The title is sensationalistic and a bit misleading. Docherty is himself engaged in theoretical criticism, as he is aware, and the theory that makes it possible is distinctively poststructuralist, grounded in the thinking of Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, Virilio. Docherty sets these theorists against what he calls "Grand Theory," the philosophical discourses of modernity from the Enlightenment to the Frankfurt School and beyond. He wishes to dismantle the edifices of modern reason, especially as they are realized in Marxism—to critique and abandon their drive toward totalization, toward master narratives and metaphysics of presence, toward a fundamental refusal of history for transcendental concepts. Docherty's opposition to Marxist discourse is primarily an opposition to its origins in enlightenment rationality, and he has no intention of abandoning politics, explicitly agreeing with Marx's thesis that philosophers spend more time interpreting the world than changing it. Docherty is insisting that the philosophical discourses of modernity must take into account "the postmodern condition" in order to set effective political agendas. Thus his effort to invent a "postmarxist" hermeneutic and to define a new political role for intellectuals depends to a large extent on how he theorizes the concept of postmodernism. It is this theory that is at once the key strength and limitation of his project.

Docherty rightly points out that enlightenment rationality links emancipation to ideological critique, to distinctions between "true" and "false" consciousness, "reality" and "ideology," operating as a utopian process of demystification premised on "the polis, the city of light, as a non-historical, non-secular space" (38). Postmodernism avoids claims of absolute knowledge and absolute self-consciousness for a thoroughgoing historicization of the text and the interpreter: "The text, thus, becomes not an icon or document which exists geopolitically, as a ritual object which has stepped out of time and history; rather, it becomes an arena of action, an arena in which temporal change or historicity is its very mode of being; a chrono-political history, therefore" (42). The modern hermeneutic of demystification spatializes the text, reading discontinuities as symptoms of an ideological representation that falsifies a social reality, whereas the postmodern hermeneutic of historicization temporalizes the text, reading discontinuities as historical narratives in which the past conflicts with the present, and the historically specific with the proleptic. Whereas the modern interpreter is concerned with producing a knowledge of the truth of the text, fixing it in one historical moment, the postmodern interpreter is concerned with effecting a mode of historical action upon the text, producing its meaning through competing narratives at different times. As a result, modernism privileges mimesis and adequacy in its concepts of textuality and interpretation, while postmodernism privileges simulation and parody. Parodic simulation "opens the question of a genuine politics, for what is at stake here is a struggle between simulations, none of which have any a priori claims to an absolute or totalizing truth, for none of them can any more ground themselves in a claim of their adequacy in representing a prior self-present 'real' state of affairs" (118). Insofar as this simulation takes the form of a historical narrative, "the question, then, becomes
directed to the issues of power or authority or legitimation of such narratives, narratives we live rather than live by, historically; and directed also to the issue of who has the authority to tell the narratives, or who has agency over the patient audience” (50). Here the “violence” to history that Docherty found perpetrated by modern reason gets redistributed among so many social agents in potential conflict, but these are limited to intellectuals really, producing cultural criticism that determinedly reads against the grain of the text and invents frankly utopian fantasies: “A genuinely chrono-political criticism must be, above all, transgressive of law, criminal, able to forge a future through the interpretive parodying of historical narrative, document, text. [. . .] Politics becomes no longer a nostalgia, but a poetry of the future, a proleptic politicizing of aesthetic simulations, to parody and paraphrase Marx” (60, 118). Docherty follows Lyotard in perceiving intellectuals absorbed in theoretical projects that are not immediately reducible to party politics and social engineering, i.e., “the banal politicization of theory” (5), and that try instead to think out the social in postmodern and postmarxist terms, where “thought is only possible at the interface between theoretical systems [. . .] working at the interface of ideologies” (219). Postmarxism, Docherty at last makes clear, “is not so much ‘after theory’ as ‘inter-theoretical,’ or ‘ana-theoretical,’ if I may coin a phrase” (after Lyotard).

Docherty’s analyses themselves run along the interface of many different areas of culture, beginning with an “aesthetic” description of postmodernism that covers recent developments in painting, sculpture, architecture, dance, film, music, offering many incisive observations (on Joseph Beuys, Anthony Caro, the Centre Pompidou, Michael Clark, Diva, et al.). Here he lays out “the postmodern condition” with a group of suggestively labelled categories (“seduction,” “transgression,” “aurality,” “flight”) which underlie his later extended analyses of such other cultural forms as theory, photography, fiction, poetry, and drama. Arguing, for example, that postmodernism involves a shift from specularity to aurality as “the dominant determining mode of perception” (30), he devotes several densely argued pages to teasing out an intertextual network joining voices, sounds, and their images—human animal, divine—in The Waste Land, Titus Andronicus, Hamlet, The Spanish Tragedy, Ode to a Nightingale, and Stravinsky’s Le rossignol. It’s a tour-de-force, just a bit forced at points, but pointed all the way to the end: ‘The postmodern is characterized by flight and by the discordant song of alterity, the harsh heterogeneity of the nightingale’s ‘Jug jug,’ which is a poison in the masculinist ear” (172). Docherty works by analogy for the most part, stringing together the most heterogeneous cultural materials, exploiting and mimicking the seriality of postmodern culture, where historical simulacra are ranged in a continuum without regard for historical chronology or linearity, creating anachronistic juxtapositions that take theoretical and ideological systems on deracinating lines of escape.

