolf’s understanding of the critic’s role—that of a storyteller or translator of artifacts—is anchored very precisely in the language of psychoanalysis. As the language of conscious intention is only the tip of the iceberg, says Wolf following Freud, so the task of the critic, the “reader” of the partially visible text left behind by the artist’s interpretive moment of re-vision, will be “to trace through the labyrinthine turnings of the texts he investigates that narrative thread which binds the writer [and the painter] to his culture and the reader to both.” I quote these passages in part to outline the method Wolf employs but in part to suggest that these prefatory remarks are, for the most part, the only place in which Wolf is less than concrete. The book itself, given its strategies, is remarkably tied to the materials it investigates; with one crucial exception, they, not the critic’s cerebrations, remain central.

The development of the argument does, however, present something of a problem. The concluding chapter, on Thomas Cole and the Romantic sublime, is the climax of the book and something of a tour de force; but it is also the most thoroughly psychoanalytic (built on Lacan and recent revisions of Freud) and the most obscure to the reader who does not choose to believe that this method overrides all others, that the psychic allegory not of Cole but of the text of his work (“unraveling from the dense tissue of intention and disguise . . . the history of artistic consciousness in its efforts at realization”) is the most significant part of his magnificent landscape paintings. The fascinating local readings that emerge from Wolf’s consideration of Cole’s major works are often clouded by the larger claims. He builds on Burke’s theory of the sublime, and interpretations of it developed by Thomas Weiskel, in order to suggest that the beautiful in Cole arises in reaction to the sublime and “represents a sublimation of those forces along a visual pathway that fictionalizes its own origins and history.” The placement of the viewer (the reader) in the space (the text) of the painting (here Sunny Morning on the Hudson) allows one to trace the enacted narrative in which that clash between the sublime and the beautiful takes place, a “consummation of the subject’s forbidden desires that is both passive and visionary.” Only a long and detailed summary could reproduce the texture of Wolf’s argument in this chapter; its results are at times exciting and compelling, but it is also the case that one often feels the text entirely disappear from view, its place taken by an ulterior narrative, in this case, for example, the “scoptophilic tendencies of the child.” “The gap experienced by the child between his intentions [blocked narcissistic desires] and their fruitions reappears in the large vistas of open space, and especially in the forbidding presence of the centerground
mountain, which separate the foreground promontory from the river valley world." This analogy, however, is allowed to overwhelm its text; the passivity of the child (neither the viewer per se nor the painter, but a subject of conscious-preconscious engagement with the imaginary landscape) represents a femininity that fulfills libidinal fantasies, allows "the erotic energy of the subject to remain within the circumference of the self," and in an oedipal context reflects the child's desire "to make love with the father either through fantasies of masturbation or by assuming the role of the mother." Such readings are the bulk of the chapter on Cole, and it is hard to find them a persuasive argument for the power of Romantic American landscape.

On the other hand, the preceding chapters on Washington Allston and John Quidor are superb. A chapter on Allston and the aesthetics of parody suggests his protomodern awareness of the self-referential qualities of visual language, and another on his classical landscapes draws on comparisons as diverse as The Tempest, Anne Bradstreet, Claude, Coleridge, and Poussin in order to demonstrate his growing preoccupation with the unintelligibility of the visual and the painterly process of "dismantling the signposts of an intelligible reality while acknowledging that true vision consists of a blurred vision clearly beheld." An excellent chapter on Cole's Expulsion from the Garden of Eden argues (with reference to Milton, Edwards, and Melville) that the Fall, understood in terms of Romantic selfhood, operates as "a rejection of those antinomian modes of cognition which, like the light of Eden, posit a 'pure' truth apparently free from mediation and the demands of narrative form." Expulsion means the gift and burden of self-consciousness; romantic rebellion is, in fact, an act of repudiation holding forth the possibility of new modes of vision, however they may mask "through its imagery of loss the force of its own refusal" to abide by the "laws of Paradise." The book's best, most imaginative, and most innovative chapter compares the literary work of Irving and the canvasses of Quidor. Wolf's discussion of The Money Diggers (in relation to "Wolfert Webber, or Golden Dreams"), Antony Van Corlear Brought into the Presence of Peter Stuyvessant (in relation to Knickerbocker's History), and Rip Van Winkle are models of interdisciplinary work, illuminating both the fiction and the paintings, and finding in both an energy and modernity entirely fresh. Here is a Jacksonian world in which its actors release rather than repress those instinctual forces subversive of the social self, and recapitulate the tensions over the erosion of traditional values, the breakdown of paternal ties, and rise of mobility and a market economy that social historians have found to typify the period. Intrinsic to Quidor's vision is the creation of worlds that seem alien to his own, new worlds of explosive and uncontrolled energy "inimical to the canons of order by which he exists."

