Criticism

Volume 31 | Issue 4 Article 8

1989

Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

The Use and Abuse of History: Recent Developments in Feminist Theory

Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England by Mary Poovey. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988. Pp. xi + 282. $39.95, cloth; $14.95, paper.

"Am I that Name?": Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History by Denise Riley. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988. Pp. vi + 126. $29.95, cloth; $12.95, paper.

Feminist Literary History by Janet Todd. New York: Routledge, 1988. Pp. 162. $37.50, cloth; $12.95, paper.

Feminist scholarship has played a decisive part in the regeneration and expansion of historical studies in recent years, opening up rich and productive areas of intellectual inquiry in literary, cultural and social history and in related disciplines and interdisciplinary fields. It is hardly coincidental that the questioning of traditional conceptualizations and periodizations of the past has intensified at the same time as this unprecedented expansion of women's history, alongside a growing body of work on the history of racial, ethnic, sexual and other minorities. Yet recentering history around women's lives and experiences does not in itself resolve problems regarding the nature and status of historical knowledge which have been raised by feminist theory. Rather, it embroils the writer in new conceptual difficulties that are not merely of esoteric interest but have direct consequences for her choice of methodology and argument. Can women be conceptualized as an autonomous social group for the purposes of historical research? How does women's history affect existing models of periodization? What is the nature of the relationship between "female" and "feminist" and to what extent is this relationship historically overdetermined? How is female agency to be conceptualized in examining the patriarchal social and ideological structures of the past?

These and related questions are addressed in the texts under review, which are all concerned to argue the centrality of history to feminist literary and cultural analysis. The directions and emphases of each author differ; Todd's work offers a defence of a relatively traditional model of literary history, while both Poovey and Riley draw on Foucaldian terminology to develop a broader notion of the textual and of the discursive construction of gender. All three works, however, defend the importance of a sociohistorically informed approach to feminist issues and relate their theoretical concerns to the analysis of specific aspects of English society. Each text also argues that women's history cannot be treated in isolation but that "woman" is a category which is always overdetermined by multiple social and ideological factors. While it would be incautious to generalize from such a limited sample, the texts under review can perhaps be seen as symptomatic of an increasing body of feminist work which is either abandoning or radically problematizing models of sexual difference developed in psychoanalytical and deconstructive theory in favor of more detailed and specific analyses of particular constructions of femininity as shaped by multiple variables of historical and cultural background, of class, race and sexual preference.

Of course, the feminist interest in history has not remained untouched by

critiques of historiography which have occurred both inside and outside of feminism. In the context of an Anglo-American and largely empirical historical tradition, the impact of poststructuralist theories of the text has been twofold. With regard to the content or object of historical research, such theories have encouraged much closer attention to symbolic systems of meaning—culture, discourse, ideology, literature—in the study of the past. Second, at the level of methodology, they have served to intensify awareness of the necessarily textual dimension of any process of historical reconstruction and of the writer's own investment in the articulation of a particular conception of the past. Poststructuralist theory has also influenced a European historiographical tradition implicit in much Marxist thinking about culture, a tradition which, while scornful of naive empiricism, has tended towards sweeping and totalizing models of the historical process. Fredric Jameson observes in this context that "few enough of us are engaged any more in writing literary history, at least of the narrative kind . . . though we may think of doing criticism historically, which is a somewhat different matter."[1] Although the complete excision of narrative from history may be neither possible nor desirable (as Jameson's own work clearly demonstrates), the specific field of literary studies has indeed seen a shift away from an Auerbachian model of literary history as a narrative account of the aesthetic masterpieces of Western civilisation. New forms of historical analysis often link literary and non-literary texts, prefer detailed and small-scale studies to grand historical generalizations and stress the complex and contradictory relations between literary, cultural and social structures rather than reducing a text to an exemplary manifestation of a pre-existing *Zeitgeist*. The appeal to "history" signals in this context a desire on the part of the writer to situate a text in relation to temporally specific and diverse social and cultural determinants governing its production and/or reception, rather than invoking a pre-given consensus as to the nature and meaning of historical processes. This question remains a problematic and contested one—nowhere more clearly than in feminist analysis, which has developed diverse and often conflicting accounts of the status and significance of history and processes of social change.

