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## Book Reviews

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### Book Reviews

*Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect* by Karlis Racevskis. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983. Pp. 172. \$19.50.

*Michel Foucault: Social Theory as Transgression* by Charles C. Lemert and Garth Gillian. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. Pp. xv + 169. \$14.95.

*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. Second Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Pp. xxvii + 271. \$8.95 (paper).

The appearance within the space of twelve months of two new books on Foucault, along with the revised and expanded second edition of a third (the original edition had been published only a year and a half previous), testifies to the validity of one of Foucault's most cherished theses: the power of discourses to proliferate and to produce lateral affiliations across the disciplines of knowledge, and thereby to unify in a single discursive field a wide variety of problems and topics that appear otherwise to occupy separate compartments. The five authors represent, respectively, French literature, sociology, philosophy (twice), and anthropology—a fair sampling of the human sciences that Foucault has made the principal object of his research. It is perhaps significant that none of the authors hails from that quarter of the disciplinary map which Foucault has consistently maintained as his home base: history. Since it will be my claim against these books that they are insufficiently historical, in a somewhat old-fashioned sense of the term, it is surely worth pausing for a moment over the concept of history that animates Foucault's work.

Foucault has consistently drawn attention to the lateral affiliations among discourses within a given epoch or social formation. His originality has consisted in an almost uncanny ability to discover significant connections and junctures between widely dispersed institutions and practices: for example, the similarity among the disciplinary practices in the schools, the army, and prisons in what he has dubbed the carceral society. It is just this apparent heterogeneity within a conceptual problematic that makes the unifying power of a discursive regime so effective. The unity of the historical field does not lie in the replication of an epistemological paradigm across all the disciplines and practices in a period; it consists, rather, in the affiliative structure of different practices reinforcing each other at crucial points: for instance, the intersection between the systems of education and penology in delinquency, the productive conjuncture that subjects individuals to the disciplines of school and prison while maintaining the separation between the two institutions for the majority of their respective inhabitants. Foucault's evasiveness about the nature of the social whole notwithstanding, the unity of social practices is precisely what characterizes for him the political effectiveness of modern social formations. As Karlis Racevskis puts it, somewhat tendentially (but not, I think, inaccurately): "power-knowledge strategies . . . op-

erate in a homeostatic field of forces within which the achievement of stability does not require the original impetus of a conscious purpose" (p. 110).

It is somewhat troubling, therefore, given the example of the subject of these studies, to find them so strikingly blinkered with respect to the adjacent discourses that make up the immediate material environment of Foucault's research project. There are, of course, references to some among Foucault's predecessors (Canguilhem, Bachelard, the Annales School of French historians) and contemporaries (Althusser, Lacan, Derrida, Lévi-Strauss), but almost without exception (Racevski's discussion of Lacan and Foucault is both historically apt and methodologically useful), what emerges from these brief forays into the genealogy of contemporary French intellectual life is an assertion of the uniqueness of Foucault's project, the special and unrepeatable brilliance of his conceptual innovations, the virtual autonomy of the discursive practice of Michel Foucault. Whatever else one might say about such assessments, they are at the least unfoucauldian.

Take, for instance, the various claims to establish Foucault's difference from marxism—claims given some support by Foucault's own alternately glib and dismissive or coy pronouncements concerning marxist concepts of history and society. Dreyfus and Rabinow contend that Foucault's interpretive analytics of the relations between power and knowledge are "more radical" than marxism (or the conventional sociology of knowledge) by virtue of Foucault's "reflections on Nietzsche" (p. 115), but it is nowhere made clear in what this radicalization of marxist theory and its concepts consists. Dreyfus and Rabinow make no reference to the extent marxist critiques of Foucault's work (Poulantzas and Lecourt, for example) which would give them a ready opportunity to substantiate their contention. I surmise that the difference they see between foucauldian and marxist conceptions of society hinges on the absolute refusal of totalization in the former. In commenting on Foucault's understanding of the functioning of power, they write: "This is not a new form of functionalism. The system is not in any way in equilibrium; nor is it, except in the most extended of senses, a system. There is no inherent logic of stability. Rather, at the level of the practices there is a directionality produced from petty calculations, clashes of wills, meshing of minor interests. . . . This directionality has nothing inherent about it and hence it cannot be deduced. It is not a suitable object for a theory. It can, however, be analyzed, and this is Foucault's project" (pp. 187-88). If this description is correct (and it certainly has textual warrant in Foucault, notably in the famous "nominalist" characterization of power set out in *The History of Sexuality*), then the possibility of political calculation, which has been the foundation of marxist political practice from Lenin onward, is denied. Perry Anderson's recent characterization of marxism as "the search for subjective agencies capable of effective strategies for the dislodgement of objective structures" highlights the signal difference between marxist and foucauldian concepts of political practice: on a foucauldian account, no such thing as "effective strategies for the dislodgement of objective structures" is possible, since the structural tendencies produced by the social whole are not "a suitable object for a theory." The Dreyfus-Rabinow account of Foucault thus deprives his work of its potential for political effectivity.

Lemert and Gillan attempt to bend the stick back again in characterizing Foucault's project as a form of intellectual terrorism, shifting the ground from an analytical to an activist position: "Foucault's politics rest primarily on a destructive effort. He seeks to dismantle and decentralize the false unity of power, to struggle against the localization of power in techniques and tactics. However, behind this struggle there is no conception of a social rationality in which politics would become more than an act of negation" (p. 108). The connection of Foucault's thought to anarchism is clear (p. 91), as is his fundamental repudiation of marxist analytical concepts, notably class (p. 112). Lemert's and Gillan's analysis returns often to Foucault's relationship to Althusser (pp. 4-5, 13-14, 35, 116-17), but the patent misrepresentation of althusserian theory vitiates what might have been an important confrontation between Foucault's work and, not just any marxism, but specifically that marxism which Foucault himself has openly acknowledged as one of the decisive points of orientation for his own concept of history.