Because these chapters are so inventive and powerful, the Cole chapter that concludes the book, despite its intention, will seem less successful—not because it lacks imagination but because it gives in too freely to the terms of contemporary psychoanalytic theory and the Romantic sublime. Those terms trap Wolf's own powers of perception and limit them to a dirge; elsewhere he dances. Even so, this book will have an impact, and it should have an audience beyond that of art historians. With the exception of Barbara Novak, no one has recently added so much to our power to perceive and our vocabulary to describe the central works of American Romantic painting. Its use of liter-
ary materials is illuminating and accurate; and though there is little attention to larger social and historical developments, they are everywhere implied to be part of the text this interpretation so intently sees and reads.

Likewise limited to a relatively unread aspect of American antebellum life, Karen Halttunen’s *Confidence Men and Painted Women* offers—without directly invoking them—a masterful reinterpretation of some of the main literary and artistic works of the period. It does so by describing in wonderful and telling detail the pervasive influence on middle-class life of fears of hypocrisy and insincerity, fears that were countered by careful prescriptions of proper behavior that of course promoted the most alarming and extreme *forms* of hypocrisy and insincerity. The world of Jacksonian mobility and potential chaos that is invoked in Quidor’s works is also the world that produces an avalanche of advice literature designed to protect the innocent and the gullible from confidence men and prostitutes, and in a more everyday fashion protect the middle classes from mistakenly acquiring the appearances of guile, artfulness, or duplicity.

The fear of confidence men, and in fact their existence in visible numbers, grew from the conditions that historians have identified as Whig paranoia—suspicion of threats to liberty in the post-Revolutionary generation, the rise of countersubversive activities, the advent of the self-made man. In a world of strangers, as the urban world increasingly was, any duplicity meant the destruction of social bonds among men; to meet this crisis in social interaction, advice manuals in effect created a “cult of sincerity.” The Puritan condemnation of the cultivation of virtue as a marketable commodity gave way to the need to forge a concept of character that would yoke inner virtue and outward reputation. The new ideal of character, tied unavoidably to an ideal of sincere behavior, brought together “the premodern concept of soul, which focused on man’s inner spiritual being as he confronted God alone, and the modern concept of personality, which turned attention to man’s external standing before other men.” Such artificial cultivation of character, however, simply made it theatrical, open to further conning, and itself an expression of hypocrisy. So too the cultivation of sentimental ideals of fashion and etiquette among women, precisely because they aimed at creating a natural appearance by prescribing bourgeois codes of self-control, sensibility, and decorum, ended in new and more elaborate forms of the hypocrisy they tried to combat. The development of women’s fashions through classical, romantic, and sentimental periods shows increasing self-consciousness about the problem; and the sentimental styles of the 1840s and 50s, which conformed to the natural lines of the body in order to enhance sincerity and reveal the woman’s soul (rather than burying it in artifice, as romantic styles had), transformed the pursuit of fashion into “a form of moral self-improvement.” Such improvement, like the genteel performances in social life it exacted of women, served instead to increase the emphasis on form itself and hence on the implied risk of hypocritical conduct.

Halttunen’s most interesting chapter concerns the extension of these rites of behavior into the ritual of mourning, which as she shows developed in this period an elaborate code of its own. As death became less a community affair in a crowded urban world and more a *private* social event, it was accompanied on the one hand by an advice literature that instructed one in the
protocol of weeping, condolences, keepsakes, funeral attire, and the like, and on the other by the professionalization of duties among undertakers. The sentimental view of mourning made the natural preeminent, but it did so by “erecting an elaborate framework of social forms that codified and regulated . . . public expressions of bereavement and sympathy,” expressions that not only allowed for the indulging of grief but also became “a means of establishing a public claim to bourgeois gentility.” Everyone became a confidence man. It is especially in the context of the rise in popularity of parlor theatrics, which Halttunen sees as the fullest expression of an acceptance by the 1850s of a new view of character as itself theatrical, that funerals gain their true meaning: the hearse, the procession, and the coffin become more designed to put the corpse at center stage, to make it a virtual actor in the drama of sentiment and social performance watched over by the now professionally attentive “funeral director.” In this event as in others, the middle class, as it enters the age of capital (Hobsbawn) and conspicuous consumption (Veblen), begins to cast off its sentimental uncertainty about theatricality and embrace the skilled performances that have grown out of its own original anxieties about sincere conduct.