Through such earlier books as *Women's Friendship in Literature* and *Sensibility: An Introduction*, Janet Todd has established herself as a significant presence in feminist and eighteenth-century literary studies. Her new work *Feminist Literary History* is presented as a defense of the claims of "history" against theory—that is, as a validation of the feminist literary history practised by Elaine Showalter and others against the criticism it has received in recent years from feminist theorists influenced by poststructuralism, such as Toril Moi, Mary Jacobus and Alice Jardine. Todd forcefully criticizes what she sees as the apoliticism and elitism implicit in dominant forms of French feminist theory, arguing that psychoanalysis in particular has proved itself of questionable value in addressing the politics of literature and gender. Instead, she advocates the practice of a "kind of historically specific, archival, ideologically aware but still empirically based enterprise, using a sense of specific genre as well as notions of changing female experience" (p. 7). While defending the importance of a historical approach to women's experience, Todd indicates some of the limitations of a "gynocritical" model of feminist literary history grounded in a notion of women's literature as an autonomous tradi-

tion. Such a model, she suggests, is blind to the diverse ways in which women's cultural production is always influenced across gender lines, while simultaneously encouraging the critic to project her own interests unreflectingly onto the past, assuming a commonality of women's experiences that is insufficiently sensitive to historical difference. Rather than being too historical, in other words, feminist literary history has not been historical enough, and Todd argues for greater attention to empirical questions and archival work as well as suggesting that American feminism could benefit from more sustained engagement with the category of ideology which has been so important to English feminism.

A number of the claims advanced in *Feminist Literary History* are in my opinion suggestive and potentially persuasive: the critique of the abstractness and ahistoricism of much French feminist thought, Todd's advocacy of forms of reading attentive to the strangeness and otherness of the past, her insistence that feminist literary theories need to pay much more attention to the status and significance of genre. Yet such points remain for the most part schematic and are not developed in terms of a sustained argument or conceptual framework. In her introduction, Todd states that the text is not intended as an introductory guide to feminist criticism; its discussions of particular critics are sketchy rather expository and Todd does not make any claims to offer a systematic coverage of the field. Yet as a theoretical intervention and critique the work is disappointing. It offers unnecessary background detail already familiar to anyone working in feminist criticism and ranges across a variety of disparate issues—the feminist anthology, readings of Mary Wollstonecraft, "men in feminism" and male homosexuality—without offering any adequate clarification of the project of a "feminist literary history," at a time when all these terms have been called into question. Todd does not for example discuss in any detail her understanding of the status of "literature" and its relationship to ideological and social structures, except to criticize the traditional canon. Such an account of the specificity and significance of the literary text would have been helpful in justifying her desire to defend an idea of literary history against the current trend towards broader notions of the cultural text (new historicism, an obvious context for such a discussion, merits only a very token reference.) Even more glaring is the absence of any systematic engagement with the problem of "history." Clearly, the mere evocation of the term cannot provide a solution to the problems of textual interpretation, but merely raises new questions as to the interpretative framework governing the theorist's conception of the nature and meanings of historical processes. It is precisely feminist analysis which has in recent years reemphasized that any construction of history is always partial and based on a selective reading of disparate social and cultural phenomena. This acknowledgment of the inescapable hermeneutic dimension of historical understanding does not automatically imply, as Todd seems to fear, that history is thereby reduced to nothing more that a indiscriminate plurality of competing fictions whose truth status cannot be meaningfully subjected to any form of empirical verification. It does, however, place the onus on the theorist to spell out the assumptions underlying her particular conception of history, assumptions which in turn imply a specific politics and a social theory, however inchoate, of the nature and causes of historical change. Todd's own un-

derstanding of history appears to owe little to either Marx or Foucault, and she is explicitly critical of the teleological narratives which she identifies in the work of feminist literary historians such as Showalter, yet the nature of her own conception of history, of the status of the female subject, and of the social functions of literary texts is never rendered explicit.