By this point in my own narrative it should be clear that for all his textual pyrotechnics, Docherty doesn’t entirely abandon ideological critique. Indeed, his analyses, insofar as they “work at the interface of ideologies,” can only continue the process of demystification he wants to displace, along with its peculiar utopian imagining: “The postmodern question is not whether one has heard the voice of alterity here, but rather whether one will hear such a
voice, whether one will take one’s poetry from the future” (190), although a future when alterity is the dominant cultural paradigm, when the Same is open to the Other, i.e., a future that doesn’t quite exist yet and therefore can be called “non-historical, non-secular” to some extent, plus clearly a “city of light.” One of Docherty’s more remarkable ideological critiques, in fact, is his treatment of Robert Lowell’s *For the Union Dead* (1964). Docherty writes the narrative of Lowell’s career in poetic, cultural, and political terms, as a reaction against his early affiliation with the conservative Southern New Criticism, a reaction in which American foreign policy during the Cold War, especially during the Berlin crisis and the Bay of Pigs invasion, leads Lowell to a reinterpretation of the Civil War and the westward expansion of the US into Indian lands. This allows Docherty to stage a marvelous puncturing of the concept of “America” and the imperialism it (still) supports: “The poem [“Dropping South: Brazil”] was written at the time of Lowell’s trip to Latin America, funded by the ‘Congress for Cultural Freedom’—actually, and unknown by Lowell at the time, the CIA. It is against the dominant ideology of the ‘Wasp’ that the political stance of the collection—and of the title poem itself—is made” (130).

Not only is Docherty often engaged in ideological critique, but like other hermeneutics of demystification in the enlightenment tradition, his critical discourse is explicitly situated in a contemporary predicament, a social diagnosis of the present into which he sees himself intervening: “ideology-criticism, according to which marxism claims a privileged ability to unmask ideologies in the name of revealing a truth or reality, is no longer applicable when reality itself has been thrown into question and when culture has entered the age of what Baudrillard calls ‘simulation,’ the society of the image, a society governed by representations with no prior presence or ground” (205). This is Docherty’s representation of the contemporary “reality” which compels him to develop his critical discourse: the technology-driven process of simulation that emerged in the mass media during the post-World War II period projects his concepts of textuality and interpretation. Docherty doesn’t oppose this reality in any way; rather, he enthusiastically embraces it and suggests that his hermeneutic, as well as much contemporary culture, reflects it. Since media simulation results from the post-war expansion of capital in the communications industries, whereby technological development was enlisted quite directly in supporting the economic cycle, Docherty’s enthusiasm can easily be seen as too uncritical.

More precisely, his failure to establish a calculated and differential relation to his own social ground poses problems for his concept of history and the political agenda it is designed to support. Docherty’s postmodern refusal of master narratives interestingly follows Habermas (whom he otherwise opposes) in construing modernity as a cultural consciousness that appears at different historical moments: the Reformation and the Renaissance, for example, or the eighteenth century and the French revolution, or the early twentieth-century aesthetic avant-gardes—moments, in other words, when tradition was questioned and the self-awareness of novelty emerged. Unlike Habermas, however, Docherty sees postmodernism existing as a possibility at every moment of self-conscious modernity, existing as a cultural path not always taken, but allowing him to make such assertions as that Ibsen’s *Ghosts*
is “one of the first postmodern plays,” and that Pound’s criticism of Eliot’s working drafts “makes the poem not a modernist poem at all in the final analysis, but rather a postmodern poem” (148, 168). When Addison is seen as “at least one eighteenth-century precursor” of postmodernism, in contrast to Swift and Pope (thank heavens!), one begins to think that Docherty is merely postmodernizing everything with an obvious loss of historical difference. Docherty’s postmodern hermeneutic of parodic simulation, especially when it produces highly elaborate filigrees of intertextual connections, walks a tightrope between the erasure of historical difference and the proliferation of historical narratives as so many private language-games, raising concerns about the possibility of intersubjective communication to ground political action in social institutions. Docherty actually doesn’t venture much beyond the academic consumption of cultural works, almost all of which are elite (the exceptions: Broadcast News and Rambo), but without presenting detailed considerations of the social and institutional contexts in which they circulate and are consumed. Hence, his effort to think the social and avoid a banalization of the political leaves the place of social agency undertheorized. Granted intellectuals should be wary of participating in government social projects and can no longer set themselves up as a vanguard political party, one might still wonder whether their dedication to “mere” thinking wouldn’t be just as narrow and banal as the “mere” political that represses the social—repressive, in this case, of the institutional conditions in which thinking is socialized. In fact, Docherty’s conception of the present moment is somewhat impoverished, narrowed as it is to an emphasis on the “aesthetic” in postmodernism (as opposed to the technological, say, or the economic), to media simulation (but without a decisive engagement with popular cultural forms), and to two main ideological determinations, patriarchy and American imperialism (formidable opponents, yet never unalloyed with other ideologies in the texts he examines and in their reception, which he doesn’t).