A brief but revealing epilogue on “the confidence man in corporate America,” which focuses on the rise of Horatio Alger and Dale Carnegie modes of performative experience, points to the everyday life the modern participant will find more familiar. He and she will now find it more haunting and unsettling in the historical context Halttunen has provided. The book’s range of reference to advice manuals, magazines (especially, of course, Godey’s Lady’s Book), fashion illustration, and contemporary treatises is impressive; and while there is not much attention given to the larger political and cultural developments of the period, the reader is given a new context in which to judge them. Although she does not treat it, Melville’s The Confidence-Man now seems less a bizarre allegory than a burlesque of advice literature; Hawthorne’s “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” looks entirely more vivid in view of Halttunen’s suggestions about the post-Revolutionary generation’s response to the threat posed by confidence men to naive newcomers to the city; and Uncle Tom’s Cabin, while Ann Douglas and others have situated its central scene, little Eva’s death, in the literature of mourning, appears now even more an orchestrated product (consciously or not) of those ambivalent sentimental ideals of feminine behavior exemplified by performative death and mourning. While the range of Halttunen’s attention might thus be narrow, the implications of the material she reveals are much larger. Her brilliantly imagined study will provoke important reconsiderations of antebellum culture and provide a model for new and more ambitious work in the history and interpretation of American society.

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Edward Said's latest collection of essays is wide-ranging and ambitious. It addresses what he takes to be the contemporary impasse of American literary criticism: its disappearance up the cul-de-sac of professional elitism, either via "deconstruction" and its "labyrinth of textuality," or via the alternative route of political dogmatism, most notably of a Marxist variety. Said wants the critic to occupy a middle ground as the only ground of productive criticism—that is, a place from which neither text nor history is fetishised at each other's expense, nor indeed set up as exclusive and reductive categories of analysis. He is concerned, therefore, with the crucial question of the relative autonomy of the text, of the relations between literary discourse and the formal, historical and social conditions of its production and reception. Above all, this collection wants to reinstate "criticism" as an important and effective cultural practice. Thus the essays include appraisals of the post-structuralist debate in its American context, particularly around the work of Derrida and Foucault, as well as a number of detailed studies of individual authors, for example, Renan, Swift and Conrad.

As a British feminist research student I was heartened by the trenchancy of Said's introduction and his insistence that the literary academy articulate and be responsible for its cultural position. But as one who knows of Said's work primarily from his Orientalism, rather than from his literary criticism, I became disappointed and dissatisfied as I read on; the close alignment of scholarship and political purchase which characterised that earlier work is here finally blurred by a kind of professional evasiveness—a blindspot about the "literary" which leaves The World, the Text and the Critic inconsistent, even confusing. Rather than discuss his entire range of essays, I'd like, then, to concentrate on Said's proposal for a "secular criticism" since it underlies both the strategy and the selectivity of this collection.

Said begins by stating:

My position is that texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moment in which they are located and interpreted. (p.4)

It is then to "the realities of power and authority . . . that make texts possible, that deliver them to their readers," that critics should attend. Said attempts to forestall objections from both Left and Right by maintaining that criticism can (and must) operate "between the dominant culture and totalitarian forms of critical systems": it needs to be firmly "in the world"—"secular"—and yet to be constantly oppositional. Further, it needs also to go beyond the available forms of literary criticism. But how exactly, to use Said's terminology, is "the critical consciousness" to negotiate its own worldliness? How can it be both deeply situated in its own time and place and yet go beyond those determinations? And how is it to be effectively oppositional, as a tool of a radical and consistent exposure of power-relations, without becoming "tainted" with political orthodoxy? In answer to these questions Said ad-
advances an elaborate model of the differences between "filiation" and "affiliation." The task of critics is to recognise and utilize the disjuncture between their filiative culture ("of birth, nationality, profession") and that method or system acquired affiliatively ("by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation"). The problem remains for me, however, with just this separation out of the terms of "personal" and "public" existence, even when, as here, they are not crudely opposed but distributed across a range of more sophisticated categories. For how does one really understand—let alone act upon—such distinctions? Why, for example, is a profession "filiative," and how can "economic and historical circumstances" be included as a category of willed acquisition? What's more, Said's binarism surely brings with it all the problems of intentionality, and suggests that we are, as critics, unified subjects, able to distinguish at will between the range of social and cultural positions offered us at work, at home or in bed. Such "identities" are never fixed and separate but constantly in process, defining and defined by each other. I would argue that it is unhelpful, therefore, to apotheosize "the critical consciousness" as an essential and transcendent attribute. As Said's analysis demonstrates elsewhere in the text, consciousness, far from being separate or separable from the social, is always social, is its material—the site of historical contradictions, of the operations of power, of the effects as well as the production of discourse. And yet whilst acknowledging the centrality of literary culture as located precisely as an imaginative mediation of the social, Said's critical terminology heads off any discussion of literary discourse as an articulation of fantasy, of the production of unconscious desires in excess of the socially possible or acceptable. Noticeably, psychoanalysis receives little attention in Said's overviews of theory, and yet it is here that the relations between subjectivity and language are explored. Moreover, the psychoanalytic framework allows ways into theorising the definitions of face and gender, for example, which literary texts offer their readers, as contradictory and complicated "processes of subjectification": the construction of subject-positions which can be simultaneously coercive and oppressive, and yet necessary strategies for survival, even pleasure. (See, for example, Homi K. Bhabha's analysis: "The Other Question—the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," Screen, 24 [1983]).