No feminist theorist seems to deserve Todd's unconditional approval; she snipes at almost every critic she discusses, often for very odd reasons (Showalter, for example, is admonished for using too many metaphors, as well as for "dabbling in translated language"). While critical of the abstractness of much French theory, Todd's own text is often equally sweeping, relying on generalizations and emotive judgments. For example, she argues that psychoanalytical criticism "seems to grow supremely arrogant, knowing its own primacy to the literature it envelops . . . at the same time, it shores up the project of traditional criticism and takes part in the constant evasive and ultimately conservative working over of canonical texts" (p. 15). Discussing more subjective feminist American criticism, Todd is equally censorious: "During the whole of the 1970s dislike of male scholarship, logic and authority made some American criticism over personal, gushing and woolly"(p. 37). Much of the text is written in this casual, journalistic and judgmental style, and *Feminist Literary History* relies heavily on a brisk ideology of common sense. Recent critiques of subjectivity, reason or history appear in this context as the modish but ultimately silly outpourings of a few Parisian eccentrics rather than as part of a longstanding and complex, if politically ambiguous, philosophical tradition of critical engagement with the legacy of the Enlightenment.

The text gives the impression of having been hastily written; Todd's phrasing is often awkward or unclear and links between chapters or chapter sections appear intuitive rather than systematic. Todd's choice of this kind of more informal and essayistic approach is undoubtedly related to her insistence on the elitism of theory and her irritation with feminist intellectuals insufficiently attuned to the politics of the women's movement outside the academy. I would certainly agree with what I take to be Todd's basic point that feminism has failed to engage in any systematic and critical fashion with the (ambiguous) political implications of its own specialization and institutionalization within the university. Yet to refuse difficult theoretical work on such grounds is to risk an anti-intellectualist stance blind to the potentially emancipatory and critical dimension of theory as a means of interrogating commonly held assumptions and challenging simplistic dogmas, feminist or otherwise. It is all the more questionable in that Todd does not address the politics of her own institutional position, except to position herself as a victim by asserting her own "marginality," offering as evidence the hostile reviews of her books in the *Times Literary Supplement*. For a senior and much published Cambridge academic to make such claims in a seemingly unproblematical fashion merely confirms the poststructuralist insight that the process of autobiographical self-authentication may engender obfuscation rather than insight, in this case an apparent blindness to the privileges accruing from class and cultural capital.

Following on from her earlier work on ideologies of femininity in the texts of Austen and Wollstonecraft, Mary Poovey's new book *Uneven Develop-*

ments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England, offers a carefully documented analysis of the cultural construction of gender in England in the 1840s and 50s. Her object of study includes not only literature, but also a variety of other cultural texts which simultaneously expressed and shaped contemporary thinking about femininity: letters, periodicals, legal and medical texts. By drawing on the notion of a "symbolic economy," Poovey is able to move beyond the limiting conception of an autonomous "text" reflecting or subverting an unproblematically given "context" to examine the ideological conditions underpinning a variety of Victorian cultural practices. Poovey's basic thesis is that Victorian culture sought to conceptualize difference in terms of a binary polarity of gender, and that this vision of separate but supposedly equal spheres was in turn profoundly inflected by class and race interests, serving to obscure class inequalities and to underwrite the forces of imperialism. At the same time, she is anxious to stress that representations of femininity were neither homogeneous nor monolithically repressive; her title signals the claim sustained throughout the book that the construction of womanhood in mid-Victorian England was often internally contradictory and open to contestation.

In a concise and lucid introductory chapter, Poovey addresses herself to a number of theoretical issues central to the politics of culture: questions of causation, the relative significance and interdependence of factors of gender, race, and class, the relationship between determining structures and subjective agency. The chapters that follow contain detailed discussions of specific "border cases," chosen on the grounds that they exemplify particularly clearly the contradictions and tensions within Victorian constructions of gender. Poovey examines debates over the use of chloroform in childbirth, the issue of divorce as it crystallized around the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, the construction of the category of the male professional writer and governess and finally, the powerful mythic resonances generated by the figure of Florence Nightingale. In these discussions, Poovey emphasizes that ideological forms were often multi-layered and non-synchronous; emerging "scientific" models of gender in mid-Victorian England revealed the still powerful influence of more traditional, religious symbolizations of femininity.

