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Feminist Milton by Joseph Wittreich. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987. Pp. xxvi + 174. \$22.95

This improbable-sounding book documents an important episode in the reception-history of Milton and the interpretation of the Genesis-myth by female authors. It also conducts a revisionist polemic against what recent American feminists have written about Milton. Wittreich rebukes such critics as Christine Froula, Mary Poovey and Sandra Gilbert (who is generous enough to praise the book on the dust-jacket), arguing that their patriarchal, repressive, establishment Milton is a grotesque misreading, the product of conservative masculinism in the eighteenth century. These critics denounce what the orthodox praised, but their version of Milton is the same; consequently, Wittreich argues, they unwittingly serve the patriarchy they mean to attack. In contrast to this rigid and ultra-conventional bogey-man, Wittreich proposes a radical, liberal, polysemic, deconstructive and *truly* feminist Milton, who contradicted himself deliberately and who expressed patriarchal attitudes only to expose and defeat them.

On what authority does Wittreich promote this reading? Is the canonical author simply a set of cues, devoid of intrinsic meaning or merit, that can be remade by each new critical trend? It might seem that Milton is merely ammunition for Wittreich's campaigns—against feminist Miltonists, for feminist Old Testament critics, for "subversion" in all its forms, against "New Historicism" (which seems to include Stanley Fish). But he claims far more than this. Wittreich insists that his is the genuine Milton, freed from irrelevant excesses, and that subversive feminism is Milton's full-blown and deliberate intention.

This intentionalist position derives partly from textual analysis and partly from reception-history. Wittreich shows, quite rightly, that many of the masculinist statements in *Paradise Lost* are placed in the mouths of specific characters, to test the listener's ability to think for herself and to choose between competing perspectives—the prime example being Adam's misogynistic rant after the fall, when he calls Eve a "crooked rib" and a "fair defect." These moments must clearly be read dramatically, as must the outbursts of Samson and the chorus in *Samson Agonistes*. Even when he speaks *in propria persona*, Milton may insinuate an inadequate or fallen perspective which the reader must learn to reject: thus the celebrated "not equal," applied to Adam and Eve at their first appearance in Book IV, is governed by the verb *to seem*, and the only observer of the scene is Satan.

Such readings will be already quite familiar to Miltonists. What is distinctive and attractive about this book is its appeal to reception-history. After intense research into women's reactions to Milton before 1830, Wittreich concludes that the true (and "feminist") nature of Milton is not a product of late twentieth-century revisionism, but had actually been discovered in the eighteenth century: "it was Milton's early female readers who uncovered what was 'new' in *Paradise Lost* and in this way restored the poem to its original horizon of expectation" (p. 154). (Female readers thereby "opened the way" to Romanticism, too.) These are the true feminists for Wittreich—not the misguided and crypto-conservative anti-Miltonists of today—and on these must be based a new revolutionary feminist criticism which celebrates Milton

rather than denouncing him. This new wave of appreciation (continuing the work of Joan Webber, Diane McColley and Stevie Davies) can now be based on "actual, not fabricated history" (p. 153).

Wittreich's intention is avowedly provocative, and to this end he makes some quite breathtaking claims. *Feminist Milton* begins with an impressive parade of female authors—a testimony to the range and volume of women's writing between 1680 and 1830—and we are asked to believe that most of them are not only feminist, but "enlist Milton as a rebel in their cause" (p. xi). Wittreich asserts that "Milton's feminist consciousness issues forth in similar intensity" in all three of the late poems, that Milton "means to repeal" every statement of female subordination in his poetry, to silence them as the pagan oracles were silenced and thus to "decry and explode" male suprematism; the words of Christ in judgment are really intended to be derided as clichés, since God and Raphael have already rebuked the notion that husbands should rule over wives as their superior (pp. 10, 119, 147). Women realized this "from the beginning," "almost without exception" calling for sexual equality and asserting that Milton called for it too; when they "register adversarial attitudes" they "are levelled *not against Milton* but against male readers of his poetry who twist it out of shape" (pp. 40–41, my emphasis). Female readers led the way in distinguishing the character's voice from the author's, "seem always to have discerned a political aspect in his poems, and to have celebrated them for it," and refused to "disengage Milton's prose writings from his poetry" at a time when male critics were trying to depoliticize Milton by denouncing his prose (pp. 70–71). Women were also pioneers in rescuing the last books of *Paradise Lost* and in revaluing *Samson Agonistes*—"historically so important to the feminist enterprise" (p. 130). This "early feminist" vanguard subsumed distinctions of class and race: women adhered to, indeed controlled, a popular culture that had always understood Milton properly; and "most Black women . . . recognized Milton as their advocate" (pp. 5, 37, 44–45, 61, 148). Female responses to Milton thus constituted "the strongest currents in Milton criticism," whose effect on male critics was "simply phenomenal"; by the late eighteenth century "feminist criticism had achieved [a] powerful ascendancy and widespread assent because it had the authority of Milton's text on its side" (pp. 21–22, 40).

The emergence of an autonomous female critical tradition, and the "gendering" of literary response, are indeed fascinating topics. And it is important to confirm that Milton was a complex stimulus to women's writing rather than a dead hand. When Mme Figuet du Bocage engages with Milton in *Le Paradis terrestre, poème imité de Milton* (London, 1748), she establishes a reciprocal relation between her genius and his: in an "essor sublime" fuelled by the same fire that animated Milton, she aspires to reach him in Elysium and to make him feel again the love that originally inspired the erotic "charmes" of Paradise that now fill and sustain the female author's writings (f. A1, p. 35). Her main concern, however, is to modernize Milton, removing those passages that might have offended Pope, and transforming the seventeenth-century revolutionary into a rococo figure of erotic sensibility and aesthetic sublimity. Such expropriative homage—recentering and secularizing the epic by selective imitation—may be traced in many women writers. When Fanny Burney calls her father "Author of my Being" in the dedication

of *Evelina*—echoing the words of Eve to Adam at her most submissive—she is simultaneously striking a humble posture within the Eden of the family and (through her command of literary allusion) drawing attention to her own authorial aspirations and achievements. When the radical Annabella Plumtre denounces hypocritical “Moderation”—“To thee I call, but with no friendly voice”—she rescues the words of Satan for a new and positive political cause (*The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, ed. Roger Lonsdale [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984], p. 812).