These are problems with which any political criticism in the wake of Marxism must struggle. Docherty’s most important contribution is perhaps to situate the debates within a more precise and sophisticated understanding of postmodernism, while offering many carefully nuanced analyses of texts and concepts. Some of his most incisive critiques, aside from the readings of Eliot and Lowell, take on de Man’s repression of history and the status of representation in contemporary democratic politics. And by far one of the most curious things about the book is the index: it contains three sections, “Proper names,” “Subjects,” and “Nature reserve,” the latter of which includes words for flora and fauna that figure in Docherty’s analyses, allowing the reader to construct a labyrinthine “ecosphere” with its own political agenda: “The labyrinth should be mutable, and its internal mutability or intrinsic heterogeneity will make it not just a spatial labyrinth but also a historical epoch, a ‘poetry of the future’ constructing a history in which the reader articulates her or his own ‘eco-historicity’ and becomes able to inhabit the ‘nature reserve’ and keep it going” (242).

I finished this book with much admiration for the lucidity, learning, and political commitment of its arguments, grateful for—even if mindful of—the questions it provoked me to ask. Docherty’s work deserves a wider audience, not only because his books formulate timely and provocative projects, but
because, as an Irishman teaching at University College, Dublin, he indicates the varied and productive uses to which British materialist critics are putting poststructuralism, redirecting the cultural political debates that have engaged Europe since 1968.

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Lawrence Venuti


It feels as though there is more than one book in this book, but that is a good thing. It is various and inclusive, its chapters characteristically presenting many subtitled facets. The fact that it is called Secret Rites and Secret Writing will make many readers think of a comparison with Annabel Patterson's Censorship and Interpretation, but it is quite different in kind, coming in a sense both before and after Patterson, much less based on a theory, more detailed and more factually based. Theory comes up against historical scepticism and the competing claims of close contextualization. There is also a critical mission. Self-confessedly Potter writes in defence of literature between 1641 and 1660, some of which has been undervalued, and she touches on a very great number of texts in many different modes, but, selecting from that period royalist writers, she is concerned with the kinds of censorship and encoding which seem to govern their oppositional activities. This is both a contribution towards the literary history of the period and also a consideration of the conditions of mind and communication within the period. If it had a more doctrinaire theoretical base, it might gain in confidence, but much of its value as questioning review would be removed.

A very broad introductory chapter sets out to describe the conditions of authorship and distribution in the period, finally coming to question how much there was a single ideological style in all the varied, though mainly satirical and nostalgic, vocabularies of resistance. After outlining the control of the press and the practices of unlicensed publication, Potter suggests the range of possible situations by tracing the cases of three very different printers: Richard Royston, propagandist closely associated with royalist divines; John Crouch, printer of "low" royalist propaganda and newsletters in 1647–49; and Humphrey Moseley, printer of choice poetry showing nostalgia for the pre-war culture. She also broaches large questions as to how much economics—sale of copies in a greedily marketplace—determined the huge growth of publication, and how much ideology.

The second chapter is also very broad, and begins with matter which many would discard as subliterary, but which is here typically included. Investigating how secret languages may work, Potter begins with details of actual Civil War ciphers, used for state letters, then moves on to discuss universal languages, shorthand, constructions of royal iconography (as in the infamous case of the anti-royalist misunderstandings of the foreign picture captured from a ship off Sussex in 1644), chronograms, anagrams, and the uses of free
translation as a means of encoding the present. Then, having opened up the whole question of encoding and interpretation, she moves, via “The King’s Cabinet Opened,” to sophisticated artifacts, to Cleveland’s “The King’s Disguise,” Lely’s 1647 portrait of the king with Prince James, and Lovelace’s poem about it. In a rather clever way, not perhaps evident at first, the chapter has travelled from ciphers which have special, specific meanings to those needing more interpretation, in situations in which language has become “character.” We have established a flexible understanding of encoding and interpretation, and made considerable tributes to those last poems.

The third chapter isolates two favorite genres in this literature: romance and tragicomedy. The subsections again traverse a wide field: romance as roman-a-clef; a discussion of the popularity of tragicomedy; pamphlet tragedies; Gondibert; the figuration of Prince Charles in some works; and tragicomic celebrations of the Restoration. This and the second chapter have been predominantly about the culture of a repressed community, and about how “royalist communities coped with defeat by adopting a philosophy of secrecy.”