In fact, I would argue that Said's critical language is finally at odds with his political project. For if "texts are fundamentally facts of power not of democratic exchange" (p. 345), what are the effects of his own critical apparatus? Its vocabulary of "genius" and "master," "secular" and "worldly," surely smacks of exactly the kind of moralising religiosity and literary "clerisy" (sic) which he sets out to attack? At the very least his discussions tend to slide into a mystificatory academic fulsomeness, a dense eloquence which sanctifies the objects of his attention and his role as critic: "Book Five concerns French writers wrestling with the travail of creation as erudition impinges upon it" (p. 261). At its worst this language secures the reader back inside that essentialising Romanticism which has sustained the literary establishment and underwritten the values and cultural privilege of the bourgeoisie since the mid-nineteenth century.

Thus whilst attacking the Eurocentricism of the humanities, Said says little
about its class specificity or its androcentrism. His discussions are constantly drawn back to the "world of high modernism" for their literary exegesis; it is the "modern cultural history" as constituted by Joyce, Mallarmé and Mann that he sees as compensating for "the failure of the capacity to produce or generate" (p. 16). Little space is actually given to those other literary discourses and other audiences which were present even within white English culture. Said’s focus on the displaced and deracinated heroes of high bourgeois culture in the end effectively ratifies those other absences. Indeed it is symptomatic that there are no readers in Said’s title. A mediating audience between "text" and "world" would have inevitably muddied those singular and neat territories, locating the question of the politics of a text across a much wider range of subjectivities and histories. I would like to have seen these areas opened up in Said’s account in terms of an attention to language as it constitutes definitions of subjectivity within literary texts, and the larger part such literary discourses play in the production of meanings "in the world." Said cites Jane Eyre, for example, as posing the West Indian Bertha Mason as Other to white, middle-class English society. But he omits to note that it is crucially around her femininity—as mad wife and excessively sexual woman—that her alterity is centered, making her an object both fascinating and repulsive and differently representative to Jane and Rochester. On another, simpler level Said’s uncritical use of the word "Luddite" (p. 156) as an insult betrays the same absence of attention.

Finally then, I feel, The World, the Text and the Critic clings too much to its own magisterial absolutes ever ultimately to challenge the professional clerisy it wants to oppose. For despite its enormous sophistication and scholarship I’m left with a picture of the critic as a lone voice crying out in the wilderness of existing institutions. It is after all a supremely individualist project that Said outlines with that crucial link between subjectivity and "politics"—collectivity—only making an entrance in his last line. Without foregrounding such a category as the most productive basis for any politics, it’s not surprising that Said should fear the Left as a terrorism of uniformity. But to berate Marxism whilst taking the work of Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams as exemplary is surely disingenuous: where as Said suggests that the cry "it’s all political" is reductive and dismissive, doesn’t the work of both men demonstrate it to be rather a point of departure and of profound engagement with the historical, personal and professional contradictions which we necessarily share and which literary texts speak to in deeply diverse and pleasurable ways?

Given the extreme right-wing climate of the American academy and its culture at present, perhaps Said’s new book is less of a defensive reflex and rather more of a subversive and brave intervention than my review makes out. It’s because I respect and sympathise with the project of The World, the Text and the Critic that I have been so critical of it as still "professing literature." It is a volume which will intrigue and exasperate many readers but if it moves them to consider their own accountability as literary critics, then it will have been an important one.

University of Sussex

Alison Light
This important study aims to revise the traditionally formalistic accounts of Faulkner's work "by reconstructing a context for Faulkner's fiction out of historical experience, contemporary literature, or political and sociological documents" (x). Recognizing that Faulkner's own obvious ambivalence about racial integration "has often discouraged his readers from speaking critically . . . about questions of racial conflict in his fiction" (x), Sundquist works to define both the regional and national sources of that ambivalence. As he convincingly demonstrates, "it is only when we lose sight of the climate of social thought and legal proscription in which [Faulkner] wrote . . . that his fiction seems out of proportion to the troubling realities of race relations in America" (ix).

Sundquist contends that Faulkner's career may be divided "between the three major novels that preceded his discovery of a theme emblematic of the combined passion, fear, and promise of racial conflict—the problem of miscegenation—and the three great novels that discovery produced" (ix). Part I of Sundquist's book thus focusses primarily on the technical achievements of Faulkner's important early fiction—The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Sanctuary—to define both the aims and effects of the writer's "turbulent search for fictional forms in which to contain and express the ambivalent feelings and projected passions that were his as an author and as an American in the South" (x). In Part II, Sundquist develops his thesis about the theme of miscegenation in readings of Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, and Go Down, Moses, the works in which Faulkner "extended those forms into novels of major social and historical significance" (xi). It is in the second portion of his study that Sundquist articulates his most broad-ranging historical arguments about Faulkner's engagement of the Southern mystique of "blood."