Wittreich makes a characteristically vivid, learned and energetic contribution to this new gendered reception-history. The fact that he uses none of the above examples merely indicates the richness of the field. Wittreich opens up important questions about the “horizons of expectation” of Milton in his own age, the gendered nature of literary response, the intention of the author vis-à-vis the effect of the text. (This inquiry is stimulated by suggestive fragments from Barthes and Derrida, Bakhtin and Jauss, Tillie Olsen and K. K. Ruthven.) His declared method of reading is admirable: he claims to reach his results

by attending to the carefully controlled contexts of individual utterances; by sorting through, not sliding by, the contradictory evidence afforded by Milton’s writings; by making imaginative constructs on the assumption that Milton’s poetry, instead of inculcating, interacts with orthodoxies and interleaves its politics and theology, its social and ethical issues, in such a way that each is an examination of the other. (p. 85)

Within *Paradise Lost*, Wittreich gives proper value to the emergence of Eve in the post-lapsarian books, to her initiative in the process of redemption, to the autonomy implied by her cultivating and naming the flowers, and to the fact that it is she, not Adam or the archangel, who is given the final prophetic speech in the poem. He makes the plausible suggestion that Eve’s “submission” in XII.597 is not to Adam but to Providence, and shows, by citing “prophetic Anna” from *Paradise Regained* I.255, that Milton was not hostile to female prophesy *per se*.

Many of Wittreich’s most desirable speculations rest on rather slender evidence, however. The importance to women of *Samson Agonistes*, for example, is supported by a single brief sentence from Hannah More, saying only that the play is “moral” and that it cannot be staged in the theatre (p. 130). The notion that women blamed Milton’s male critics, and *not* the poet himself, is entirely unsubstantiated. So is the suggestion that male critics changed their tune because of female objections. The ex-slave Phillis Wheatley was indeed given a copy of Milton by the Lord Mayor of London (p. 36), but she did not record her opinion of it, and the statement about Black women rests on a single memoir from 1892. One other citation from Wheatley, using Samson as an analogy for slavery (p. 121), is actually not by her at all, but from a nineteenth-century introduction to her poems by a white male.

It is more rewarding, then, to regard this book as a set of stimulating sketches than as a fully-documented thesis. In his study of reception-history, Wittreich has made a real contribution, uncovering some fascinating exam-

ples of women's response to Milton and to the Old Testament. Thus as early as 1699 an anonymous pamphlet (ascribed to Lady Mary Chudleigh in Wing's *STC*) can cite *Paradise Lost* IX.896-97—"O fairest of Creation! last and best / Of all God's Works"—to back up its assertion that the order of creation in Genesis, far from subordinating Eve, actually makes her "more perfect" (p. 52). A later non-conformist sermon (inscribed "Lucy Hutton" in the British Library copy) declares that certain lines from Raphael's rebuke to Adam—"weigh with her thyself, / Then value"—"ought to be wrote as a phylactery in letters of gold, and tied like a scarf, on the arms of our husbands" (p. 67). Margaret Collier, writing to Samuel Richardson, draws upon *Paradise Lost* to argue that marriage to a less talented and intelligent man is "a state of vilest servitude" (p. 58). And Hannah More (speaking through the male persona "Coelebs") discovers "all the dignity of equality" in Milton's Eve (p. 165).

But *are* these typical examples? Did Milton play a central role in the evolution of eighteenth-century feminism? The Chudleigh example is striking, if she is indeed the author, but her main source is not Milton at all; Milton nowhere suggests that Eve's later creation puts her on a higher plane than Adam. Here and elsewhere, the female author draws upon a distinct tradition of pro-female exegesis (documented recently by Margaret King, Linda Woodbridge, Constance Jordan and myself). Either by original reinterpretation of the text of Genesis, or by seriously pursuing the arguments raised facetiously by Cornelius Agrippa in *De Nobilitate et Praecellentia Foeminei Sexu*, female exegetes argued not only that Eve is less to blame, but that she is ontologically equal or even superior to Adam—and thus quite without obligation to obey him. Chudleigh can bring in the "last and best" phrase incidentally, to confirm one of these Agrippan arguments, but the Miltonic context would not support it: both in this moving lament for the already-fallen Eve, and on the morning after her dream, Adam presents Eve as God's "last best gift" (V.19, my emphasis), the highest of the "Creatures" provided for his delight. In any case, Chudleigh certainly doesn't do what Wittreich claims she does—cite several contradictory passages from Milton to show how they "interfere with and subvert one another's meaning" in a way that anticipates deconstruction (p. 88).

Some of Wittreich's most interesting examples, in fact, show women responding to this autonomous tradition of exegesis rather than to Milton. Thus Sarah Fyge Egerton, the earliest female author cited, fights misogynist satire with Agrippan arguments, and shows no detectable awareness of Milton (p. 47). Mary Astell, who does work out on an important feminist-revisionist reading of Genesis, owes very little to Milton: Wittreich cites two very general references to the poet, one that she is "rais'd and elevated with *Paradise Lost*," the other that "not Milton himself would cry up liberty to poor Female Slaves"—hardly a celebration of his politics (pp. 49, 52). (He later cites Astell's reading of the Samson story to show how widely she differs from Milton.) Lady Bradshaigh's sympathetic but half-playful reinterpretation of Eve in her correspondence with Richardson makes no mention of Milton, so it is unwise to present it as a transformation brought about by "Milton's regard for women, sometimes evident in the divorce tracts" (p. 58); Bradshaigh had in fact declared, in her previous letter, "I have never read Mil-

ton's Treatise upon Divorce, but have heard it much condemned" (*The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. Anna Barbauld [London, 1804], VI.198). And in one of Wittreich's most pleasing discoveries, Eliza Weaver Bradburn's *The Story of Paradise Lost, for Children* (1830), pro-female exegesis is explicitly opposed to the Miltonic text. Three children discuss their mother's paraphrase, and reveal the preoccupations of their gender: little William solemnly deduces Eve's inferiority and subordination from *Paradise Lost*, whereas Eliza rejects "Whatever Milton may say about it," and insists (quite accurately) that the Bible says nothing about "man's having any right to command her. . . . Nor do I think he was better." Emily and the mother-narrator herself then turn to Dr. Clarke's Commentary on Genesis, and triumphantly discover the same egalitarian interpretation. Does this prove that "Milton's views parallel [Bradburn's] own on the equality of the sexes" (p. 78)?

The case of the non-conformist preacher "Lucy Hutton" is interesting not only because she praises Raphael's speech to her "sisters" as an egalitarian tribute, but because the same interpretation of the same lines becomes the keystone of Wittreich's own "feminist" reading of *Paradise Lost* (Chapter 4, *passim*). The lines are these:

[Eve is] fair no doubt, and worthy well
Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love,
Not thy subjection. Weigh with her thyself,
Then value.