In the fourth chapter the emphasis changes to be more about self-imaging, starting off with the issue of borrowing: that is to say, it is mainly about self-dramatization through appropriation of the work of dramatists. This chapter is again wide-ranging, not constricting itself to royalist writing and including mention of Jacobean drama, in the setting up of its argument. We discuss not only the way the anthologist Cotgrave plundered earlier dramatists but also how appropriation may have worked in Webster. Then, via Jonson’s Discoveries—raising the issue of how to separate the identity of a writer from his sources—we come to the curious case of Samuel Sheppard and The Fairy King. Sheppard is the kind of bizarre figure we must thank this book for publicizing: he was a royalist propagandist who was a blatant borrower of material and a compulsive self-publicist, apparently writing simultaneously for rival journals. Potter seizes on this interesting, if minor, case as symptomatic, because of an incoherence in the sense of self, and parallels it mischievously with the case of Marvell, another magpie with an elusive self-definition. She speculates about an angst in difficult times, whether mystification in both these cases might be “intended to keep them from understanding themselves.” Then, continuing the psychological speculation, she cites other cases of incoherent self-presentation, of John Gibson and his Commonplace Book in Durham jail, of wild parodies of Fast Days, of the possible use of drunkenness as a mask: “Prophet and drunk are variations on the royalist type I have already discussed of the melancholy man with his bursts of wild laughter.” Incoherence may also be used as a cover for politics. And so to Pindaric Odes, and from inspiration to witchcraft, to tales of monstrous pregnancies and notions of “reason overcast,” the common thread being the idea of a writer being taken over by other forces, and wishing perhaps to be taken over, hiding in the crowd, some of this possibly connecting with a diffidence about appearing in print. Those who have studied oppositional political writings of other periods, from the Jacobean to the Restoration and the Augustan, will recognize many features here. This is perhaps the most speculative chapter, almost straining to hold itself together, yet it is full of potential interest.

After these dislocations comes, in the fifth chapter, a source of constancy
for these writers, an anchor, the figure of Charles. More specifically, the study is of how royalist writers reconciled his picture as a "king of images rather than words" to their needs. Noting the king's preference in his portraits not for iconic self-representation but for interiorized or dramatized representation, she reviews images of him showing constancy in suffering, parallels to David, and elements of Christ-like martyrdom. She notes that the famous frontispiece to *Eikon Basilike* was an embarrassment to some royalists, for all its power with others. The royal actor is reviewed, in the context of the art of dying speeches, as is the royal author, though here she takes a conservative line, downplaying the king's part and elevating Gauden's and others'. Then, moving on through the chronology of events, she discusses the rival images of the king, following *Eikon Basilike*, and royalist elegies, which seem to distance themselves from "female," suffering models of the dead monarch. Here Potter illustrates her point by contrasting the "male," active representations of Cromwell. Finally, there is discussion of Davenant's rewriting of *Macbeth*.

From all this various material Potter draws three conclusions. First, that it is difficult to distinguish puritan and royalist styles, but that mystery is an advantage to any party in power, so that the opposition tends to create its own mysteries, to match. Secondly, and very sanely, she is sceptical of crude applications of theories about censorship, partly because they are often contradictory: something cannot be subversive unless it is intelligible to most people at the time. To this critical reservation she adds a psychological speculation, that the fear exhibited by these encoding writers may be not so much of the censor as of censure. Thirdly, she identifies, as Chapter V has indicated, that for these dislocated writers, Charles I became a much-needed symbol of constancy.

Why all these mystifications in royalist writers? Not because of the single political circumstances of censorship, but, partly at least, Potter suggests, because writers themselves need mysteries in their craft. Psychological considerations come into contention with contextual analyses of political discourse. The final effect of the book is, in fact, not to come up with any too simple answers. In some ways one can see a parallel between the procedures of the author and those of some of the writers she describes, particularly those who hedge their identities in a taking on of other discourses in fear of censure: although there are arguments and conclusions to be found, they are not so much stamped on the materials by some process of ruthless selection as discovered gradually by the finding of signs. The manner of coming to conclusions is not bold; the sea is troubled. But I am sure that many will use this book, over the years, as a catholic review of royalist writing during the Interregnum, and will be grateful for the perspectives it offers and for the occasional diffidence that accompanies its dutiful inclusiveness. I for one am glad that it shows deep immersion over many years in the complexity of primary materials, that it breaks out of the established literary canon, and that it is not hag-ridden (if you will pardon the sexist term) by theory.

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Cedric C. Brown

Andrew Ross's No Respect is a book that wants very much to be liked, and Ross works hard to achieve that end: "The intellectual and the popular: Irving Howe and John Waters, Susan Sontag and Ethel Rosenberg, Dwight MacDonald and Bill Cosby. . . . All feature in Andrew Ross's lively history and critique of modern American culture." That's how the jacket blurb describes No Respect, and the description is apt insofar as Ross forces a "lively" confrontation of serious culture with the culture that intellectuals usually refer to as merely, and perhaps dangerously, popular. It's giving away none of the suspense to say that Ross undertakes this project for political (specifically left political) ends; quoting again from the book jacket, "Proposing a new politics of knowledge and cultural contestation, Ross draws lessons that are bound to change the way we debate the contradictions of everyday life." But that's just where the difficulty lies: in his desire to be popular with readers, and to get respect, Ross blunts the edges of what should have been—or at least could have been—a much more exciting and pointed read of America's "intellectual" industry, one that might in fact have changed "the way we debate the contradictions of everyday life." However consciously, he allows the economics of blurb-speak to take over and run a project that might have ended up both more valuable and also more controversial. In this, of course, he is not the first professor to discover—perhaps too late—that encounters with popular culture are more like a game of three-card monty than a panel at the MLA.

Which is not to say that No Respect isn't in many ways an informative and congenial read. Additionally, given the publisher, and the publicity attendant upon Ross himself, the book will likely acquire a certain prominence in the area of "cultural studies," which is the academic growth industry of the 90s. In this context, then, No Respect defines an interesting, perhaps even indicative, site of contestation, as Ross might call it.