Foucault's quarrel with Althusser, and therefore with at least one variant of contemporary marxism, is less fundamental than Lemert and Gillan lead one to believe. In "Sur les façons d'écrire l'histoire," Foucault maintained that his only difference with his teacher concerned the interpretation of Marx's position *within the history of political economy*. Foucault believed (as he had said in *Les Mots et les choses*) that Marx did not achieve an epistemological break with Ricardo and classical political economy (as Althusser had claimed in *Lire le Capital*). But Foucault was quick to point out that with respect to the "historical and political consciousness of men," Marx "introduced a radical break," and that "the marxist theory of society certainly opened up an entirely new epistemological field." Foucault's opposition to marxism is better understood in terms of his exit from and continuing hostility toward the PCF (and of course the existing socialist states, particularly in Eastern Europe) than as a repudiation of marxist theory *tout court*.

When Karlis Racevskis quotes Foucault's characterization of marxism in *Les Mots et les choses* as akin to positivism in its "pre-critical analysis of what man is in his essence" and its "empirico-critical reduplication by means of which an attempt is made to make the man of nature, of exchange, or of discourse, serve as the foundation of his own finitude" (p. 62), or when he contrasts Foucault's concept of history to "the transcendent or teleological status that Hegelian and Marxist approaches recognize" (p. 75), he can only have in mind those forms of marxism against which Althusser has written with such force and deadly theoretical perspicacity: on the grounds of repudiating historicism, there is nothing to choose between Foucault and althusserian marxism. What remains most interesting in Racevskis's judicious account of Foucault's lacanian rethinking of the concept of the subject is its silent shadowing of the althusserian theory of ideology. Racevskis writes: "This basic process of socialization does not require an a priori subjectivity to be effective, it is always already in effect" (p. 104). Althusser says: "Individuals are always already subjects." Racevskis argues: "The individualized subject of modern society is constantly held accountable to the system of the norm—but he must first be made aware of his particular situation: he must realize it and admit it. The technique of confession has therefore been the most effective tool of social control in both the Christian and the secular legal traditions

... it leads the individual to recognize himself in the framework of his submission to the appropriate moral or judicial code" (p. 107). Althusser writes: "Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was really him who was hailed' (and not someone else)." Racevskis quotes Foucault on the relations between dominating and dominated classes as "a reciprocal relation of production" and comments: "In a sense then, the class is as much a product of its strategy as the strategy is an inherent part of the class that finds itself in a position to dominate and exploit. This relation of class to strategy is precisely that of subject to discourse: the subject derives its reality from the discourse it enunciates just as a class is defined by the tactics in which it engages" (pp. 112-13). Althusser avers: "For if it is true that the ISAs represent the *form* in which the ideology of the ruling class must necessarily be realized, and the form in which the ideology of the ruled class must necessarily be measured and confronted, ideologies are not 'born' in the ISAs but from the social classes at grips in the class struggle: from their conditions of existence, their practices, their experience of the struggle, etc."

Absent from all three of these accounts of Foucault is a sufficiently detailed and rather conventionally historical sense of the affiliations between Foucault's writings and the theoretical and political scenes of contemporary French intellectual life. The least historical account is Dreyfus's and Rabinow's, the most Lemert's and Gillan's (though its history often errs in detail), but it is Racevskis's book, which takes seriously many of the objections raised against Foucault (notably by Baudrillard), that constructs the most solid foundation upon which to build a genuinely historical and critical account of Foucault's work. I have suggested already that one of the silences in Foucault's discourse to be read symptomatically involves the subtext of Althusser's theoretical labor over the concepts of history and ideology. Another place at which this discourse can be prised open to reveal its continuing contact with other powerful theoretical projects on the present horizon is indicated by Racevskis's shrewd characterization of the threat Foucault poses to business as usual among intellectuals. "It is in its rejection of any form of closure that Foucault's approach poses a threat to any system that maintains itself because its truths are taken seriously as authentic representations of the Real" (p. 138). The rejection of the possibility of theoretical closure travels under a famous name these days: Derrida. It would be a characteristic error of just that sort against which Foucault, Derrida, and Althusser have all warned, to monumentalize these discourses by personifying them as the exclusive property of one or another individual. One strategy for avoiding this trap would be to read the texts associated with these (and some other) names as symptoms of a mutation in the theoretical problematic of contemporary knowledges, as an emergent epistemological break with the still largely hegemonic concepts of historicism and humanism. I doubt that Foucault himself would have objected in principle to such a strategy. If, as Karlis Racevskis argues, Foucault's relation to contemporary intellectuals is metonymic, the appointed task of foucauldian commentators remains to identify the structures of adjacency that Foucault's discourse produces and is produced by.

They could do worse than to begin with Foucault's relation to actually existing marxism, rather than taking as their object a phantom theoretical system that perhaps never really existed in the first place. One legacy of Foucault's work may be to reopen what so many post- and anti-marxists wish to close down for good: the debate over how to read the texts of Marx.

SUNY—Stony Brook

Michael Sprinker

*Jane Austen: New Perspectives*, edited by Janet Todd. *Women & Literature*, New Series, Volume 3. New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1983. Pp. 293, \$39.50.

"Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure," writes Jane Austen in *Emma*, her novel of interpretive snafus; "seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised or a little mistaken" (Chapman ed., 431). Austen's observation might well apply to this cautious collection of essays, and to Austen criticism generally. Tellingly, three of the essayists here cite the *Emma* passage; the anthology's collective energy coalesces in an effort to uncover an epistemology—a mode of knowing—in the Austen canon. That no epistemology emerges, or rather, that to the extent that one does emerge it is an epistemology of relativism, pluralism, and conciliation, underwrites the anthology's conclusion: we will continue to ask questions about Jane Austen (was she a prim lady or a feminist? a conservative plumping for the *status quo* or a Jacobin iconoclast? a moral philosopher or a subversive ironist?) and we will continue to hedge our bets by answering "all of the above."