(PL VIII.568-71; Hutton omits "thy honouring.") Wittreich and the preacher both assume that Raphael urges Adam *not* to make Eve his subject, and that after performing the weighing operation man and woman would be found of equal "value." But if we "attend to the carefully controlled contexts of individual utterances," we find this reading to be impossible. Raphael is berating Adam for overvaluing "things / Less excellent," and the lines quoted refer only to Eve's "outside," her looks; the result of the weighing experiment, Raphael insists, is that "she will acknowledge thee her Head, / And to realities yeild all her shows." "Subjection" must mean the amorous subjection of Adam to Eve, here and in the judgment-scene (X.152-53) where Christ repeats the exact phrase—though Wittreich again interprets it as a rebuke to subordination of the female (p. 85). Raphael attacks Adam for *not* treating Eve as an inferior, and Adam hastens to assure him that she always mingles "sweet compliance" with her love. This may of course be a characterological excess, but it fits Milton's own repeated and approving descriptions of amorous contact: "subjection . . . by her yielded," "coy submission," "meek surrender" and "submissive Charms" on Eve's part, "superior Love" on Adam's (IV.308-10, 494-99). None of these disturbing and faintly perverse passages is confronted by Wittreich.

The reading shared by Hutton and Wittreich, though generous and attractive, cannot possibly represent Milton's original "horizon of expectation," since the poem itself says exactly the opposite. And Hutton says the opposite, too. Her appreciation of Raphael's supposed tribute comes in an *attack* on Milton, who is denounced (quite rightly) for having distorted Scripture by imposing on it a phantasmagorical masculinism; the same evil spirit, she

claims, generated the horrors of the regicide and divorce tracts. (Again we notice that women readers were often hostile or indifferent to Milton's prose.) Hutton *does* use Milton elsewhere in her independent feminist rethinking of Genesis, and at times goes beyond him; she assumes, not only that Adam and Eve consummated their love in Eden, but that Eve had a miscarriage at the moment of the fall (*Six Sermonicles or Discourses on the Punishment of Eve* [Kendal, 1788], p. 34). Here, however, Milton is not an ally but an enemy of the Agrippa/Astell argument for female equality—before the fall, and in an attainable future.

The case of Margaret Collier shows that, far from uncovering some original and unitary intention in Milton, eighteenth-century feminists actually constructed their own meanings by dismantling and transposing the master-text. According to Wittreich, she claims that "Milton did not wish to consign women to 'a state of submission and acquiescence,' he did not mean for them 'to enter into a state of vilest servitude'" (p. 58). But Collier's letter does something quite different. Her sharp feminist analysis of a humiliating marriage does not suppose any intention of Milton's regarding the sexes, nor does it draw upon those parts of *Paradise Lost* that deal with sexual relations. Instead, she turns to Abdiel's definition of servitude in Book VI (the war in Heaven), and makes the connection with marital politics herself. In a similar spirit, Mary Hays does not use the example of the Lady in *Comus* to advance her radical feminism, as Wittreich claims (p. 68), but creates a female character who takes the Younger Brother's praise of philosophy and applies it to her own condition (*Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* [London, 1793], p. 114).

The case of Hannah More is avowedly complex, since Wittreich recognizes that More must be numbered among the conservatives—apparently a small minority—who argue for female subordination (pp. xiii, 30). Nevertheless, she is perhaps the only female author who supports Wittreich's "egalitarian Milton" thesis explicitly. Her male bachelor character does discover a genuine "liberality" in Milton and a stress on Eve's majesty and intelligence "that restores her to all the dignity of equality" (the entire passage is conveniently reprinted as Appendix D). But it is dignity *in the act of obeying Adam*—promptly, cheerfully and elegantly, under "the crowning grace of humility." And Milton's liberality, according to Coelebs, consists in Adam "obligingly permitting Eve to sit much longer after dinner than most modern husbands would allow," and not waving her away with an impatient gesture. Even when we allow for the satirical intention, it is hard to imagine a modern feminist inscribing these lines into his or her creed. And More's whole discussion of Milton begins with the observation that his portrayal of Eve has come in for severe criticism from "the ladies," who see unfairness and harsh domestic tyranny lurking within the idealization. This is a male persona speaking, of course, but More had no reason to make her character implausible. Coelebs's observation would be pointless unless it reflected a widespread and familiar suspicion of Milton among literary women—precisely the opposite of what Wittreich sets out to prove.

This raises an important question: whether the positive view of Milton championed by Wittreich—and shared, despite this last example, by a great many eighteenth-century female respondents—can really be called feminist.

Many of these authors confine themselves to general statements of Milton's excellence, or to approving citations of his character of Eve: "Grace was in all her steps, Heaven in her Eyes, / In all her motions Dignity and Love" (e.g. pp. 58, 71). This would be a defense, certainly, against the grossest kind of misogyny, but hardly the basis for an egalitarian rethinking of sexual politics or an extension of women's ambitions beyond the ladylike. As More's bachelor makes clear, Milton's Eve translated easily into the domestic ideal, and was cited *against* any attempt by women to be brilliant, or creative, or to extend their education into the sciences or the public sphere (Coelebs teases an "imaginary female objector" who has come "fresh from the Royal Institution"). Mary Wollstonecraft stands out as a genuinely revolutionary reader because she *does* attack Milton for defining women in terms of softness and sweet attractive grace, a definition that (she feels) reduces them to mistresses or harem-companions, enslaved to masculine erotic fantasy. More had begun this attack on the eroticized cult of sensibility and illustrated it from Milton's Belial (Appendix C), but Wollstonecraft discovered it in the heart of Milton's positive character. So, more playfully, does Elizabeth Montagu, in a splendid letter that links Milton, not to feminism, but to the kind of obedience and domesticity that she and Elizabeth Carter have quite outgrown (p. 64). Wollstonecraft does indeed recognize that Milton spoke with a divided voice, that the egalitarian discussion of human companionship in Book VIII (the argument between God and Adam) entirely contradicts the patriarchal statements scattered throughout the poem and placed in the mouth of Eve. But she never suggests that such contradictions might be deliberate.

Wittreich has shown that women poets felt stimulated as well as daunted by the example of Milton, and that women readers generally appreciated the high aesthetic quality of Milton's verse, even though most of them did not in fact address the gender issue, and very few approved of Milton's radical politics. They were not "rebels," in short, and to subsume them into heroic vanguardism is to distort, perhaps to diminish, their historical achievement; by insisting that Milton's real intention was feminist, Wittreich obscures the expropriative and reconstructive skill of his female readers, and makes them march again under a male leader's banner. He has established, convincingly, that Milton was not always taken as an arrant misogynist (though *some* women did read him in this way), and that Milton did not endorse such passages as the fallen Adam's "fair defect" speech, or the chorus in *Samson Agonistes* that celebrates man's "despotic power" (though several women, including Lucy Hutton and Mary Wollstonecraft, *did* bypass "character" and bridle at what they took to be the author's own intention in such speeches). Misogyny certainly went underground in the Age of Politeness, and Milton's Eve certainly contributed to this relief. But misogyny is not the same thing as patriarchy; to build (or discover) a consensus against the grossest form of woman-hating is not in itself feminist. The feminism created by Astell, Wollstonecraft and some of their contemporaries, like that of the twentieth century, reserves its sharpest attack for the pseudo-generous praise of "feminine" qualities that effectively imprison women in the domestic and amorous spheres. It is one thing to do justice to the beauty and position of Eve's final speech, but it is quite another to claim that lines like "thou to me / Art all things under heaven, all places thou" constitute a feminist liberation (p. 105).