The book is basically a history comprised of a polemical introduction followed by six chronologically arranged chapters leading up to a concluding chapter that deals with the current situation of the intellectual "new class." The argument is spun out of the issue of respect: respect of intellectuals for themselves, and for the popular culture that they periodically address, both for and against. Ross proposes a dialectical model of popular culture to replace the older, less accurate model of a "mass culture," which is "imposed upon a passive populace like so much standardized fodder" (4): "In short, we cannot attribute any purity of political expression to popular culture, although we can locate its power to identify ideas and desires that are relatively opposed, alongside those that are clearly complicit, to the official culture." (10). There is perhaps less novelty in this observation than Ross implies, but the point is still worth making. It is particularly worth making for him, given the newly prominent role he wishes to establish for intellectuals. The history of popular culture, he says, "cannot simply be a history of producers," "It must also be a history of intellectuals—in particular, those experts in culture whose traditional business is to define what is popular and what is legitimate, who patrol the ever shifting borders of popular and legitimate
taste, who supervise the passports, the temporary visas, the cultural identities, the threatening ‘alien’ elements, and the deportation orders, and who occasionally make their own adventurist forays across the border” (5). That sounds pretty exciting, particularly when the popular culture under discussion is arguably the only culture we have: “[I]t is popular culture, and not the work of ‘serious’ American writers, artists, musicians, and thinkers, that is often, and increasingly, heralded as the nation’s central and lasting cultural achievement, at home and abroad” (7). The point, clearly, is to put intellectuals in the picture, to get them to where the action is.

Once they are there, Ross—writing as an intellectual—is embarked on a much higher stakes game than is available in your usual academic commentary. He achieves, rhetorically at least, the common ground that left intellectuals have often sought. And with this identification of a common cause comes a new source of vicarious power, notoriety and fame, ostensibly available to us all:

My own history of intellectuals is methodically governed by no strict or absolute definitions of the role or function of intellectuals. It includes, among others, Lenny Bruce, Ethel Rosenberg, Andy Warhol, John Waters, and Grace Jones, just as it includes Dwight MacDonald, Susan Sontag, Marshall McLuhan, Amiri Baraka, and Andrea Dworkin. The diversity of this gathering is hardly surprising if one acknowledges the enormous difference in style between intellectuals of the Old Left, bohemian intellectuals of the Underground subcultures, the counterculture and the New Left, Pop intellectuals and celebrities, and, lastly, intellectuals of the liberation movements—the four primary generational, cultural moments with which I deal. (10–11)

This summary not only defines the chronology with which Ross will be concerned, it also plots the strategy of No Respect.

His chapters begin with a discussion of the Rosenbergs, and move through considerations of the Cold War, Hip culture, McLuhan and the global village, 60s camp, and contemporary debates over pornography, ending with an expectable, if apparently heart-felt, appeal for action on the part of the putative “new class” of intellectuals, as constituted under the regime of a globalized information/service economy, and as organized by the increasingly pervasive agenda of “political correctness”:

A politics that only preaches about the sexism, racism, and militarism while neglecting to rearticulate the popular, resistant appeal of the disrespect [inherent in popular forms] will not be a popular politics, and will lose ground in any contest with the authoritarian populist languages that we have experienced under Reaganism and Thatcherism. . . . [T]he challenge of such a politics is greater than ever, because, in an age of expert rule, the popular is perhaps the one field in which intellectuals are least likely to be experts. And in an age of radical pluralism where the politically unified guarantees of past intellectuals’ traditions no longer hold sway, the need to search for common ground, however temporary, from which to contest the existing definitions of a popular-democratic culture has never been more urgent. (231–32)
I have only admiration and sympathy for Ross's position, particularly his cautions regarding the levelling that can result from an obsessive preoccupation with political hyper-correction. My objections have to do not so much with what he does, as with what he leaves undone.

His history of intellectual disputes is well documented and informative, if the topics (the Rosenbergs, McCarthyism, Stalin and the American Left, and so on) are often quite familiar. What the book lacks is the presence of the very popular culture it purports to address, along with a consideration of the knowledge industry of which intellectuals, universities, and publishers are all parts. The absence of the one may be inadvertent, perhaps even inescapable for an "intellectual" project such as this, but the absence of the other suggests limitations of a more serious sort—limitations relating to the cultural "respect" about which intellectuals have such ambivalent feelings, especially in the domain of info/serv.

Ross's discussion of pornography is indicative in this way. His chapter "The Popularity of Pornography" deals with a question that contemporary intellectuals have vigorously, and variously, debated; namely, the question whether porn is good or bad, particularly with regard to the issues of race, class, and gender, and especially as these relate to the rights of repressed minorities. Here, Ross picks a politically vexed and revelatory topic, of just the sort that a study such as his—a study of intellectuals and popular culture—would be expected to engage. But the revelations have more to do with the shortcomings of this book, than with its achievements. While there is here—as elsewhere—a clear delineation of factional and political differences, there is also a conspicuous lack of primary text. Ross refers to porn (much as he does to television and popular fiction); he names titles, he recounts the plots of certain videos, but he never presents his texts directly, whether visual or written. "To be as popular as it is," Ross writes, "pornography's capacity to bodily arouse its variety of consumers must be acknowledged to relate in some way to real needs and to existing configurations of desire and fantasy-structures" (190). Yes, obviously, but what might these real needs be? About that we will hear very little. Consequently, the "pleasure" that problematizes Ross's exposition is both safe politically, and also arid. The body he addresses is one without senses; it is a body of the intellect only.