For Sundquist, the importance of the later novels derives from their explicit attention to and representation of the problems of Southern and American race relations. The problem of miscegenation, "the threat of physical amalgamation, of the disintegration of racial distinctions, erupts into a violent assertion of distinctions" (94). In the novels that figure some literal embodiment of that threat—Joe Christmas or Charles Bon, for example—Sundquist finds Faulkner revealing both the origins and consequences of the "double bind" of the Southern mythology, "not . . . as the single flaw in an otherwise noble design, but as a representation of its gravest disorder and most perplexing dilemma . . ." (97).

The conclusions that Sundquist draws in the second part constitute an important contribution to our understanding of the historical dimensions of American racial conflict. He demonstrates, for example, that the hysteria of whites over the rape of their women by blacks derived from the repression of white violation of black women during slavery. He further argues that the very need for this repression, both during and after slavery, required whites to project an image of "the Negro" as a mirror-like embodiment of the cultural uncanny, as well as to elaborate the "system" of Southern gynecomancy to protect the "logic" of white marriage as opposed to sexual relations with and
among blacks. The tragedy of characters like Joe Christmas and Charles Bon, both of whom "pass" for white, derives not just from their presenting "a form of lived alienation few whites could ever understand" (63); they are emblems of the horrifying fact that black inheres within white "as enslaving memory, as the simultaneously feared and needed other . . ." (79, Sundquist's emphasis). Sundquist's attention to the social, legal, and literary events of the period, as well as to the historical accounts of miscegenation, further grants his argument a magnitude often lacking in the criticism of modernism.

However, because Sundquist's intentions are revisionary, his work often raises as many problems as it resolves. This in itself is certainly no failure, and many of those problems are the fruitful result of his suggesting new directions in Faulkner's criticism. But some of these difficulties involve Sundquist's method rather than the particulars of his argument. A reader interested in the subtle complexities of cultural and historical determination, for example, may at times find Sundquist's views of history and language frustratingly traditional. Rightfully dismayed as he is by the often reductionist and formalistic accounts of Faulkner's work, Sundquist's rationale for dividing the writer's career would seem to depend upon an equally reductionist assumption that "technique" can or even should be separated from and subordinated to "theme." Though Sundquist is at his best and most convincing when he is demonstrating the complicated inextricability of technique and theme—as he does throughout most of this book—he does not always appear to find the "material" of language quite so significant as the material of historical event or social institution.

Most of his criticisms of The Sound and the Fury, for example, revolve around the "excesses" of Faulkner's technique or language: "Quentin's story is overrun by a vapid philosophizing that has elicited from readers the most regrettable kinds of attention" (15). In Sundquist's view, this indulgence of technique at the expense of theme leads to the sort of aestheticism often attributed to Faulkner, even to the sort of "Metaphysics of alienation" Lukács attributed to modernism in general. Missing the "historical dimension" of Absalom, Absalom!, the Quentin of Sound is obsessed by his incestuous desire which, as Sundquist says, "has as yet no clear bearing of the problems of the South or the novel . . ." (15). As a result of Faulkner's experimental frenzy, his "dissolving the linear structures of history, family, and the novel," the narrative actually obscures the significant matters of failed "generative power" that the late works engage directly (22).

Here, Sundquist does not seem to consider the possibility that linguistic "technique" may in fact constitute the very substance of personal consciousness; nor does he address the possibility that subjectivity itself is necessarily political and historical, simply because it is produced within and by the signifying systems of culture. Regardless of its propositional content or explicit reference to historical fact, the language that represents Quentin's subjectivity belongs to an order far less "personal" than Sundquist suggests. In this sense, Quentin's personal neurosis must be symptomatic of the cultural conventions that inform the language he speaks. Though that language may be motivated by a desire to repress its very historicity, it can never be wholly successful in doing so. Thus Sundquist's refusal to subject that language to
critical interpretation may suggest a certain limitation to his conception of the historical.

Sundquist's desire to expand the limiting contours of psychological readings of Faulkner betrays a potential misrepresentation of psychoanalytic theory as well. Even as he acknowledges the importance of John Irwin's study of Faulkner, Sundquist argues that "the Oedipal reading of Quentin's desire for paternal revenge only makes sense in the larger context of Southern paternalism . . ." (123); he further claims that Irwin's "reading leaves out of account the novels in which the development from incest to miscegenation, and from private neurosis to public trauma, takes place and slights the telling social and historical contexts of American race relations that would give his thesis greater validity" (162, n. 26). Though Sundquist's evaluations of Irwin's work may be valid, it is important to note that the Oedipal conflict can never be seen as a "purely" psychological dynamic. As Irwin would no doubt agree, the relations of parent and child the complex describes are not universal but quite clearly cultural, dependent upon the conventions of the Western nuclear family. As such, those relations are also inevitably historical and political, since the family is itself a construct that both depends upon and inculcates other cultural assumptions about the power, authority, and freedom of the individual subject. Sundquist is certainly right to suggest that the Oedipal conflict in itself is merely an abstract descriptive formula whose significance requires particularization by each subject in time. However, that necessity does not undermine the importance of psychoanalytic theory; it simply reminds us once again that the subject can only be understood within the contexts that produce him or her. The implication that psychoanalytic "readings" are by their nature devoid of historical significance and specificity is not a convincing one.