If Milton is indeed "the poet of women who find their finest portrait, all they should aspire to be, in the character of Milton's Eve" (p. 34), then feminist reaction against him—despite all Wittreich's learned and passionate arguments—is easier to understand.

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Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres by Leonard Tennenhouse. New York: Methuen, 1986. Pp. x + 206. \$12.50 (paper).

Some works of literary criticism live in their details; some live in their general claims; and some live in the relation they establish between the two. Leonard Tennenhouse's *Power on Display* lives almost exclusively in its general claims. It is not committed to close analysis of lines, passages, or documents. The claims through which this book displays its power are generalizations about the political implications, within his own time, of the plot structures of Shakespeare's major genres. The book makes a number of suggestive historical connections. The historicism of the book is not particularly "new"—something that would not necessarily be a problem if the author did not make a number of programmatic claims to the contrary.

The Introduction begins well by identifying the "two Shakespeares" in literary criticism, one of whom transcends history, the other of whom mirrors it. Tennenhouse sees this split as deriving from "the modern literary institution," although it can be seen quite clearly in Ben Jonson's elegy for Shakespeare prefixed to the First Folio. In an interesting formulation, Tennenhouse claims that his book will show "the political compatibility of the historical Shakespeare with his transcendent double" (p. 2). Unfortunately, Tennenhouse never (so far as I could see) reveals wherein this compatibility consists. I could imagine it consisting in strategies of mystification, which present particular social arrangements as natural or ideal, but this is not a line which Tennenhouse follows. Instead, he drops the whole matter of the "compatibility" of the two Shakespeares and takes up only the assumption that Shakespeare "was constantly in tune with his time." When one pursues this assumption—taken to be somehow different from that of traditional historical scholars—Tennenhouse says that "one discovers an author who at all times seemed to know the rhetorical strategies for making sense, as well as what it was politic to say" (p. 2). Whatever Tennenhouse wanted to say about Shakespeare's rhetorical strategies eludes him here. All competent speakers at any time must, by definition, know the strategies for making sense—this is what linguistic competence means. The real point of the sentence is that Shakespeare knew "what it was politic to say." This adumbrates the major argument of *Power on Display*—that Shakespeare's plays purposefully and consistently worked to define and reinforce the power of the monarchs under

whom he lived and wrote. Tennenhouse nods to the subversive Shakespeare that "some scholars have begun to identify" (p. 6), but in fact his book opposes this view. Shakespeare's plays, in Tennenhouse's view, are functionally identical with Jonson's masques—"stagecraft collaborates with statecraft to produce spectacles of power" (p. 15; see also pp. 39 and 156).

We will return to the issue of Tennenhouse's extremely conservative—Empson would say bootlicking—Shakespeare. For now, I want to focus on the matter of methodology. One of the central features that Tennenhouse sees as distinguishing his work from that of traditional historical scholars is that he refuses to distinguish political from aesthetic aims. He rightly sees the idea of "the aesthetic" as a post-Renaissance creation, but as in his treatment of the "two" Shakespeares, Tennenhouse does not really pursue the "identity" of the aesthetic and the political in Shakespeare. He asserts this identity without ever explaining it (p. 6). He argues, quite cogently, that the strategies of idealizing (or demystifying) power in Shakespeare's plays might be paralleled in other sorts of contemporary writing, and then leaps from the unjustified conclusion that there is therefore no difference between literature and these other works to the totally mystifying assertion that it is precisely these strategies that the drama shared with other cultural productions that "made it [the drama] aesthetically successful" (p. 6). What Tennenhouse has done is to eliminate any notion of the aesthetic, not to redefine it. Again he has not met his own challenge. To attempt to reconstruct the political implications of Shakespeare's plays in a fully contextualized way would seem to be an honorable and worthwhile endeavor, but it does not in any way address the issue of the special power of these artifacts: call it their aesthetic power.

Contextualization, moreover, is something that Tennenhouse professes to scorn, along with (professedly) any claims to historical "truth"—the scare quotes are his (p. 11). I have to confess that I find these disclaimers unintelligible, not to say disingenuous. Contextualizing Shakespeare is said to provide "a certain kind of power—resembling the Olympian perspective of most anthropology—over Renaissance culture" (p. 7). The relationship between anthropology and domination is indeed a troubling one, but I fail to see the relevance of this to the study (as opposed to the practice) of Renaissance culture. If the point is merely that all attempts at historical reconstruction are precisely that—re-constructions—the truth of the point is undeniable but the force of the point is nugatory. Tennenhouse rightly sees the scholarly process of contextualizing Shakespeare as leading to "a product of our own culture, namely, literary criticism," but it is unclear why this is a problem. And surely declaring one's own critical strategies "anti-procedures" will not solve the problem of producing something that is clearly recognizable to the "literary institution" of the present as (modish) literary criticism. Tennenhouse claims that he found that, in the face of a knowledge of nineteenth-century culture and literature, he could not establish the "historical specificity" of Shakespearean drama, but found himself instead reproducing the uses made of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century culture. Charlotte Brontë's treatment of the uses of Shakespeare in *Shirley* is indeed fascinating, but I fail to see that the analysis shows this passage—which is primarily about the special Englishness of Shakespeare—to reveal the fundamental structures of twentieth-century Shakespeare criticism, especially of contextualizing criticism. Tennen-

house is certainly right that Shakespeare's culture is not something "outside" of his plays, but contextualizing need not imply this. At its most cogent, Tennenhouse's attempt is precisely to argue for the "historical specificity" of Shakespeare's plays, to argue that particular genres were developed to suit particular political and cultural moments. And, of course, he means to argue for this view not merely as possible but as true.

The large effort of Tennenhouse's book is to see the generic distribution of Shakespeare's plays within his career as non-arbitrary and as not a product of some mysterious process of artistic development. This is certainly an important endeavor. The dominance of English history plays in this first half of the career and of tragedies and "romances" in the second is indeed striking and is indeed susceptible to historical inquiry. Tennenhouse's suggestion is that the specifically Elizabethan genres of romantic comedy and chronicle history suited the particular ways that Elizabeth conceived of and displayed her power, and that the Jacobean genres of tragedy and romance correspondingly suited James's modes. About the romantic comedies, Tennenhouse asserts "that heroines possessing the power of patriarchy should regularly appear on the stage during the 1590's and not later, obviously had something to do with the fact that a female monarch was on the throne" (p. 61). Whether or not this connection is "obvious," it is plausible. Tennenhouse's suggestion that the history plays incorporate "a certain popular vigor within the body of the state" (p. 84) allows for a nice linkage between history and comedy, and perhaps for a link to Elizabeth's practice (Tennenhouse is less clear on this here). The Jacobean genres are seen as working to mystify and rarefy the notion of kingship.