As to why the sex of No Respect is so politely safe, and why in general there is no threat to the respect which continues to define the "symbolic capital" of academia, this has to do with a second weakness of the book, which is Ross's failure to situate his project within the entertainment industry of which academic popular culture is merely a small and—in economic terms, at least—a very minor part. TV and porn—those are the big time; universities and academic publication are not. Nevertheless, the professors do perform useful, "dialectical" errands within the larger cultural marketplace. Ross, however, seems better at imagining dialectics when they are played out by "popular" figures, such as Bill Cosby and Rodney Dangerfield:

[W]e could take the voices of "Cosby" and "Rodney" here as representative of what popular culture constantly works to do, not always wholly successfully, in incorporating popular perceptions, aspirations, and resentments that are reshaped and reaffiliated in the course of its ap-
peals, however contradictory, to legitimate cultural authorities like doctors and professors. Without that all-round, dialectical appeal, to ordinary self-respect as well as to cultural authority, most people would not believe in "Cosby," or "Rodney," let alone love them, as audiences clearly do. (4)

One grows uneasy with such sweeping, and undifferentiated, generalizations about what audiences "believe in" and "love." (Is it academics being referred to, or teenage boys; or is it women, or people of color? The homeless maybe? Who?) It is not this, I'm objecting to, however, but to Ross's apparently confusing the power that popular texts attribute to intellectuals ("legitimate cultural authorities") with the actual role of intellectuals, particularly as they come directly to engage and (consequently) to work for the information economy.

The end credits of Rodney Dangerfield's film, Back to School, make a nice, concluding parable in this connection. Ross has a good deal to say about the film in his introduction, where he also discusses Aretha Franklin's hit version of Otis Redding's "Respect." What he doesn't mention is that this song plays behind the end credits of Back to School, the clear message being that Dangerfield's character, who goes back to college along with his teenage son, has finally gotten the "respect" that wealth and economic power alone couldn't bring. Much the same is true of Dangerfield himself. The perennial Tonight Show guest and professional older guy won new respect (and cash) in the 80s by playing ("himself") in films popular with college audiences, and by acting in commercials for Lite Beer, which the Miller Brewing Company aggressively markets on college campuses (and which the film itself unapologetically foregrounds). The university makes itself available—"dialectically" perhaps—to the entertainment industry, just as the University of Wisconsin rented its particular campus out to Orion Pictures. Obviously, there is no difference within the domain of info/serv between figures such as Rodney and those whom Ross refers to as "legitimate authorities." Both are representatives subject to economic and cultural appropriation, as he found out himself, after the publication of No Respect, when he became the subject of a New York Times Magazine story on the annual MLA meeting. Depending on how one reads the story, Ross is portrayed either as a dashing young trend-setter, or else he's getting set up (apparently with his unwitting collusion) as an ideological fashion victim. Or, speaking dialectically, maybe it's both at once. The point is that intellectuals no longer exist outside the culture of the popular (if they ever did), least of all intellectuals who work very hard to be popular, so that any critique which fails to deal with its own material and ideological conditions of production becomes inevitably less credible as a result.

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Jerry Herron

From the outset, the editors and some of the contributors to this volume seem a little abashed about their subject matter. While not exactly defensive, there is an effort to substantiate the legitimacy of this enterprise, an enterprise the editors term the “first serious academic exploration of the many lives of the Batman.” Just as the producers of comics have tried to convince consumers in recent years that “comics aren’t just for kids,” there is an effort here to declare superheroes worthy of serious academic consideration. Over a half century of production has lent a certain air of legitimacy to comic books, and when this is coupled with the pointed social commentary of recent “graphic novels” and the spectacular success of the Batman film, it is fair to assume that there is sufficient grist for the academic mill. Belying their occasional whimsical titles, the ten essays that make up this volume serve as a useful and wide-ranging compilation, although perhaps not wide-ranging enough.

Four of the essays serve largely to explore aspects of the production process. Bill Boichel’s opening essay, “Batman: Commodity as Myth,” does a good job of establishing the groundwork for the essays that follow. He provides a brief history of comics and comic books in general, and a more detailed history of Batman in all his various incarnations. Boichel also charts the seemingly incessant personality changes that the character goes through, and comments intelligently on the reasons behind these shifts. This idea, of Batman as an extraordinarily “mobile signifier” is an idea that is taken up at length by later essayists.