*Jane Austen: New Perspectives* challenges the old perspectives on Austen more than it showcases entirely new ones. What is fresh, however, and thus makes this anthology an interesting and important addition to the Austen bibliography, is the extent to which many of the essays are self-consciously metacritical. Whether Austen herself was an orthodox anti-Jacobin has been disputed, hotly so since the 1975 publication of Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), but certainly her critics have been themselves, in the main, staunchly conservative and assiduously afraid to chisel too forcefully at those fragile bits of ivory lest they shatter. And while Austen's work has been examined through the prism of late eighteenth-century popular culture and Romantic social and aesthetic values, no systematic analysis of socioeconomic ideology and its incursions into the Austen *oeuvre* existed until Mary Poovey's recent groundbreaking study, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984). Janet Todd's collection of essays, conscious of the staid nature of the Austen critical industry's past, signals a movement beyond polite New Criticism and toward opening the well-rehearsed historicist and textual disputes to a more risk-taking critical discourse.

Most of the essays in Todd's collection question their own undertaking even as they propose new interpretive contexts. Alistair M. Duckworth op-

poses a closed system of historical criticism (a camp in which he situates his own work) with what he calls the openness of suspicious, anachronistic criticism in "Jane Austen and the Conflict of Interpretations." Approaches to Austen's work, and to disagreements about it, depend, Duckworth proposes, upon the "pre-understandings" we bring to bear and the ways in which the "overdeterminedness" of Austen's novels promotes the indeterminacy of meaning we may locate in them. Duckworth concludes that "the tendency of historical criticism, especially when it works in alliance with modes of rhetorical and thematic analysis, to close Austen's meanings, to seek to provide a complete and true definition of her vision, should be viewed with reservations" (48). David Spring responds as a social and economic historian to the varying and conflicting contexts from which Austen's work has been interpreted, and in "Interpreters of Jane Austen's Social World: Literary Critics and Historians," Spring offers a fresh view of class and of social fluidity in the Austen *oeuvre*. In "Emma and its Critics: The Value of Tact," Joel Weinsheimer uses Gadamer's terminology of interpretation to speculate about the applicability of the Kantian idea of judgment to *Emma*. From a quite different starting point, Weinsheimer also weighs disagreements among Austen critics, disputes the possibility of an absolute, authoritative interpretation of Austen's novels and, in claiming that "context-free neutrality" is impossible in the critical enterprise, argues for a hermeneutic circle, a dialogue between Austen's time and our own.

Other essays in this collection also overlay readings of Austen's fiction with surprising sources. In "Two Faces of Emma," Avrom Fleishman applies Freudian notions of projection, mediated desire, and repetition to present a psychopathology of Emma which concludes that she is a functional neurotic and repressed homosexual. Nina Auerbach, in "Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm: Feeling as One Ought about Fanny Price," compares Austen's most uncongenial heroine to Wordsworth's leech-gatherer, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Byron's Childe Harold, Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, and Maturin's Melmoth as well as to Grendel—a picture gallery of Romantic outcasts. Fanny, in this view, is a feminized, Romantic type of Hamlet, a monster and marginal creature, "a killjoy, a blighter of ceremonies and divider of families" (211). Janet Todd reads Austen according to Virginia Woolf, seeing Austen's descendent as a victim of the anxiety of influence, threatened by and defensive about her precursor, in "Who's Afraid of Jane Austen?"

While Todd looks forward, two of the essays retrieve elements of Austen's precursors in her works. In "The Burden of Grandison: Jane Austen and Her Contemporaries," Edward Copeland wittily returns to "the Golden Age of female domestic felicity" (98) he finds in the cedar parlor of Richardson's Grandison Hall and argues that the coherence of social vision there represented was no longer available to Austen and, indeed, that frightening changes in the economy and in concepts of the family prompted Austen—and Charlotte Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, Fanny Burney, and Maria Edgeworth—to ground their fictions on the wreckage of family structure. Jocelyn Harris looks even farther backward for Austen's ancestors and glosses Anne Elliott's "the pen has been in their hands" remark in *Persuasion* with Chaucer's Wife of Bath's stout declaration—

By God! if wommen hadde written stories,  
 As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,  
 They wolde han written of men moore wikkednesse,  
 Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (273)—

in "Anne Elliott, the Wife of Bath, and Other Friends," an essay that traces the "density of allusion" (288) in *Persuasion* to claim that overlaying the template of earlier works on Austen's may enrich our readings of her novels.

Two essays draw original conclusions through analyses of Austen's linguistic and stylistic virtuosity. Zelda Boyd, in "The Language of Supposing: Modal Auxiliaries in *Sense and Sensibility*," dissects Austen's predilection for balanced verbal pairs and finds there a proof of Austen's strong sense of the circumstantial and of the language of judgment. Angela Leighton, also concentrating on *Sense and Sensibility* in "Sense and Silences: Reading Jane Austen Again," brilliantly argues that the drama of language in Austen's novels revolves around what Lacan calls the "not-said," the fragmentary fictions that could not be written. Silence, Leighton claims, lies on the other side of control and when Marianne, after receiving Willoughby's letter of repudiation, "almost screamed with agony," the sounds she does not make contrast with the public speech that describes her situation. "If the literary work is read as a palimpsest," writes Leighton, "where the surface text conceals and half reveals another, less obvious text, or where the narrative is deliberately complicated by secrets and enigmas, things unsaid and voices unheard, we may begin to hear in these Silences the sounds of women 'knocking'" (131).

The crux of this anthology of and about critical disagreements lies perhaps in the juxtaposition of three essays that offer readings of *Mansfield Park* through Fanny Price. Fanny has long presented a puzzle for Austen readers: what can we make of this least likeable of characters in her creator's least charming book? Nina Auerbach starts with Fanny's very marginality and reads her as "the controlling spirit of anti-play" (211), a counteractor in a book in which Austen "force[s] us to experience the discomfort of a Romantic universe presided over by the potent charm of a charmless heroine who was not made to be loved" (221). Marylea Meyersohn argues that Mary Brunton's *Self Control* lies behind *Mansfield Park* and that Fanny, a Griselda type and "a prefiguration of the Angel in the House" (226) is in flight from and strangled by speech in contrast to the novel's consummate talker and letter-writer, Mary Crawford. Fanny listens in a novel whose "central tension" is the "process of deferral" (224), writes Meyersohn in "What Fanny Knew: A Quiet Auditor of the Whole." In "Feminist Irony and the Priceless Heroine of *Mansfield Park*," Margaret Kirkham sees Fanny as an ironized conduct-book heroine and connects Austen to a rational, post-Enlightenment feminist moralism in the tradition of a Wollstonecraft and Mill. These related but methodologically and thematically utterly different views of Fanny complement the essays on critical cacaphony among Austenites by Duckworth, Spring, and Weinsheimer.