These are all interesting and plausible suggestions, and they provide some critical payoffs. The chapter on the comedies includes an excellent analysis of a linguistic and sexual joke in *The Taming of the Shrew* (p. 49), and a shrewd observation on the importance of aristocratic blood in *Twelfth Night* (p. 66). The chapter is flawed, however, by a reductive sense of "the Petrarchan fantasy" (pp. 45, 67, et.), and by an insistence on the uniqueness of Shakespeare's comic heroines—an insistence that vitiates almost every reference to Sidney, that leads to the total occlusion of Spenser (whose name does not appear in the Index), and that contradicts Tennenhouse's own salutary general assertion of the embeddedness of Shakespeare in his culture. The chapter on the histories contains an important and original insight. In arguing for an element of recuperated carnival in the histories as well as the comedies, Tennenhouse points out the carnivalesque aspect of Bolingbroke's supporters in *Richard II* and the hint of popular elements in Richmond's invading army in *Richard III* (p. 79). Tennenhouse makes excellent use of E. P. Thompson on conservative forms or riot, and nicely formulates the relation between Hal's adoption of the carnivalesque and his rejection of Falstaff (p. 84). The problems in *Henry V*, however, are a bit too easily "historicized" away.

Tennenhouse's treatment of Hamlet involves him in some contortions—Fortinbras ends up the hero of the play—but it is in the chapters on the Jacobean Shakespeare that major problems arise. Elizabeth's sexuality is treated oddly in the chapter on tragedy—her gender does not, for instance, enter into the episode with Grindal to which Tennenhouse alludes (p. 103)—and sexuality in general is treated in either reductive or obscure ways. Jacobean

drama, like *Hamlet*, is only apparently obsessed with sexuality. We must not fall into anachronism. We must realize that in Jacobean thinking, "sexual desire always has a political meaning and objective" (p. 114). The discussion of mutilation as the "symbolic antidote" to rape in Jacobean drama is very hard to follow but could perhaps be coherently unpacked. The larger problems with Tennenhouse's approach to the tragedies emerge in his very forced reading of *Othello* and, most significantly, in is extraordinarily conservative, not to say Tillyardian, reading of *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Tennenhouse accepts Goneril's account of the behavior of Lear's knights (p. 136), moralizes the binding of Gloucester (p. 138), and sees the ending of the play as concerned with monarchical power and its "metaphysical source" (p. 142). Tennenhouse reads *Antony and Cleopatra* as strictly pro-Augustan—anything else would be (again) anachronistic (pp. 143–44). Among the tragedies, only *Macbeth* seems truly to fit Tennenhouse's scheme.

Measure for Measure, like *Macbeth*, is a play that scholarship has long identified as closely tied to King James. Tennenhouse builds on this established connection in seeing *Measure for Measure* as purely idealizing. It is not a "problem play" for him. Tennenhouse's most interesting idea is the importance of the aristocratic "woman of no desire" in Jacobean comedies (p. 169). He links this figure to what he terms, in a typically hypostatizing phrase, "the Jacobean relation of submission to patriarchy." Tennenhouse sees Jacobean drama in general, in all genres, as working "to authorize patriarchalism over against paternalism" (p. 171). He sees this as directly opposing the Puritan celebration of paternalism. Again, this is interesting but, from the point of view of methodological "newness," is oddly intellectualist and intentionalist; substantively, it makes the Puritan household treatises sound more anti-monarchical than they are. It is neither true that the authors of these treatises "could not imagine a form of political organization that was not a monarchy" nor that these authors represented the household "as a political hierarchy capable of contesting the state" (p. 173). More important, however, than the reading backwards from the Puritan revolution that this sort of history requires is the effect of this thesis on Tennenhouse's reading of the Romances. Again hyperbole and reduction reign. Tennenhouse tells us that in the reunion of Pericles and Marina, "what is important is less the meeting of father and daughter than the continuity of political power" (p. 183); it is "the aristocratic body" that comes to life at the end of *The Winter's Tale* (p. 184); and it is because of the metaphysics of this hypostatized "aristocratic body" and for no other reason that Shakespeare can proclaim Paulina's "magic" lawful at the end of this play (p. 185).

The strengths and weaknesses of Tennenhouse's book should by now be apparent. The issue of patriarchalism is certainly a rich one in the period, as is that of the relation of state power to popular forms. Tennenhouse has done us a service in raising these issues and suggesting their relevance to particular genres. What is disturbing in his work is its methodological imperialism, its claim to be the only way to historicize Shakespeare without falling into various noxious forms of idealism, and its correspondingly unabashed exclusiveness, reductiveness, and hyperbole. Stripped of hyperbole, fustian, and self-aggrandizement, *Power on Display* provides some important and thought-provoking historical claims. It is a pity that the current critical climate seems

more conducive to the aggrandizing flaws rather than the middle-level strengths of this book.

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Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance by Houston A. Baker, Jr. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987. Pp. xx + 122. \$19.95 (cloth).

In *Black Literature in America* (1971), Houston A. Baker, Jr. discusses the problems that editors encounter when describing the origins and high points of black American literature. He writes, "If boundaries have not been firmly established and major authors have not been finally decided, the editor cannot work with the same sense of assurance that the editor of an anthology in British or white American literature so easily assumes" (p. xv). Baker concludes by underscoring the importance of socio-historical factors in the selection and evaluation of one's materials. In effect, Baker uses an Afrocentric, socio-historical approach. While recognizing the importance of evaluative and selective criteria that are in accordance with accepted critical standards, however, he rejects any analytical project which ignores or minimizes the elements of black folklore in Afro-American expressive forms. Thus, Baker's critical agenda proposes the integration of Afro-American artists and black folklore into a critical canon. This proposed integration would form a canon which reflects two realities: 1) the Afro-American's ability to survive through the use of deceptive discourse strategies, and 2) the distinct yet similar experience of black Americans and their non-black neighbors. This proposition may seem doomed to failure because racial, ethnic, gender and class consciousnesses tend to be at odds with the hegemonic discourses which create canonical hierarchies. Nonetheless, Baker would have us believe otherwise.

In his most recent work, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, he proposes an Afro-American definition of modernity. Baker selects Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901) and W. E. B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) to illustrate two rhetorical strategies that Afro-Americans have used to survive different socio-historical periods. According to Baker, the former work exemplifies the "mastery of form" while the latter work is an example of the "deformation of mastery."

Baker believes the renewal of Afro-America is achieved through "renaissanceism" which ensures black survival through the mutual valuation of the "mastery of form"—masking one's purpose within mainstream expressive forms—and the "deformation of mastery"—using forms which are rooted in black expressive traditions. Baker masterfully describes and manipulates both of these discursive strategies in an effort to establish an Afrocentric postmodernism.