The argument that power is never monolithic or exclusively repressive and that the theorist of culture must be able to account for resistance as well as conformism is no longer particularly new, but it is less common to find an adept illustration of this insight at the level of specific analysis. Poovey is to be credited for an account which avoids the functionalism often latent in theories of ideology while simultaneously resisting the temptation to make inflated claims for the subversiveness of women's cultural practices. Her readings are subtle, dialectical and persuasive, showing that certain Victorian images of femininity—the emergence of the figure of the professional nurse, for example—were able to at least partially satisfy some women's desires for activity and agency, while simultaneously working to legitimate bourgeois and nationalist ideologies. Again, the acknowledgment of the triple importance of race, class and gender has become ritualistic in much critical theory, but one usually finds in practice that one of these is surreptitiously elevated to the status of meta-category. For example, the oppositional status of Victorian women writers is affirmed with little attention to the race and class in-

equalities underpinning their achievements, or else the work of these same writers is read as nothing more than bourgeois mystification in obscuring the real and fundamental antagonisms of class. Poovey's combination of theory and close textual analysis succeeds in keeping constantly in play the contradictory implications of Victorian ideals of domestic femininity, which allowed limited spaces for the exercise of female agency while simultaneously helping to consolidate bourgeois hegemony and reactionary myths of English national identity.

In the penultimate paragraph of her final chapter, Poovey considers some of the broader theoretical and political implications of her analysis: "To reveal the artificiality of the Victorian definition of difference . . . is implicitly to challenge the importance of the category 'woman'; to give this category a history is implicitly, at least, to call its future into question" (p. 201). It is this same insight which provides the guiding thread of *"Am I That Name?": Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*, in which Denise Riley aims to relativize the current preoccupation with femininity as difference in feminist theory by situating it within the history of feminist thought. Like Poovey, she emphasizes that "women" is a shifting and historically variable category, not in order to align herself with a post-feminist position which argues for the redundancy of gender distinctions, but to clarify the historicity of feminism's own project. Riley argues, correctly in my view, not only for a theorizing of history but also a historicizing of theory, that is, a self-reflexive awareness of the fact that the construction of femininity in contemporary feminist thought draws on a complex intellectual history and is shaped by a variety of discursive frameworks, rather than simply arising out of an already given notion of sexual difference. Riley's analysis attempts to demonstrate that "women" is a category which fluctuates both synchronically and diachronically and whose meaning is fundamentally affected by its relationship to other shifting categories: reason, nature, etc. As a result, one cannot simply collapse together feminism and women's experience, not even by resorting to a more differentiated notion of experience which attempts to account for variables of class, race and sexual preference; there is no underlying commonality of women's lives that in itself generates a progressive or oppositional politics. Indeed Riley suggest that it is this very notion of "being a woman," the assumption that gender saturates all aspects of one's identity, that needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny, as a set of assumptions that has a specific history.

In three chapters which range from mediaeval Europe to the twentieth century, Riley examines some aspects of that history. She argues that mediaeval Christianity, while assuming the diminished rationality of women, nevertheless accorded them spiritual equality in terms of access to divine grace, and that processes of secularization led to the emergence of a concept of nature profoundly detrimental to women's rights in identifying women exclusively in terms of their sex. In the following chapter Riley examines the emergence of what she describes as a new concept of the social in nineteenth-century England; thoroughly feminized by its association with the family, hygiene, reform, philanthropy and other female concerns, the sociological domain was thus explicitly separated from the "male" realm of public and state politics. Finally, she considers the history of women's suffrage in Great Britain, showing how it has constantly veered between the proclamation of women's status as human beings and the focus on their specific interests as women.