Other essays in this collection include Joan Austen-Leigh's biographical speculation, "The Austen Leighs and Jane Austen or 'I have always maintained the value of Aunts'"; Margaret Kirkham's study of visual representations of Austen and the way they contributed to her Victorian stereotyping as

a prim old-maid, "The Austen Portraits and the Received Biography"; Jane Nardin's "Children and their Families in Jane Austen's Novels," a psychological study of the structure of adoptive and surrogate families; David Monaghan's attempt to reconcile apparent disagreements among Austen critical factions in "The Complexity of Jane Austen's Novels,"; Katrin R. Burlin's application of the notion of *ut pictura poesis* in "'Pictures of Perfection' at Pemberley: Art in *Pride and Prejudice*"; and two interesting studies of ways of knowing and perspective in Austen, Martha Satz's "An Epistemological Understanding of *Pride and Prejudice*" and Mark M. Hennelly, Jr.'s "*Pride and Prejudice*: The Eyes Have It."

Jane Austen's famed attention to detail has been matched by her interpreters here, who pay as close attention to her syntax and to her asides as she did to ribbons and hat-trim. A handful of these critics present authentically fresh perspectives on Austen's novels (especially Leighton and Auerbach) or raise provocative questions about the enterprise of understanding her (especially Duckworth and Spring). Oddly, in a collection none of whose pieces takes on Austen's most parodic work, her *Juvenilia* and *Northanger Abbey*, this anthology on the whole views Austen as a consummate artificer, a deliberate and near-duplicitous manipulator of narrative and character. Taken together, these essays argue for both relativism and pluralism in Austen studies by claiming both that the richly textured novels will never yield absolute, single, trustworthy meanings and that the criticism about Austen will continue to spawn disagreement and to splinter into ever-renewing camps.

Drexel University

Julia L. Epstein

*Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* by Patrick Brantlinger. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983. Pp. 307. \$25.00

Patrick Brantlinger has taken one of the key questions repeatedly asked by social critics: is post-industrial popular culture an opiate of the people or representative of their hopes and desires? He focuses upon the "negative classicists," i. e., social commentators from both the right and the left who argue that mass culture is clear evidence of the decay of modern society. Brantlinger does not give us his own theory of mass culture, but rather presents with admirable clarity a wide range of writers who have seen modern society and its "benefits" as signs of the decline of true civilization. His book is a valuable analysis of attitudes toward not only mass culture, but also theories of social order, utopian (and dystopian) possibilities and the connections between literature and politics.

Brantlinger has avoided such hackneyed dualisms as high culture vs. low culture, right vs. left, uplift vs. degeneration. By concentrating on a single classical image—bread and circuses—he has instead brought together a rich harvest of contradictions, hopes and fears. The relevance of his study for the present-day is obvious:

As Rome was both the zenith and burying ground of ancient civilization, so modern mass society with its mass culture is both the zenith and nadir of modern progress, acme and end of the line for the "dual revolutions" of industrialization and democratization. Or so the negative classicists either fear or hope. (p. 35)

After surveying classical beliefs about social decay and the masses, Brantlinger effectively examines the pervasiveness of these attitudes in such nineteenth-century authors as Hegel, Matthew Arnold, Tennyson, Marx, Nietzsche, Zola, George Moore and William Morris. Obviously he has had to be selective in his choice of twentieth-century critics, but Brantlinger keeps his main thesis clearly in mind as he wends his way through the thicket of such symptomatic thinkers as Freud, Ortega y Gasset, T. S. Eliot, Adorno, Horkheimer, and their lesser followers of the present day.

Brantlinger's approach enables him to look freshly at a variety of authors, reminding us of the richness and complexity of cultural analysis. He argues, for example, that the Decadents at the end of the nineteenth century reacted against progressivism by declaring all empires doomed: "They even seemed to be hastening the decline and fall by imitating the decadent Romans and by cultivating linguistic corruptions and eccentricities, like magical incantations against the powers-that-be" (p. 126). While ancient decadence is praised, modern decadence, based upon industry and machinery, is condemned. In these circumstances, we can better understand the search for the primitive made by an optimistic socialist such as William Morris. His Icelandic sagas, revival of crafts and utopian fiction were all an effort to invigorate modern society through primitivism. If decadent Rome had been revitalized by the barbarian hordes, so too could modern Britain be. Ironically, as Brantlinger notes, the end result of Morris's efforts was often a form of decadent escapism. Yet this should not be our final judgment of the arts and crafts movement, which—like the Frankish and German conquerors of Rome—revived and retained the best of the old. Without the arts and crafts movement, we might have lost the best of Victorian design.

Brantlinger avoids simple conclusions, and is at his best in presenting the complexities of his chosen authors. For example, he recognizes the subtle imperialism underlying Conrad's African tales, while admitting the anti-imperialism of Kipling. Albert Camus is linked with two conservatives, Ortega and Eliot, to compare effectively the ways in which the same images drawn from classical literature can be used pessimistically or optimistically. Camus, rather than projecting a dying culture, looked back nostalgically to the simple Greek man, who might be a model for an anti-nationalist, pan-Mediterranean culture. Insights such as these will give specialists new ways to look at specific authors and literary movements.

Some of Brantlinger's most acute comments are about television, and the simplified criticism (or defensive praise) it has received. As he points out, "The mass media are the most powerful instruments ever invented for the dissemination of civilization; they are also frequently declared to be the tool of our cultural suicide" (p. 35). Brantlinger's final two chapters examine this paradox in some depth, starting with the pessimistic prognostications of Theodor Adorno and his Frankfurt Institute. Marxists were as likely as reli-

gious conservatives such as Eliot and Jacques Ellul to fear and distrust the masses. Watching the destruction of social democracy in Weimar Germany, Adorno saw hope only in "the forces set free by decay," harking back again to the barbarian hordes that overran Rome. Unfortunately Brantlinger does not take the opportunity here to examine why the upper-class intelligentsia put its hope in some future "barbarian horde," whereas intelligent working men placed their hope in organized collective political action. The class and political implications of the "bread and circuses" metaphor might have been explored more fully. Theories of social decay rarely come from working people—the masses themselves—but rather are a product of disillusioned intellectuals of the left or right.