One further issue raised in this study deserves mention. In Sundquist's desire to deal directly with the specific political ramifications of American racial conflict, to grant them the attention they clearly deserve, he sometimes appears to dissociate miscegenation from other kinds of threats to social and psychic order. This problem is particularly evident in Sundquist's treatment of the relations between incest and miscegenation in Faulkner's work. In the passage noted above, for example, Sundquist suggests that the problem of incest is an essentially private, neurotic one, at least in Faulkner, while the problem of miscegenation is public and historical. The move from representations of incest to miscegenation thus constitutes "development" or progress on Faulkner's part. As a critical strategy, this minimalization of incest is perhaps necessary to grant significance to the other problem of "blood" figured in the threat of racial mixing. At times, however, this strategy threatens to backfire; in "thematizing" miscegenation as he does, Sundquist runs the risk of divorcing the problems of race from the equally troubling problems to which they are related.

What Sundquist's argument seems to be missing is an account of the similar cultural functions served by the taboos against incest and miscegenation. Both exist to maintain the distinctions of in/out, home/alien, self/other, and master/slave. Insofar as the taboos act to stabilize difference, to reduce its threat by turning it into opposition and making it signify in some orderly fashion, they preserve precisely the distinctions that justify certain mecha-
isms of social organization—the family, the slave system, class and economic systems, for example. It necessarily follows, then, that the violation of either taboo would threaten not just a specific opposition—between father and child or master and slave—but also the very notion of difference as opposition, the faith that social binaries actually owe their authority to some natural law. The two taboos are thus inextricably bound to one another because they work in service to the conventions of cultural power relations. In representing them as further bound to other central problems of American history—the Indian and the land—Faulkner suggests that the problems of the South are, even more fundamentally than Sundquist suggests, the problems of the nation; particularly insofar as they repeat the dilemma of America’s “origin” in the violent assertion of its new difference from the old world.

At the end of his chapter on Light in August, Sundquist suggests that Faulkner was haunted by questions that Mark Twain had framed earlier in Pudd’nhead Wilson: “Why were niggers and whites made? What crime did the uncreated first nigger commit that the curse of birth was decreed for him? And why this awful difference made between white and black?” Whether one is fully satisfied with Sundquist’s engagement of these questions, one must feel grateful to him for reminding us of them; as students of American literature, it is still our task to grapple with some manifestations of this “awful difference.”

University of Southern California

Nina Schwartz


In 1958 Hugh Kenner gave us a landmark essay (“The Sacred Book of the Arts”) on how to read Yeats. At the same time he promised a book on the matter soon. It is now 1984 and—to use the adman’s current parlance—we need it bad. Not only, as Richard Finneran tirelessly reminds us, have recent commentaries on Yeats tended to ignore newly discovered primary texts. Worse, our image of Yeats has so rewed along the lines Richard Ellman laid down thirty-five years ago that anyone writing on Yeats instinctively resists new material. Lacking a Yeats for the end of the century, the poems are going dead on us and will soon seem as dated as Browning’s.

In A Colder Eye: The Modern Irish Writers, Kenner takes the first step toward redeeming his pledge. The book tells the story of Joyce, Synge, Lady Gregory, Ó’Casey, Kavanagh, Clarke, O’Brien and Beckett, but always in the “shadow” of Yeats. Throughout it displays the markings of its commercial imprint: beguilingly written, it forswears the survey’s breadth and the depth of The Pound Era. As Kenner acknowledges, he has written “one kind of book and not another kind.” Still, this kind of book suited his task. While Ellmann disclaims characterizing Yeats’ modernism (The Identity of Yeats vows to “help [Yeats] out” of the “indiscriminate belly” of literary history), A Colder Eye throws it in relief. And who better to profile the Yeats de nos jours than the author of The Stoic Comedians?
Kenner's theory for Ireland's modernist ascendency is disarmingly simple: the Irish, he maintains, dispossessed of a native tongue, became practiced at creating unique linguistic worlds. Out of this theory he spins persuasive narratives of the masters at work. Consider:

For we are to believe that this poet from Sandymount and Sligo has taken possession of the language, and in so doing has disengaged it from English history. Moving between small words and magniloquent words he does not move between the rooted speech of the shires and Renaissance abstractions, between Anglo-Saxon bloodedness—dust, fire—and Latinate specters—pulverisation, conflagration: no, he moves among notes on a keyboard all accessible alike to his convenience: discourtesy, death. Hence, whatever the vocabulary, the look of performance, of a virtuoso way with words that appeals to no commonality of usage.