Admittedly, the "mastery of form" and the "deformation of mastery" are found in Afro-American literature which preceded *Up From Slavery* and *The Souls of Black Folk*. For example, in the *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (1849), Bibb states, "The only weapon of self defence I could use successfully, was that of deception." And David Walker's

Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World (1829), according to Baker's earlier work *Black Literature in America*, was an expression of an impassioned preacher, a "militant revolutionary, and American radical." However, both the Bibb and Walker pieces are the lesser-known writings of black Americans and, as such, are out of the mainstream academic's purview. Since Baker's project is the integration of black academic mainstream literature into a heretofore white literary canon, neither the Bibb nor the Walker work is referred to in *Modernism*, though, Baker is well aware of these works.

Since Baker's *Modernism* proposes an integrative canon, his selection of works by Washington and DuBois seems odd to me; these are, after all, the two works by black men which are best known in both white and black academic circles. Then he provides us with an informative, yet not so original, analysis of the rhetorical strategies of each work. Finally, Baker culminates his book-length essay with a lucid description of black modernity which collapses any dualism which might be inferred between the "mastery of form" and the "deformation of mastery." His choice of Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925) as exemplifying the integrative possibilities of the two strategies provides an interesting discussion which offers a broad catalogue of black expressive forms such as the illustrations of Winold Reiss and Aaron Douglas.

In his analysis of the intellectual importance of Locke's work, Baker writes "that *The New Negro* is the first fully modern figuration of a nation predicated upon mass energies" (p. 91). However, Baker qualifies his use of "mass energies" with Locke's understanding of the short-comings of creative acts: "Locke's collection is not . . . the clearest instance of a full discursive engagement with such mass energies. Although his work set the stage for such an engagement, the editor left the task itself to a 'younger generation'" (p. 91). Here, Baker underlines the fact that Alain Locke was well aware of the short-comings of any national movement that ignored the importance of its ties to the younger generation of black folk.

In addition, Baker contends that the moment of the Harlem Renaissance gave way to a spirit of nationalistic cultural engagement called "renaissancism." Afro-Americans who possessed the skills and knowledge of a hegemonic culture (the mastery of form), but who were motivated by a firm understanding of African modes of existence (the deformation of mastery), became part of this modernist movement which "is one that prompts the black artist's awareness that his or her only possible foundation for authentic and modern expressivity resides in a discursive field marked by formal mastery and sounding deformation" (p. 91).

Similarly to his preface in *Black Literature in America*, Baker argues that both the socio-historical base of black American modernity and its creative effect on Afro-American artists are rooted in the struggle of black folk for self-definition and -determination. Consequently, the modernist project for Afro-America is at odds with the pessimism entailed in the increasing failure of the project of British and white American modernity. (For a more developed discussion of this failure see Edward W. Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community" in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster.) Baker writes:

Modernist "anxiety" in Afro-American culture does not stem from a fear of replicating outmoded forms or of giving way to bourgeois formalisms. Instead, the anxiety of modernist influence is produced, in the first instance, by the black spokesperson's necessary task of employing audible extant forms in ways that move clearly *up*, masterfully, and resoundingly away from slavery (p. 101).

Baker locates Afro-American modernity in the community of the black family whose history "always—no matter how it is revised, purified, distorted, or emended—begins in an economics of slavery." Thus, he is able to conclude that Afro-American modernity "resides in their deployment for economic (whether to ameliorate desire or to secure material advantage) advancement" (p. 105). Here, Baker avoids critically assessing the problem of black middle-class consumptive behavior. Consequently, his black communal concept falters. The notion of a black folk genius, that is, the discursive strategies and socio-political purposes of both DuBois and Washington, *might* degenerate into a literary formalism founded upon mere idealistic social decorums. However, narratives have various reading formations as Baker has affirmed in his re-reading of *Up From Slavery* in which he skillfully shows how racial, historical, and geographical factors determined the post-Reconstruction era, southern-based, rhetorical strategy of Washington.

I must confess that I do perceive the Booker T. Washington agenda of Houston A. Baker, Jr., and I marvel at a masterful Baker and his *masked* purposes. Yet I wonder as I wander in the dusk of postmodernist dawns. For I suspect that Baker's *Modernism* is, at best, a beginning and, at worst, a palliative for black critical enslavement to eurocentric postmodernisms which tend either to ignore or dismiss Afro-American cultural difference as well as the centrality of the socio-political experiences of black folk.

Since previous writers have failed in their attempts to integrate black critical thought into existing critical strategies, I find *Modernism* a fine step toward such a purpose. Baker's *Modernism* formulates a distinctively black critical practice that goes beyond the limitations of literary discourses and worthless jargon. Baker has written a lucid and compelling work on black expressive discursive strategies rooted in a materialist notion of history.

Regardless of the novelty of his "mastery of form" and "deformation of mastery" models, his discussion of their use in *The New Negro* offers American cultural studies a definitive black text and a seminal interpretation which locates the nexus of black modernism at the junctures of race, historical time, and geographical place.

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A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation by Sidonie Smith. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. Pp. xii + 211. 27.50; 12.95 paper.

Sidonie Smith's theoretical endeavor, backed up by critical readings of five autobiographies, contributes to the work of feminist scholars in re-shaping history and methodology to give women place and voice in the academy. Her project—formulating a poetics of women's autobiography and following it out in texts by Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish, Charlotte Charke, Harriet Martineau, and Maxine Hong Kingston—addresses nothing less than what Teresa de Lauretis defines as the most pervasive and ever-present problem of feminist scholarship: "most of the available theories of reading, writing, sexuality, ideology, or any other cultural production are built on male narratives of gender, whether oedipal or anti-oedipal, bound by the heterosexual contract" (*Technologies of Gender*, p. 25). Smith brings into theoretical discussions of how we read autobiography the "problematics of gender"; the task she sets herself is formulating how we can talk about the specific cultural and psychological conditions of women's formal autobiography in a history and tradition that define such autobiography as the "public" articulation of subjectivity—and concurrently define women as private and silent.

This task seems a crucial one to me (also a feminist scholar). Smith has made a theoretically sophisticated contribution to feminist scholarship on autobiography, an area recently opened up by studies such as those included in anthologies edited by Domna C. Stanton and Estelle C. Jelinek. But because of the importance of Smith's work to the American academic feminist project in general, I want to consider it in the broad context of feminist politics. De Lauretis warns us that "male narratives" are not confinable to an unreconstructed past nor even to our masculinist colleagues' theories and criticism; these narratives "persistently tend to re-produce themselves in feminist theories. They *tend to*, and will do so unless one constantly resists, suspicious of their drift" (*Technologies*, p. 25). Smith's resistance to the male narratives of both autobiography as a genre and critical theories of autobiography is firm and generally effective. But I would like to add to her project of resistance my own suspicions of a "drift" in her approach to and readings of women's autobiographical texts. What emerges for me from Smith's movement from theory through a historical range of women's autobiographies is a narrative that reinscribes the male-privileging "plot" of the oedipal family even as it resists it. While Smith effectively subverts autobiographical criticism's tendency to force women's texts up against male models of narrative and subjectivity—and, hence, out of the realm of serious consideration—her subversion does not extend to a radical questioning of the Freudian and post-Freudian family as that construct which defines, in her readings, the limits of gender roles and relations throughout a broad historical range of texts. And while the master's tools may, with all due respect to Audre Lorde, help to dismantle the master's house, I would like to open Smith's feminist project to possibilities for gender construction that complicate its binary opposition of "maternal" vs. "paternal" stories—an opposition that drifts, despite Smith's best intentions, towards the oedipal paradigm's implicitly male-privileging hierarchy of gender.