After the Frankfurt School, Marshall McLuhan and a variety of American commentators are easily disposed of; Brantlinger is acute and accurate in his puncturing of McLuhan's airy generalizations about "global villages" and the "Gutenberg galaxy." But such easy targets leave him little room for his own analysis. Indeed, Brantlinger's very ability to present complex ideas and responses has led him to bury his own best ideas. *Bread and Circuses* is an important examination of the ways in which major social thinkers have used the experience of classical Rome and Greece to analyze their own societies. It provides an important new look at the ways we have conceptualized and argued about mass culture. But it does not offer a new theory itself. Perhaps it is unfair to ask Brantlinger to do so, but he has so intelligently pinpointed the weaknesses and strengths of past critics; surely, he can speak out about his own attitudes toward the function of television in our culture, of the nature of a consumer-culture, and of the strange pervasiveness of those classical images of decay and rebirth that appear so tenaciously in a culture seemingly far from Rome.

University of Michigan

Martha Vicinus

*The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* by Annette Kolodny. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984. Pp. 293. \$28.00-9.95 PB.

In this sequel to *The Lay of the Land*, Annette Kolodny presents the female alternative to the male fantasies described in the earlier book, and she successfully demonstrates that the study of colonial, federal and ante-bellum American literature has suffered from the unwarranted exclusion of women's writings about the experience of frontier settlement. She examines canonized (or tentatively canonized) writers such as Margaret Fuller and Mary White Rowlandson, but she does not restrict herself to them, preferring to chart the genre at large, introducing (for the first time, in several cases) writers who deserve but have not received serious aesthetic attention. She does not resort to blaming a willfully male exclusionary bias because she has a better ground for her assertions—her ability to read closely, sympathetically and imaginatively texts that might otherwise strike the reader as uneventful. This talent is evident, for example, when, having depicted several women's reluctance to

uproot and move west, Kolodny speculates that captivity narratives such as those of Rowlandson and Hannah Dustin offered a disguised, socially permissible articulation of the reluctance to relocate: for Native American captor, read *husband*. Her speculation cannot be demonstrated either way, but Kolodny's thesis nevertheless accords with certain resonances in her texts, and suggests an explanation for the captivity narratives' continuing popularity among American women. *The Land Before Her* is good teaching, setting a standard of careful speculative reading that discovers the strengths of overlooked works.

Kolodny's overarching polemical theses, however, are less persuasive than her page-to-page exegetical practice. She is not content with the conclusion that her explications yield, that these are unusually candid and noteworthy books. She also wishes to constitute her texts theoretically, as a single, distinct and coherent entity in sharp contrast with the male texts from the same period. In her preface, Kolodny claims both that she is describing a *tradition* and that she is writing a *revisionist history*. If the term *tradition* implies a conscious adoption and adaptation of extant literary conventions, Kolodny has not proved that these books comprise a tradition. Though in some cases she does show that one of the writers was familiar with another's book, she does not convincingly demonstrate a group consciousness of genre. Sometimes she equivocates on this, such as when she contends that an episode in Mary Jemison's life story is "reminiscent of Rowlandson" (73), thereby implying without asserting a conscious literary indebtedness.

The case for a revisionist history is stronger because it does not require that the underlying coherence of the texts be explicitly present as the writers' hypogrammatic intentions, but it raises problems in its turn. Without the concept of group self-consciousness, Kolodny must look elsewhere for the source of the texts' unity. She cannot appeal to the writer's common physical environments, because men lived in the same terrains. Near the end of her introduction, she seems to throw up her hands, hinting at "subconscious mental processes or biologically based urges" (12), but these brief suggestions do not become developed assertions.

It is tempting to suggest that Kolodny should have abandoned her insistence on the literary result of gender difference, because the contrast is strained at some points. For example, when the hermit-heroine of a 1788 almanac narrative displays the sort of violence Kolodny finds characteristic of male writing, Kolodny announces that the text "quietly subverts" or "altogether supersedes" men's writing because the "male adventure is displaced by a narrative of female adventure" (60). One might say, however, that what is superseded is Kolodny's determination to maintain a polarity between masculine and feminine writing.

But the contrast does not have to be discarded, only the desire to root it in psychological or biological gender absolutism. And in fact Kolodny's most credible thesis is historical: since women were "dispossessed of paradise," excluded from both practical decision-making and the imaginative expansive obsessions that frequently motivated decision making, they were compelled to make do with a limited sphere. But if this limitation was a captivity, it was also an escape: total personality was not restricted to the allure of egoist dominance. This thesis does not depend on the psychosomatics of gender, it

is less vulnerable to counterexamples, and it accounts for the common character of many of the texts Kolodny explicates. Unfortunately, it is incompatible with a polemical intention Kolodny should have discarded. At the end of her introduction, Kolodny speculates that if women had led the western settlement it would have been less violent and rapacious. But if the character of these writers was historically determined by the fact of their having been excluded from dominance, then there is no point in speculating on how things would have been different had they been dominant from the first.

The fundamental problem with this book is Kolodny's utopian ambition—her inclination to contend that the writers represent a kind of salvation from the nightmare of male history. Whereas men, according to Kolodny, fantasize a regime, women envision peaceable spaces that permit rich interchange among people and between people and nature—communities and gardens. But however much Kolodny's readings of the texts do discover these utopian strands, such redemptive potentialities rarely seem to be clear key-moments when the writer's commitment is maximally intense. Instead, the utopian strands are occasional topics, one element among others, rather than intentional centers. Quite a few of the books discussed, in fact, do not display the paradisaical imagination at all. Kolodny's close fidelity to the texts, in other words, is an adversary to her utopian polemical intention. If her reader senses that an overinsistent application of her polemical theses would be reductive, this is because Kolodny has herself delineated the complexity of thought and emotion which surpasses such reductive theorization.