He continues the performance from the grave, for when his tombstone in Sligo enjoins us,

Cast a cold eye,
On life, on death...

each of these monosyllables needs redefining by Yeatsian usage, as though a ghost, and not sixty million living Englishmen, had the tongue still in its keeping.

Cast. The verb of indifference. "When such as I cast out remorse." (1929)

Cold. Austere. "... cold / and passionate as the dawn." (1916)

Eye. The focus of aloofness. "... the lidless eye that loves the sun." (1910)

Life and Death. Juggler's contraries. "We have naught for death but toys." (1917) "Death and life were not / Till man made up the whole." (1927) "What is life but a mouthful of air?" (1934)

These are no longer "English" words but his words, almost accidentally coincident with English ones. To take possession of polysyllables in this way is less difficult since they tug at no one's heart. So T.S. Eliot could make dissociation and correlative his own. But to reverse the connotations of a homefelt word like cold, to turn coldness into a bracing quality, neither the death of affect nor the absence of living warmth, would seem an impossible defiance of what Keats invoked—"When this warm scribe, my hand, is in the grave"—or Emily Brontë in the poem she called "Cold in the Earth."

I quote at length not only because the passage presents one of the book's major successes, but also because, by implication, it suggests its limitations. This is Kenner at his best, and it is hard to think of anyone else who could put so much in so few words. Here, just before the book cuts to another subject entirely, Yeats' achievement and his importance are established beyond question, leaving the reader all but breathless. Yet the tour de force's very suc-
cess creates a problem. Having so inspired us, the book makes us want to know more—to know, for example, how this daedalian craft enters the pattern in Yeats' carpet. Nor does Kenner entirely disappoint us. Coming back to Yeats elsewhere, he speaks of: Yeats the dramatist, the Anglo-Irish Yeats, Yeats the master of the English lyric, Yeats' Antaeus-like strength and his opposing aversion to particularity, the "one story" of Yeats' life ("a thwarted hero and a poet") and his mid-life resurrection. By temperament, though, he resists laying these snapshots over one another to assemble a full portrait. The result is that they never fuse into a gestalt of power that (if Yeats has anything to teach us) might amplify our own. Having marveled at *A Colder Eye's* illuminations, then, at times the reader finds himself in the dark wondering where to look next:

Nothing is more striking, in the manner he has perfected since 1916, than the way [The Tower's] declaiming language, its eighteenth-century clarity of diction, serves purely private themes, makes purely esoteric proclamations: not what oft was thought, to which the poet brings new adequacy of expression; no: what ne'er was thought save by him, to which we bring our somewhat bedazzled assent: a conditional assent, in the midst of which we may wonder what it may mean. . . . For we may know how to trace [his] assertions in Blake and elsewhere, but to hear them so downrightly asserted, to be expected to assent? We may choose to settle for being glad that Yeats knows.

It is perhaps unfair to take Kenner to task for not having written a book he never planned. *A Colder Eye* was not meant to explicate the modern Irish writers' "private themes," nor does it intend to be a study of Yeats' "esoteric proclamations." Yet, as the book's accumulating catalogue of Yeatsian selves attests, one can only write so much about technique without raising the question of what is served by it. (If not, in the twentieth century, a writer's "thoughts," then the shading of his sensibility. "A man's message," Pound wrote, "is his façon de voir, his modality of apperception.") And once that question is raised, even as delightful an evasion as "we may choose to settle for being glad that Yeats knows" cannot charm it away.

*A Colder Eye*, then, is not Kenner's Yeats book, only its preliminary. Yet we may hope (especially as the authorized biography of Yeats has been aborted by its author's untimely death) that a sequel will not be long in coming. The century is slipping away.


Given the task of mapping the current critical terrain in France for a panel at the centennial meeting of the MLA, Jacques Leenhardt responded by ad-
vancing the thesis that, to a significant degree, "deconstruction" was made in America. This was an ominous sign for two reasons. First, it suggested that an important distinction existed between what was really going on in France and "deconstruction." Secondly, since this assessment was offered by a by no means insignificant participant in the French critical scene, it suggested that "deconstruction" had become some sort of mutant practice that the French were eager to palm off on the Americans. After all, nobody seriously involved in contemporary criticism would have much difficulty in locating the unquestionably French source of the term "deconstruction."

I emphasize this because it underscores the problems signalled in the subtitle of the sixth volume in the University of Minnesota's "Theory and History of Literature" series. The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America essays to supplement reception theory by confronting it with the problem of the reception of theory. The text is both curious and fascinating. Not one of the contributors expressly writes from the standpoint of reception theory, but each essay more or less quietly raises an issue which bears on the cortical layer of that theoretical enterprise. If the literary object (the texts of Romanticism are the unavoidable examples in this text) is irreducibly constituted within a theoretical field, then reception theory must seek to illuminate not just the "literary" context of the object, but the theoretical context of the "literary" as well. Moreover, and this is a decisive contribution of this text, the reception of theory obliges reception theory to account for its own reception, that is, the socio-historical conditions of its own reading effects. I stress that this argument is made quietly. It is due, in part, to the very raison d'être of the series and therefore exceeds the range of this particular text's argument. However quietly argued, this text cannot afford to dodge the issues and it certainly doesn't.