The collection also includes interviews with Dennis O’Neil and Frank Miller which serve to complement each other rather nicely. It was O’Neil (as writer) and Neal Adams (as artist) who returned to a somewhat darker interpretation of Batman after the 1960’s version, who was little more than a Boy Scout in a cape and cowl. O’Neil is the current editor of Batman and Detective Comics for DC as well as the creator of the “bat-bible,” a set of rules and principles that govern the character. O’Neil provides an insider’s perspective on the comic industry and discusses the technical aspects of production and the impact of fans on comic books. It is argued here (as elsewhere in this volume) that comic book fans wield a reasonable degree of influence over the final product via letters, fan clubs and conventions. Perhaps the ultimate realization of this influence was the decision to let fans phone in their votes as to whether the second Robin should be killed off. In a close vote (5343–5271) readers ultimately turned thumbs down on the Boy Wonder.

In his interview, Frank Miller refers to this episode as “the most cynical thing that particular publisher has ever done.” This comment reflects Miller’s general antipathy to the comics industry as a whole. A former writer for both Marvel and DC, he was the creator of the spectacularly successful The Dark Knight Returns, a four-part comic book (actually, “graphic novel” is the preferred term at present) which featured a cynical, middle-aged Batman who comes out of retirement to wage war in a chaotic, postmodern Gotham City.
It is this vision of Batman upon which the 1989 film was ostensibly based, a film about which Miller says, "I disagreed with almost everything in it." While his objections are not detailed, Miller does philosophize at length about heroes and Batman's psyche. As he notes of comic books, there is "no form of entertainment where the idea of the hero has been more fully explored." Miller's distinctly romantic view toward heroes is contrasted with the more cynical view of Alan Moore, co-creator of *Watchmen*, yet another highly acclaimed "graphic novel." Taken in tandem, O'Neil as an industry insider and Miller as an industry outsider provide a good perspective on the potentialities inherent in the Batman character and the comic book business as a whole.

The "production" section of the book is wrapped up by Eileen Meehan's "'Holy Commodity Commodity Fetish, Batman!' The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext." Meehan approaches Batman not as a fictional creation or popular hero, but as an especially lucrative product line of Warner Communications. The result is a thorough, if somewhat dry account of the way Batman is marketed. While she articulates the selling process meticulously, the question of what makes this commodity so appealing is never directly addressed.

The remaining essays focus either on Batman or some aspect of his audience. The question of who actually reads comic books is a topic that pops up repeatedly. Meehan mentions at one point that Marvel has found their average reader to be a 20 year old male. Dennis O'Neil states that the average DC reader is a 24 year old male. This issue is taken up most directly by Patrick Parsons in "Batman and His Audience: The Dialectic of Culture." The title of this essay is somewhat misleading, because Parsons is not particularly interested in Batman or his audience. His scope is much wider than that. Through a wealth of statistics and tables, he charts the ebb and flow of the comic book industry's fortunes. He offers a decade by decade analysis of the comic book phenomenon, and is especially thorough in delineating the reasons for the decline of comic book popularity after the early 1950's. By extension, the shift in target audience from adolescent to young adult is dealt with as well. Current readers of comic books are analyzed in terms of age, gender, and education level, and Parsons closes with an insightful discussion of the influence of audience on the content of comic books.

Utilizing a much more narrow focus than Parsons, folklorists Camille Bacon-Smith and Tyrone Yarborough detail the reaction to the *Batman* film by a diverse group of fans in "Batman: The Ethnography." Focusing on the audience instead of the film, their interviews range from a DC employee to a group of patrons exiting the movie theater. While there was almost universal acclaim for Jack Nicholson's performance as the Joker, the general pattern was that the more knowledgeable viewers were about the character of the Batman, the less they liked the film. Miller's view of the film (quoted above) serves to substantiate this claim, and the authors relate this disenchanted to the negative reaction Star Trek fans had towards *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. It seems fans are put in something of a double-bind in that they are pleased to see a personal favorite hit the big screen, but are dismayed at the way their own vision of a series or character is compromised and/or betrayed by the filmmakers.
In a similar vein, Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins take an ethnographic approach to the 1960's *Batman* television program in "Same Bat Channel, Different Bat Times: Mass Culture and Popular Memory." Interviewing adults who had first encountered the series as children, they explore the idea of "popular memory" as a "place where private and public pasts meet." The essay reveals, in entertaining fashion, the ageless pattern in which people revere the cultural production of their youth and revile the cultural production aimed at their own children.

The final "reception" oriented essay is Andy Medhurst's gay reading of Batman in "Batman, Deviance and Camp." While this is the most engagingly written essay in the collection, it is easily the weakest. Early on, Medhurst devotes considerable attention to Fredric Wertham's anti-comic diatribe, *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954). It was here that Wertham declared the Batman and Robin scenario to be "like the wish dream of two homosexuals living together." Medhurst has a little fun with Wertham's homophobic rantings and is content, finally, to describe him as "crazed." Unfortunately, Medhurst doesn't stop there. He goes on to declare that commentators who protest against Wertham's homosexual reading are merely revealing the other side of the coin of bigotry. Medhurst is missing the point. Both Dennis O'Neil and Frank Miller address Batman's sexuality in this volume, and neither attempts to refute homosexual readings of the Dynamic Duo by thrusting upon their hero a rampaging heterosexuality. Far from it. According to O'Neil's "bat-bible," Batman is "celibate." More explicitly, Miller says, "Batman isn't gay. His sexual urges are so drastically sublimated into crime-fighting that there's no room for any other emotional activity. . . . He'd be much healthier if he were gay." The same might well be said of earlier detective heroes like Sherlock Holmes or Philip Marlowe, both of whom have been declared homosexual at some point. Their heroism, as well as Batman's, is characterized by obsessive behavior and a certain alienation from their society. Any kind of sexual interest can only detract from their brand of heroism. In addition to Medhurst's knee-jerk cry of bigotry, there is also his outlandish contention that "Wertham's reading of the Dubious Duo has been so extensively cited as to pass into general consciousness." Perhaps the millions of children, adolescents and adults who flocked to the *Batman* film were well versed in the writings of Fredric Wertham, but it seems unlikely.