There is a more satisfying celebration of these texts implicit in many of Kolodny's individual readings, but it is not acknowledged in her polemical overtures. A crude epistemological relativism leads her to conclude that no one sees the land in itself: everyone only projects fantasies onto it; the writers presented in this book are distinct in projecting communitarian/ecological fantasies, good ones rather than bad ones. Were this lumbering psychological commitment discarded, Kolodny might unveil the more modest but more durable virtue hinted at throughout the book, especially in the chapter on Caroline Kirkland and in the contrast between Alice Cary and Caroline Soule—realism. Many of the writers Kolodny describes do seem to pose an alternative to the conquering expansiveness described in *The Lay of the Land* (and to its deflationary antinomy, tall talk). This alternative, however, is not a utopian potency, but instead fidelity, to objects as they are, rather than as sites of exploitation—seeds, sheds, yeast, brush, stumps—and to the actual composite of emotions—fear, fatigue deprivation, contentment, loneliness, and so on.

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*Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* by Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983. Pp. 304. \$25.00.

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth's *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel* is a

bold project modestly pursued. As a consequence, the reader may be distressed or relieved by it, depending on how stringently she judges an author's obligations to fulfill the expectations stirred in the beginnings of a book.

The first chapter does indeed stir many expectations, for Ermarth declares an interest in marking the nineteenth-century English novel as the culminating expression of a kind of thought first evinced in the Renaissance. Medieval historiography, narrative, painting and geometry, she argues, drawing on an already well established tradition of thought, were characterized by the perceived discreteness of objects, valuation of the static and the prototypical, and contrasts between time and eternity rather than past and present. In contrast, the new episteme introduced by Renaissance geometry, historiography, narrative and painting encourages the assumption that "because objects have an invariant structure," general laws of relationship can be drawn from a limited number of cases (21). Similarities among the apparently dissimilar emerge in time and greater degrees of abstractness are achieved. Quattrocento painting is the most developed example of the new features of a linear realism with at least four implications: an increase in aesthetically revealed depth; the increased significance of the spectator and its position; "a potential equality among viewpoints" (20); and the creation of a common horizon of perception. To connect the realistic novel to this episteme, the author draws analogies between it and quattrocento painting: "What the faculty of sight is to space, the faculty of consciousness is to time. . . . The linear coordinates in fiction (past, present, and future) operate like the spatial coordinates in painting (front, side, and back) to homogenize the medium in which consensus becomes possible" (40).

Ermarth's precise and helpful discussions of the roles of past tense narration, memory, and narrative sequencing of simultaneous events ably justify the analogy between the coordinates of fiction and painting. But the premise of the book, the definition of realism as a form that relies on the possibility or hope for consensus, is elusive. This elusiveness is partly the result of the multiple meanings of consensus in the works of the authors discussed. *Persuasion* is a somewhat realistic text because in it the narrator, unlike the corrective narrator of *Emma*, corroborates and consents to the protagonist's mind. Furthermore, towards the end of the novel Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth effect an alternative to social disorder, rather than Emma's and Knightley's entrance into social order, by meeting one another's minds and thus constructing consensus. In *Our Mutual Friend* consensus emerges through the clarifying similarities in the identity crises of such characters as Eugene Wrayburn and John Harmon and it is also an atmosphere the narrative strives to create by linking the various worlds of the characters through the repeated images of the river and the dust mounds.

The initial historical breadth of the book is justified by Ermarth's theoretical task, but as the book progresses from three theoretical chapters to chapters on individual authors, history is virtually omitted and the theoretical enterprise considerably narrowed. Elaborate concentration on strategies for obtaining consensus or the illusion of consensus in particular texts supplants any possibility of consideration of the project of consensus at a time of enormous social change. The fragility of consensus is constantly asserted, along

with the difficulty facing the reader who assembles all the elements of a long work in order to perceive its unifying concepts and the common world held in bounds by the medium created by the narrator. But the social and historical reasons why consensus may escape are articulated only as questions of form. For instance, the theoretical premise that there is a potential equality among viewpoints because the narrator collects perspectives of a diverse population is not given the attention it requires if consensus is indeed seen as an historical task, as the aspiration of an episteme. Such unexamined acceptance of a liberal concept leads to readings that casually ignore the question of why, for instance, of all the characters in *Our Mutual Friend*, it is the resolution of the crises of the two gentlemen, John Harmon and Eugene Wrayburn, that the author correctly adjudges as essential to the imagination of consensus. Furthermore, though the author's initial intent is to characterize an episteme and a genre, only highly selected texts are shown to enforce the theory. No reference is made to minor authors or other coexistent forms, such as sentimental fiction. Consequently, a major opportunity to test hypotheses and historical generalizations is evaded. Canonized texts are given priority in the hierarchy of indications of a social world that may not be so easily assimilated to even formal consensus.

There are many indications that the author is aware of the limits of her project and the other questions that might be asked. She has defined her task, for good reasons, so as to exclude them. As a consequence, questions about the canon and the status of characters who direct consensus disproportionately may seem impertinent to this particular work. Such questions are not designed to undermine the achievement of this work that does indeed contribute greater theoretical depth to a number of authoritative readings of the texts examined. Instead, they are questions about the ability of this genre of literary criticism to embrace even a minimally inclusive definition of history. Curiously, the increasing obligation of literary critics published by distinguished presses to raise the theoretical stakes of their arguments may lead to the deployment of theory and history as simply another form of background. They become a way of making close readings look more important rather than a way of jolting literary criticism and close reading out of some of their complacencies in order to place the canon in history. They also become a way of recycling established and effective readings. The separation of theoretical chapters from chapters of close reading invokes a form of discourse that constrains an author from pausing to examine terms as they are applied to texts and to digress fruitfully into challenges to a thesis.