In the first three chapters Smith introduces the "problem" of feminine difference into the history and criticism of formal autobiography. The first chapter describes the erasure of women from both the writing of formal autobiography and from modern criticism of the genre. As Smith asks, after her summary of autobiography criticism, "where in the maze of proliferating definitions and theories, in the articulation of teleologies and epistemologies, in the tension between poetics and historiography, in the placement and displacement of the 'self' is there any consideration of woman's *bios*, woman's *autē*, woman's *graphia*, or woman's hermeneutics?" (p. 7). Women are not only excluded from the genre by a public/private split along gender lines that has historically tended to silence them in the public sphere; they are also erased by criticism and theory of autobiography that either marginalize women's texts or deny their difference from narratives about and shaped by men. Smith's answer to this erasure of women's difference is to assert feminine difference on the fronts of history and theory: in chapter two she interpolates into the history of autobiography's origins in western literature specifically feminine models of "life plots" that exist in tension with a male-identified "Renaissance humanism." From this redefined history of originating, gendered myths of autobiography, she then extrapolates, in chapter three, a poetics of women's autobiography that accounts for tension, interaction and negotiation between male- and female-identified autobiographical constructs.

Smith consistently foregrounds how modern criticism of autobiography has shaped the history of the genre, so that her examination of the "former age of origination" (the late Middle ages and early Renaissance) is never far removed, indeed, is inextricable from, her revisions of "the current age of contemporary criticism" (p. 20). Her argument with the dominant history of autobiography's origins is not, therefore, built solely on grounds of historical accuracy, but rather challenges "the unexamined way in which that history, as it situates the emergence of the genre in a new notion of man, construes the autobiographical subject as always male and thereby ignores the interdependencies of the ideology of gender and the ideology of individualism that spawned the new discursive form" (p. 26). The "other half," so to speak, of the emergent (male) autobiographical subject is the "misbegotten man," the sinful and transgressive Eve whose individuality must be silenced just as her male counterpart's is voiced. Historians of autobiography have, Smith argues, contributed to the silencing of "woman's subjectivity and her public voice," a silencing concurrent with the articulation of the "new man" (p. 31). To counter this erasure, she offers "four predominant life scripts available to the women of the late medieval and Renaissance periods: the nun, the queen, the wife, and the witch" (p. 31). Deploying these scripts in different ways, women autobiographers of the late medieval and early Renaissance age of "origination" articulated their stories somewhere between the discourses associated with "the newly empowered man" and woman, the "misbegotten man." As sweeping as Smith's claims may sound in my rather reductive summary of them, they gain credibility through the author's theoretical care to avoid totalizing concepts, either of patriarchy or of women's modes of resistance to patriarchy: "patriarchal ideology, as any ideology, can never be entirely totalized. Pressed by its own contradictions, it fractures in heterogeneous directions" (p. 41).

Although resistant to totalizing, Smith also seeks to formulate a theoretical framework that might accommodate the consideration of gender. In pursuit of this framework, perhaps, Smith's revision of the history of autobiographical origins is self-consciously informed by psychoanalytic, predominantly Lacanian theories of the subject's self-formulation through its entrance into language. Thus, autobiography partakes of the "assertion of arrival and embeddedness in the phallic order" (p. 40), clearly, as Smith makes plain, a problematic move for women. As a way of understanding how women might write themselves into literary subjectivity, Smith's Lacanian framework is useful; it allows her to articulate a place for the woman autobiographer without ignoring the gender-linked problems that have attended her endeavors. Women write a double autobiographical discourse that engages in the discourses of the public, "masculine" self—they are, after all, "in drag" the moment they publicize themselves—and in the discourses of the silenced, private "misbegotten man" through which they signify their feminine difference from the public self. Smith's insertion of this double-voiced possibility into the "phallic order" of autobiographical history allows for a nonessentialist, flexible theory of women's autobiographical writing: "Suspended between these culturally constructed categories of male and female selfhood, she would have discovered a certain fluidity to the boundaries of gender. These sliding spaces of ideology and subjectivity she would have negotiated in greater or lesser degrees of conformity and resistance" (p. 41).

It is, however, in her Lacanian reading of autobiography's historical origins that, I think, the drift of the oedipal narrative begins to carry Smith's theory away from her radical critique of the "basis on which male autobiographical authority asserts itself" (p. 43). For however subversive of fixed structures defining the autobiographical subject of Smith's theoretical framework might be, Smith's language tends to re-inscribe the oedipal family at the very controlling center of how human beings construct themselves as discursive subjects. For while Smith seeks to historicize the range of available roles for male and female gender identification in the writing of autobiography, her psychoanalytic framework often seems to assume the omnipresence of the oedipal family, enforced, as de Lauretis reminds us, by the "heterosexual contract." Women autobiographers create a "female voice" which "functions as a potential disruption within androcentric discourse," but they do so within a binary opposition that emerges metaphorically as a form of androcentricism of which Smith could be more suspicious: the autobiographer must "negotiate a doubled identification with paternal and maternal narratives" (p. 42). Smith does not seem to look for counters to androcentricism outside of the structure of Mother and Father, the poles of the oedipal family and what Adriene Rich has called "compulsory heterosexuality."

I do not mean to suggest that Smith's theory of women's autobiography is reductively psychoanalytical or inattentive to historically specific alternatives for feminine self-identification. She is careful to ground her theory in the historical conditions of women's writing, and she by no means limits herself to psychoanalytic paradigms in analyzing the ways in which women autobiographers have negotiated patriarchy's mutually exclusive definitions of femininity and the public voice. One of the strengths of this book, to my mind, is its alertness to deconstructive theory, the textual/historical theories of Mik-

hail Bakhtin, and psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity and language—all in support of feminist resistance to male homosocial criticism, history, and culture. What I wish to point out is the book's tendency to privilege a view of writing *and* a view of history that take too much for granted a heterosexist, Freudian view of gender roles and sexual relations.

This view emerges in three problems that I can identify in Smith's theoretical approach to the history of women's autobiography. First, as I have already suggested, in Smith's discussion of the woman autobiographer's attempts to enscribe herself into an androcentric context and tradition that have excluded her, she constantly recurs to the metaphor of the writer working between "maternal" and "paternal" discourses. While beginning with the binary opposition of masculine/feminine is understandable, even politically useful since Smith argues for women's subversion of that opposition, I have to ask why this opposition must consistently (and a-historically) reinscribe the oedipal family as the controlling structure of autobiographical discourse?