As one might expect, Medhurst is hostile towards the recent Dark Knight incarnation of Batman. For a man whose Batman will "always be Adam West," a return to a darker version of the character is interpreted as nothing less than a "reheterosexualization." As Medhurst observes in a somewhat homophobic aside, "(his humorlessness, fondness for violence and obsessive monomania seem to me exemplary qualities for a heterosexual man)." This insistent sexual analysis becomes both tedious and absurd, somewhat along the lines of a "bestial" reading of the relationship between Winnie the Pooh and Christopher Robin. Medhurst does have some interesting things to say about camp, but those insights tend to be lost in an otherwise ill-conceived essay.

The volume comes to a close with its two most thought-provoking essays. Jim Collins's "Batman: The Movie, Narrative: The Hyperconscious," uses *The Dark Knight Returns* and the *Batman* film to explore the notion that hypercon-
sciousness of popular culture is "the distinguishing feature of recent popular narrative." Batman serves as a good example of this phenomenon, because the recent incarnations of Batman offer only a small sample of the Batman narratives that are omnipresent in our culture. These range from reprints of the earliest comics to reruns of the 1960's television show. Popular culture is no longer relegated to history, but is available to consumers in something very close to its original form. Current Batman texts not only reflect a hyper-consciousness of popular culture in general, but previous Batman texts in particular. This results in a new kind of narrative which Collins terms "narration by amalgamation." These "aggregate narratives" appeal to "a series of audiences varying in degrees of sophistication and stored cultural knowledge." This is an interesting idea, especially when coupled with the findings of the Bacon-Smith/Yarborough study. Director Tim Burton may have presented audiences with an "aggregate narrative," but reaction to the film was clearly equivocal. While the movie was an unquestionable financial success, for many viewers there seemed to be a negative correlation between knowledge about Batman and enjoyment of the film.

William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson share Collins' interest in omnipresent Batman narratives in "I'm Not Fooled By That Cheap Disguise." Instead of addressing the issue of narratives however, they focus their attention on Batman himself. With so many Batmans available to the consumer, which is the "real" Batman? As it turns out he proves a fairly elusive quarry. Comparing Batman to characters such as Sherlock Holmes, James Bond and Philip Marlowe, the authors declare that what differentiates Batman from these other heroes is that "Batman has no primary urtext set in a specific period: When this is coupled with 'the non-accruing nature of events" in the Batman saga, we are left with very little in the way of definitive character traits. While their point is well taken, the authors may overestimate the usefulness of an urtext in defining a character's "true" nature. To use one of their own examples, Sherlock Holmes is blessed with a fairly substantial urtext, but this century has seen no less than three "definitive" Holmeses, all of whom differ markedly from each other. William Gillette offered up a romantic Holmes, Basil Rathbone gave us a gentlemanly Holmes, and Jeremy Brett created a more waspish, egotistical Holmes. As useful as an urtext may be, it is open to highly selective interpretation.

In an effort to pin down their subject, they boil down the Batman saga to five categories (Traits/Attributes, Events, Recurrent Characters, Setting, Iconography). What emerges from this is the idea that Batman is "primarily defined by [his] iterative actions," that is, crime fighting. This established, Batman appears no different from most other detectives. On the one hand he is an alienated hero who operates by his own code, yet on the other hand he is a "supporter of the hegemonic order" and "an agent of political domination." The authors go on to suggest that recent Batman texts (e.g. The Dark Knight Returns, Arkham Asylum) evidence a reappraisal of Batman's historically hegemonic role. Instead of a fanatical defender of property rights, Batman is seen as a potential outlaw who possesses the capability of representing the interests of the underclass. The irony of this is, as the authors point out, "The contradictions of capitalism would thus permit the commodification of criticisms as long as they resulted in profits."
Despite the book's relative breadth of subject matter, there is one article that is notable due to its absence. In their Foreward, the editors describe Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* and *Batman: The Movie* as a "sudden irruption into the field of signs, a moment in the popular hero's life that is without parallel or precedent." This seems accurate enough, and it was principally these two texts that account for the "Bat-Summer of 1989" and, one suspects, this book as well. Why then, is neither of them more directly addressed? The effect of these texts is carefully scrutinized, but the texts themselves go largely unremarked upon. What this collection needs is an essay which analyzes what is going on in *The Dark Knight Returns*, the way its ideas were either picked up or ignored by the film, and why they both proved so astonishingly popular. While the book is hampered by this oversight, as well as sloppy proofreading, it should prove of interest to the reader interested in cultural studies. By and large, this examination of the phenomenon of a super hero is a stimulating and worthwhile effort.

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