Details that might shake the faith in consensus, a faith Ermarth states is essential to reading the realistic text, actually are presented in an essay Ermarth contributed to a volume of essays on women in fiction. ("Fictional Consensus and Female Casualty" in *The Representation of Women in Fiction*, eds. Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Margaret R. Higonnet, Johns Hopkins, 1983). There she discusses a number of heroines of realistic texts who must die because they cannot be assimilated to consensus. That such a theme is segregated in an appropriate volume and not included in the text under discussion is simply an instance of how faith in a thesis is constructed, an instance that shows that the premise of equality among viewpoints requires suspicion. Without challenging the efficacy of Ermarth's thesis about consensus, I would argue

that the potential depth of the study is limited by the topics that are avoided, as always. The text therefore announces its participation in the perceptual mode examined, for it yearns for consensus and is satisfied to prove it at the level of abstraction that formally enables the neglect of disproof.

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*Literal Imagination: Blake's Vision of Words* by Nelson Hilton. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983. Pp. xvii + 322 with 83 halftones. \$30.00.

On page 3 of *Literal Imagination* Nelson Hilton offers an "experiment" whereby plate 86 of Blake's *Jerusalem*, consisting of 64 lines with no design, is covered over except for a few words, mostly nouns, such as "Spectre," "fibres," and "looms." With less than 5% of the words visible, we are able to see that "each word signifies so amply that even so skeletal a structure begins to bear (bare) meaning as each word finds relation to another. While this relational process occurs initially in the mind of the perceiver, it can develop through and toward structures in the "mind" of the text, and then further to relations in the "mind," or *episteme*, of English and collective imagination. . . . the words of the plates have their own plots."

One must admire Hilton's nerve in beginning this way. Many readers will put down the book by page 4, not knowing that they have already undergone the worst, though hardly the last, of his experiments, and that there are solid and even conventional chapters ahead. Those brave enough to keep reading may be the only readers Hilton wants; he may be content to slough off the rest right away as too tightly locked up in conservative and "Urizenic" notions to enjoy the expansive and antinomian critical playfulness he proposes.

For playful he certainly is. The bear/bare pun is only one of hundreds, some of them in Blake (vale/veil, weep/sweep), some of them in Hilton (seam/semi), and many of them hovering somewhere in between, perhaps in the mind of English itself (change/chains, wrath/wreath/wraith, symmetry/see me try). There are also lots of anagrams, such as name/amen and earth/heart, and sub-anagrams like fire/fibre and amen/lamentation/garment. And there are long skeins of looser oral and visual associations, such as tyger/anger/gyre/fire, not to mention Blake's invented names, which seem to pack several words together.

This is fun, and any playful reader may join the game. What are the rules? There seems to be only one. Look for links of any sort between two words, though not the narrative or syntactical or logical sort of links (for these chains must be broken), and then wherever one of the words recurs let the other one resonate with it. Each word will somehow *mean* the other, and both will mean all others that look or sound like either. Since "polysemy is always available, words and their meanings are always flying about," and we may fly about with them if our imaginations will allow us.

What equipment is needed? Again only one thing, the *Blake Concordance*, "that valuable work," through whose "discourse" we may trace the trajecto-

ries of the flying word-worlds. I would add that a set of colored pencils ought to be helpful.

What is the goal? To set the whole synchronous text of Blake vibrating on an infinite number of registers. And to have fun doing it. (The mind of the text should have fun doing it, too.)

Anyone who doubts the satisfactions of so undisciplined a sport is put down as a Urizenic type, one of the parental killjoys Blake shows us in his *Songs*. "Such expanding cross-reference," Hilton says, "mocks the chains of criticism," and no critic wants to be told he or she is in chains and then be mocked to boot. For some time there has been a cult of knowing playfulness among Blake scholars, and lately it has gotten a second wind from the fun new French theories. Hilton is now "it": catch him if you can. But solemn adjurations about bedtime and washing up and doing homework are ruled out from the first.

Unfortunately for Hilton, he is only half a child. He concedes that "chains, connections of some sort there will be undoubtedly be," and "there are links that cannot be broken while we are as we are." He has, however, no basis whatever for specifying what these irreducible chains might be, or just what we are when we are as we are. When he invokes the high state of imaginative freedom he is much vaguer than Blake. His methodological statements all have to do with breaking traditional chains and creating as many new ones as we can think up, and we are given no rules for deciding which old ones to break and which new ones *not* to create. All chains are alike. Hilton has no way of knowing when enough is enough, when to tell the sorcerer's apprentice to stop fooling around and get to work.

Take his comments on "London." He points out something I had never noticed, that the initial letters of stanza 3—

How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldiers sigh,  
Runs in blood down Palace walls

—spell "hear," which is the final word of the lines immediately before and after it. Hearing indeed dominates the poem. "We are urged to hear," Hilton says, "the soldier's sigh running in blood, while the chimney s/weeper's cry casts a pall over St. Paul's" (i.e., every blackning Church o'Paul's). In the poem's final word, "hearse," we hear its rhyme-word, "curse," but we *see* the word "hear" again, as we have been hearing and seeing it throughout.

These are clever and interesting points, but there are difficulties. The speaker does not hear the sigh running or the cry appalling, in fact, but *how* they do so; it is almost as if the speaker hears *about* these things, though it remains true in both cases that a sound brings about a color-change. More important, "appalls" does not mean "casts a pall" but rather the opposite, "to make pale" (with fear or guilt), though the word "blackning" might itself suggest "pall." St. Paul's seems to be pulled out of a hat.

If these objections are dismissible as Urizenic conservatism, one may ask why Hilton stops where he does. How about the harlot, of "the youthful Harlots curse"? Surely in "harlot" we *hear lots* of curses. We also *hear Lot's*

curse, which makes London into Sodom and the harlots into his daughters, who pass on an incestuous plague to their infants. Then there is Har, an important character and place in Blake, whose *lot* is to succumb to a marriage hearse. And if St. Paul's is part of the poem, how about St. Mark's, whose name appears three times in the first stanza? Hilton says that "the poem's self-unchaining does not, of course, usher the delighting reader into any realm of absolute free-play," but by his own rules we may keep up our merriment until we drop dead and no one may tell us to stop.

Hilton's other half, I am glad to say, wrote half the book, including thorough and very helpful discussions of such key symbols as veils, spectres, fibres, stars, vortices, and polyps. He had to work on these, researching historical sources and analogues, eighteenth-century physiology, and so on, and tracing with scholarly care what these symbols precisely meant. This half of the book makes a fine contribution to Blake studies, though Hilton's heart may not have been in it.