Riley suggests that this kind of historical analysis of shifting constructions of gender provides a way of negotiating between the untenable alternatives of what she describes as deconstruction and transcendence. The feminist construction of woman is unstable, but this instability is neither random nor indeterminate but is shaped by the logic of a particular history: "equality; difference; 'different but equal'—the history of feminism since the 1790s has zigzagged and curved through these incomplete oppositions upon which it is itself precariously erected" (p. 112). The current feminist obsession with "difference"—whether defined psychologically, psychoanalytically, or through a phenomenology of the body—recognizes only half of this truth; for if women are constantly compelled to emphasize the specificity of their positioning and experiences against dominant ideologies which glibly equate the masculine with the human, feminists have been equally eager to avoid over-zealous identifications with their sex and to insist on access to the full range of human possibilities. The search for an absolute difference which can provide a grounding for feminism is thus misguided; on the contrary, Riley argues, feminism must necessarily oscillate between its concern with particularity and its insistence that women be allowed access to a full humanity.

Riley's analysis develops significant new theoretical ground in the area of feminist scholarship and her defense of her position is for the most part subtle and complex, conducted with sophistication yet also with clarity. The author reveals a welcome ability to question received wisdoms within feminist thought and to grapple with difficult conceptual problems. Particularly useful is her contention that contradictions within feminist thought cannot simply be "solved" at the level of theory, but bear witness to tensions and problems inherent to the sociohistorical development of feminism as a political movement. What seems to me the main difficulty arising from Riley's text is her reduction of gender to a function of consciousness. This move is apparent in such statements as the following: "being a woman is more accurately conceived as a state which fluctuates for the individual, depending on what she and/or others consider to characterise it" (p. 6). Thus, for Riley, "'women' are only sometimes 'women'," on the grounds that "it's not possible to live twenty-four hours a day soaked in the immediate awareness of one's sex" (p. 96). It seems to me that a confusion of issues takes place here. It is indeed plausible to suggest that women are not necessarily always conscious of their gender and Riley's analysis usefully historicizes this question, saving it from an arbitrary subjectivism by showing how this awareness of gendered identity is in turn affected by broader shifts in cultural conceptions of femininity. In other words, it is only under certain historical conditions that women self-consciously focus on gender as a defining if problematic category of their social identity (rather than on their religion, their age, or any of the other multiple aspects of identity).

At this stage, however, a crucial slippage takes place from the assertion that women are not always aware of their gendered status to the claim that "one is not always a woman." It is here that I would disagree with Riley's position as both voluntarist and idealist. Gender is not simply determined by conscious attitude or choice of identity, but constitutes a fundamental underlying structure of social organization which affects, in historically and culturally variable ways, the distribution of economic, political and symbolic power

in all known societies. "Being a woman" is in other words a condition that is determined by multiple causes and has multiple effects which remain independent of and to some degree inaccessible to individual consciousness. Riley's reliance upon phenomenological arguments, even what she describes as a "historical and political phenomenology" obscures this issue by reducing gender to a question of subjective experience and temporality.

While Riley's emphasis on the discursive construction of gender provides a salutary corrective to those positions which assume an underlying substratum of authentic female identity across history, it thus engenders problems of its own. The exclusive focus on discourse as the site where gender difference is articulated and maintained inspires a voluntarism which assumes that transformations in gender relations are conditional upon changes in representation alone. Clearly, systems of signification are relatively autonomous; they are not, however, free-floating, but linked in complicated and often contradictory ways to the processes of production and reproduction through which societies ensure their own existence and continuation. This dialectical relationship between the "material"—the body, the natural world, the physical environment—and the "cultural" must thus be conceived as one of constant and mutual interaction: while the material world is always interpreted through discourse, it cannot simply be reduced to an effect of it. On occasion, Riley's text seems surprisingly close to a traditional history of ideas, discussing modern conceptions of gender with very little reference to economic interests or the logic of capitalist expansion as determining factors in the emergence of such conceptions. Similarly, while Riley persuasively demonstrates the limitations of any appeal to the female body as unmediated source of difference, feminists must surely address the significance of such biological factors as women's reproductive capacity as a fundamental determining factor in the perpetuation of systems of gender hierarchy. It does not seem to me that such attention to material constraints requires, as Riley assumes, a recourse to ontological foundations or a belief in an underlying substratum of femininity that remains constant throughout history.