The Yale Critics is strategically assembled. It opens with a collectively written preface followed by a lucid general introduction that prepares the ground for the ensuing three sections. It closes with an afterward by one of the three editors that poses as a review of what has preceded. One cannot even read through the text without experiencing in its structure the problematic of reception and its supplementarity. This is underscored by the striking consistency of strategy employed in the readings comprising part three. In each case, with varying degrees of intensity, the reading of a Yale critic traces the steps of an immanent critique whereby the Yale critic is deconstructed with equipment from his (they are all men) own arsenal. What stands illuminated, however, is not simply the critical corpus, but the theoretical position of the text at large. Again, the text's structure and patterns of argument stress the responsibilities it must take on in presenting us with the irreducibility of theoretical mediation. One cannot simply review this book, it must be re-reviewed through the afterward.

Setting aside (as the Yale critics have at various times encouraged us to do) the stated intentions of the text, let us consider its function. This text operates to establish a relay between literary critics formed in the Anglo-American New Critical tradition and what we have come to call deconstructive criticism. Beyond simply introducing these traditions to one another, the text serves to criticize both from a standpoint that is, perhaps of both practical and theoretical necessity, withdrawn. New Criticism is held responsible for
both its methodological failures and the problematic American reception of continental criticism. The Yale critics, in turn, are criticized for insufficiently differentiating themselves from New Criticism and consequently domesticating continental criticism (primarily deconstruction) while ostensibly acting in its name. The relay is established between two afflicted parties. The text’s argument against the Yale critics is not unlike the argument staged by Voltaire in letter eleven of *Les lettres sur les Anglais* where he entertains the singular logic of inoculation whereby one gives something to someone to prevent them from getting it. The Yale critics, in a reception context dominated by New Criticism, are giving us deconstruction in order that we not get it. Voltaire’s letter was written while “exiled” in England and can be read as an effort to inoculate the French with cultural and political dependency. The contributors to *The Yale Critics*, in their assessments of the fate of deconstruction at Yale, appropriate from its critics this secondary strategy of Voltaire’s. This bears directly on the standpoint of the critique itself.

While there are no immanent grounds for reducing the heterodoxy of the contributors to a unified standpoint, the text’s organization functions to do so. This may be the dialectical price the volume pays for its impressive coherence. The truth that may reside in Leenhardt’s thesis can at least be posited if we read the subtitle of this volume as a slogan, that is as an act of appropriation: “Deconstruction in America—Now!” This reading can only be sustained if deconstruction can be differentiated from the Yale school.

All of the most powerful pieces in this text draw the limits of deconstruction at Yale at the point where it becomes merely criticism, renouncing the socio-political problematic that extends beyond its institutional function as criticism. Drawing these limits is difficult because it involves a critical assessment of deconstruction (specifically Derrida) once differentiated from its Yale manifestations. The unresolved question becomes, “Does general deconstruction provide us with a decisively political way to place our critical activity within the social field we wish to change?” Significantly, the contributors respond to this both positively and negatively. It is a sign that an important supplementary American reading of deconstruction is called for. One that would both situate it historically and activate it politically.

Curiously, this is where this otherwise remarkable text falls short. With the exception of two or three brief allusions to works that have sought to place deconstruction in a politically defined historical context, most of the political and historical analysis crucial to illuminating the necessity of differentiating deconstruction from the practices of the Yale critics is carried out in an analogical style that deconstruction has participated in discrediting. Not one of the contributors to this volume would be content with defining the political character of a literary text by showing how an analogy existed between the content of a character’s aspirations and the planks of a contemporaneous political platform. Deconstruction needs to be read so as to trace the socio-political relations that are inscribed in the procedures and structures of the theoretical text, no matter how “transcendentally” we comprehend this text. New Criticism will not be terribly helpful here. Given the direction taken by *The Yale Critics*, this should have been reason enough to broaden the reception context of deconstruction to include the tradition that stretches back at least to Brooks and Bourne which came to be decisively influenced by the
Frankfurt School during the forties. Otherwise, those American partisans of New Criticism who were meant to be both introduced to and transformed by the Yale critics will be entitled to cast the encounter in the reassuring terms of the history of criticism.

Nonetheless, this text represents a substantial achievement in the new history of criticism. Not only does it contain lucid and penetrating essays on significant and difficult contemporary critics, but the essays themselves are instances of the best in contemporary criticism. Moreover, the entire volume is organized so as to structurally articulate questions that clearly signal the complexity of the current critical enterprise. If deconstruction in fact acquires its political cutting edge in America it will be due, in part, to the fact that a book like this was written and read.

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