The first half, taken in the right spirit, can also be useful, not only for its sometimes brilliant brainstorming but as a reminder that solemnity will not take you far in understanding Blake. Having loosened our mental manacles, then, Hilton ought to undertake the harder task of distinguishing good critical chains from bad, and coherencies from incoherencies in Blake himself.

*Coalition For a New Foreign and Military Policy*

Michael Ferber

*Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction*, by Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983. Pp. xii. \$25.00.

We have been for about a year now in the midst of a minor flurry of books and articles that explain, paraphrase, contextualize, or otherwise account for deconstruction. For reasons that are slightly mysterious, these attempts seem to fall into two categories: synchronic elucidations that are sympathetic (e. g., Culler's *On Deconstruction*) and historical evaluations that are disparaging (Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction*). The opposition is still heated; deconstruction still causes us to take sides. But the net effect of this recent publication seems to be that we are getting used to deconstruction—which is rather like getting used to an angel in the drawing room.

It is the greatest strength of Vincent Leitch's new book that it sustains the strangeness and difficulty of deconstruction while providing both a history and an elucidation, plausibly and sympathetically. The main strategy is to present an intertextual interpretation of critical trends, a story in which discourse speaks to discourse, book to book. Part I, "Semiology and Deconstruction: Modern Theories of the Sign," picks up the key terms and their theoretical freight from Husserl, Saussure, and Heidegger and places them in their contemporary usage and modification in Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, and Derrida. This terminological/theoretical complex extends through Part II, "Versions of Textuality and Intertextuality: Contemporary Theories of Literature and Tradition," a careful documentation of the lines of force descending from Heidegger into recent structuralism and deconstruction. The contribution of

this central section is precisely to centralize "intertextuality" as the premier critical development of contemporary criticism. The final section, then, "Critical Reading and Writing: Strategies of Deconstruction," depends in turn on particular variations of intertextuality to discriminate among current deconstructive styles.

Leitch describes his organization this way: "Patterned like a history of ideas, the book approximates a spiral as it regularly returns to significant concepts, texts, and figures. . . . Occasionally, the text mimics the production of Penelope's tapestry, weaving a series of passages only to unstitch them later" (ix). The approach requires a lengthy exposition and, at first, a patient reading (Part I is a cave of winds, or quotations—all the characters call to each other across the years, trying to be heard, or read, over the writing of Saussure, Heidegger, and Derrida). But the terms gather weight, acquire a history, and the result is an understanding of deconstruction as an ongoing twentieth century project, with a renewed emphasis on the contemporaneity of the parent figures.

The treatment of Heidegger is exemplary. Heidegger's contributions to literary theory are often, by a huge irony, frozen into a fixed shape, as when we write of "Heidegger's contributions" as if he had some fixed number of discrete ideas; this is just the error of thought Heidegger discerned and rejected in other critics. Recent Heideggerians, Bové and Spanos especially, have argued that such "spatializing" (usually, of literature by formalist critics) misrepresents both the text and the experience of reading; their response is a "destructive" criticism that replaces literary structure with literary temporality, an unfolding disclosure and concealment of truth. Leitch performs the same function for Heidegger by locating the many interpretations of Heidegger implicit in contemporary critical strategies. "Heideggerian phenomenology" is no longer a dead background (what Miller and de Man used to do, before Derrida) but a lively aspect of post-modern thinking. In fact, this central discussion informs much of the rest of the book, providing a terminological anchor for succinct explanations of contemporary critical gestures: de Man's adventures in reading, Barthes' pursuit of a post-structuralist style of critical writing, and, chiefly, the multiplication of "undecidables" (*écriture*, trace, border—they number "about three dozen," Leitch writes) in the work of Derrida, which Leitch describes as Derrida's joyfully Western pursuit of the "logic of the supplement"—the continual addition of just one more qualification to a nearly complete disclosure of the truth (174-76).

Leitch's prose style requires some attention, for it distinguishes his book from the several recent works on the same topic. A charge often laid to deconstruction is that it violates its own anti-logocentric preachments by continuing to make assertions. Leitch repeats often enough that it is not possible to write criticism outside the logocentric system; one must use the working language, rest on it, as the physicist must treat the floor as a solid surface. Nevertheless, Leitch chooses not to preserve all the conventions of argumentative, empirical discourse. If in "space" the book is "spiral" and plural, in reading time it is allusive, accretive, and echoic. The style is conditional—often specifically subjunctive—but it does not sound equivocal. The effect is rather of modelling or construction, series of hypotheses and partial withdrawals, or weavings and unweavings. We are not told to "regard" *Of Gram-*

*matology* as the prototypical deconstructive work, but to "imagine" it so (169). Instead of adducing a series of quotations, Leitch "cuts" a "mishmash of formulations" (172). For this, he invites the reader to "compensate me, and heap on one or more levels" (174). And more than once he formally cites his own words (notably, part of his "Prologue" appears as the epigraph of a later chapter (232). The following passage, from Leitch's characterization of "metacriticism," suggests something of his procedure of rapidly deploying hypothesis, citation, apposition, and repetition; it also suggests another view of his own scholarly text:

The scholar's text, the production of a deconstructed subject, sometimes of a libidinous "hysteric," disseminates meaning beyond truth or totalization. It is the birth of a frolicsome "science," a playful "hermeneutics" of indeterminacy, reminiscent of Nietzsche's most visionary and aphoristic movements. Criticism catches up with and surpasses avant-garde literature. Perhaps. (224)

Earlier, Leitch quotes Derrida on the question of whether deconstruction should oppose logocentrism from within, critiquing it in its own terms, or try to remove itself to some anarchic, anti-philosophic position; Derrida concludes:

A new writing must weave and interweave the two motifs. That is, several languages must be spoken and several texts produced at the same time. . . . it is perhaps a change of style that we need. (179)

This is a fair summary of Leitch's project. *Deconstructive Criticism* attempts to overwrite the misrepresentations of sequentiality, to keep all the terms and their interrelations current at each moment, the whole dialectic close at hand. Leitch does not just argue intertextuality, he demonstrates it, and the result is convincing.

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