Second, and in a related gesture, Smith seems stuck on origins as privileged determinants of gender-linked roles. In describing the "double helix of the imagination that leads to a double-voiced structuring of content and rhetoric" in women's autobiography, Smith names the two strands of the helix by mythical points of origin: "The voices of man and woman, of Adam and Eve, vie with one another, displace one another, subvert one another in the constant play of uneasy appropriation or reconciliation and daring rejection" (p. 51). Maternal and paternal, Adam and Eve—are these the only points from which an autobiographer might begin to represent herself? The four life scripts that Smith identifies all seem to grow out of or against these originary possibilities. While I am not disputing that myths of origin—be they oedipal or biblical—are powerful and must be accounted for, they seem to dominate Smith's theory of autobiography and sexual difference in ways that unnecessarily exclude any possibilities for women's self-representation that do not fit into the specific family relations determined by heterosexuality. The female autobiographer's sense of herself is determined in reaction or acquiescence to "paternal" or "maternal" discourses; however subversive of one or the other the female autobiographer may be, she is always a "daughter" working through differentiation from or alignment with the "mother's" or the "father's" stories. In Smith's own critical discourse, the autobiographer is, then, safely contained within the gender relations enscribed by oedipal theory.

The very potency of origins in Smith's theoretical approach to the history of women's autobiography results, I suspect, in a third limitation that affects the five readings of women's texts: if Mother and/or Father, Adam and Eve, the origins of the autobiographical impulse, determine the possibilities for autobiographical self-representation, the strongest autobiographers do the best job of resisting their origins. Not surprisingly, these are the ones that are historically the farthest removed from the originary period of autobiography that Smith identifies. What emerges from Smith's theory and her readings is, then, a progressive view of the history of women's autobiography that implicitly privileges women writing since the advent of modernism. Pre-twentieth-century women autobiographers are "unself-conscious" in negotiating the patriarchal constrictions of formal autobiography, while women in this century have the option of negotiating the constraints of gender-linked genre

with self-awareness, a knowledge of what they are doing: "In her negotiation of maternal and paternal narratives, the autobiographer does not engage consciously the prevailing ideology of gender or challenge the authority of autobiography as a generic contract. With the twentieth century and the ambiguities and confusions of modernism, however, alternative autobiographical possibilities for women emerge, as alternative relationships of woman to the autobiographical narrative of man arise. The autobiographer begins to grapple self-consciously with her identity as a woman in patriarchal culture and with her problematic relationship to engendered figures of selfhood" (p. 56).

If Smith's point is that nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminist movements have made self-consciousness a more likely condition of the woman autobiographer, it is well taken. But it seems reductive to assume that the "ambiguities and confusions of modernism" are the only historical circumstances since the late middle ages in which women's awareness of the need to struggle with patriarchy may have occurred. Women's consciousness of their problematic relation to the "phallic order" of letters may take a range of historically grounded forms, and I would want Smith to consider possibilities for modes of self-consciousness outside modern and post-modern models. Which may also be to say that I would want her to consider possibilities for women's autobiography outside the constraints of the oedipal—or anti-oedipal—paradigm. The limitations of Smith's fixing of women's autobiography between "maternal" and "paternal" narratives emerge in her readings of the five, historically and culturally diverse texts. Her book, taken as narrative itself, a narrative of women's historical struggle against patriarchy, reads like the oedipally framed story of the daughter's attempts to differentiate herself from the mother while not over-identifying with the father: Kempe, Cavendish, Charke, and Martineau all struggle with the "transvestism" of over-identification with the father, while Maxine Hong Kingston happily ends the story by self-consciously "carrying on the matrilineal trace" (p. 173).

Smith's writing of women's autobiographical history seems, in short, a sort of long-range, socially enacted version of the daughter's struggle to assert herself within the confines of the oedipal family as revised by feminist psychologists and psychoanalytic theorists such as Nancy Chodorow, Jane Flax (on the American side), Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva (on the European). And while the struggle has a happy ending, I cannot help but wonder what gets lost along the way.

Smith reads Charlotte Charke's autobiography, for instance, in rather harshly judgemental terms that seem to blame Charke, an actress and a notorious eighteenth-century cross-dresser, for over-identifying with her famous, estranged father, the actor and infamous exhibitionist Colley Cibber, and, simultaneously, for repressing "the mother's story": "With no self-illumination and self-reflectiveness, she cannot discover who and what she is. Charlotte Charke's autobiographical gesture is therefore a futile one. . . . Betrayed by both maternal and paternal narratives and her own lack of reflectiveness about those narratives, she becomes only endless words strung together" (p. 121). Not only is Charke seen by Smith as "unreflective," she is lazy and thoughtless: "If Charlotte Charke had had more self-knowledge, less indolence and thoughtlessness, she might have pulled off a major subversion of the ideology of gender, a major disruption in the notion of autobiography"

(p. 121). Does Smith seem to be blaming the victim? More crucially, is Smith missing something by limiting her evaluation of the autobiography to how Charke negotiates the binary opposition of maternal versus paternal?

Smith does not ignore the sexual ambiguities set up by Charke's cross-dressing adventures, and she even nods towards the subversive potential of her relationships with other women, relationships which may not fit comfortably into the heterosexual paradigms of the oedipal family: "her story insinuates a world of female-female relations into the text. After all, Charke describes how she traveled with a woman for many years; how they posed as man and wife; how various women fell in love with her. The promise of female-female love masked by the male-female masquerade renders the life and the story even more disruptive of a social order founded on the patriarchal moralities of heterosexual relationship" (p. 120). But this "disruptive" potential is read as small in relation to Charke's real failure, according to Smith, to differentiate herself properly and self-consciously from the paternal narrative. I find it disturbing that Smith does not consider the possibility of Charke's lesbianism, even though she points out, in a footnote, Fielding's historically grounded record of Mary Hamilton's prosecution for many of the same "crimes" that Charke flirts with in her autobiography, as in her life. Smith cryptically remarks in this note that "We can only speculate about the effect that this previous story might have had on the perceived sensationalism of Charke's life story in the minds of her readers and in her own mind" (p. 198). It does not seem to strike Smith that Mary Hamilton's recorded experiences—including a public flogging—might have constituted good reason for Charke to obfuscate her relations with "Mrs. Brown," the actress with whom she travelled as "Mr. Brown." Nor does Smith take into account Lillian Faderman's discussion of Charke in *Surpassing the Love of Men*, her history of lesbianism. This erasure seems symptomatic of the "drift" in Smith's text, a drift that aligns both her theory and her readings with the heterosexism implicit in the oedipal paradigms that sustain an unfortunate hegemony in this book.