While sympathetic to much of Riley's argument, then, I would differ with her claim that "women" are only sometimes "women"—as if gender could be slipped in and out of as easily as a dress. The claim can perhaps be more usefully rephrased as follows: women are never *only* women, but many other things as well—they possess a class, a race, a sexuality, an educational history, a historically and culturally specific background, and they are of course, as Riley reminds us, human beings as well. It is through the interplay and conflict between these multiple, historically variable but always operative determinants of subjectivity that the relative indeterminacy of identity becomes apparent, rather than through the temporary transcendence of any one of them. In my view, the most promising and exciting feminist work which is being produced at present centers precisely around this premise and this problematic.

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Notes

1. Fredric Jameson, "An Overview," in Tak-Wai Wong and M.A. Abbas, eds., *Rewriting Literary History* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong UP, 1984).

Sor Juana

Sor Juana or, The Traps of Faith, by Octavio Paz, translated by Margaret Sayers Peden. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1988. Pp. 547. $29.95, cloth.

A Sor Juana Anthology, translated by Alan S. Trueblood, foreword by Octavio Paz. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988. Pp. 248. $29.50, cloth.

Sor Juana's Dream, translation, introduction, and commentary by Luis Harss. New York: Lumen Books, 1986. Pp. 146. $9.95, paper.

In opening his eloquent and elegant book on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, seventeenth-century Mexican poet, playwright, intellectual, and nun, Octavio Paz claims that "A work responds to the reader's, not the author's questions" (p. 3). Women readers of a great man's interpretation of a great woman's life and work are presented immediately with a challenge and a problem. As the invisible part of "mankind" we know that both the woman subject and we, the women readers, are part of a complex series of unstated exclusions and inclusions. Paradoxically, gender-sensitive readers of *Criticism*, because of the kind of questions they ask, may be in a better position than Paz to play a role in expanding the conception of feminism's basic writings and in appreciating the scope of this particular writer's feminist vision. A woman of astonishing consciousness, Sor Juana turned the world upside-down and inside-out with such Baroque aplomb that it has taken until the twentieth century for us to rediscover the breadth of her art and the depth of her epistemology.

Juana Ramirez, born in 1648, chose the convent at the age of nineteen, after five years as a lady-in-waiting at the viceregal court of New Spain (Mexico). A reader at four years of age, competent in Latin after twenty lessons, she insisted that her prodigious learning reflected tenacious effort as well as a privileged memory, and that she had taken to rhyming as others take to their native tongue. By the age of eleven she had written her first poem. In the books she devoured, initially in her grandfather's library, then at court, and finally in her own voluminous collection, she encountered varying degrees of misogyny. She paid more attention, however, to the considerable number of references to what she termed "throngs" of learned women who through the centuries had distinguished themselves in a wide range of fields. Despite her absorption in the theological and literary artifacts of a male-dominated civilization, Sor Juana compared herself to Sappho and to more than fifty other learned women, real and legendary. According to Diego Calleja, a Spanish priest who wrote the earliest biography, as an imprimatur (*nihil obstat*) to the third and final volume of her works, the young Juana submitted to a public

examination of her already notorious intellectual gifts by forty of the most knowledgeable men of the realm. She defended herself, he reported, "like a royal galleon attacked by small canoes." The event led her to identify with St. Catherine of Alexandria:

> There in Egypt, all the sages
> by a woman were convinced
> that gender is not of the essence
> in matters of intelligence.
> *Victor! Victor!*
> A victory, a miracle;
> though more prodigious than the feat
> of conquering, was surely that
> the men themselves declared defeat.
> *Victor! Victor!*
> (Sayers Peden translation; Paz, p. 435)

This insistance on the soul's lack of gender is a persistent theme in all her work. Finding life at court untenable, and the idea of marriage abhorrent, Juana Ramirez chose the convent where she would have more tranquility for study—the real love of her life. There, too, she would be free to write courtly yet personal love poetry dedicated for the most part to the two women who most ardently encouraged her scholarly and literary pursuits. When the first of these, the Vicereine Leonor Carreto, Marquise de Mancera, died in 1674, Sor Juana had been in the convent for five years. She gave rein to her sorrow in an elegiac sonnet that implies a literary as well as affectionate relationship:

> Let them die with you, Laura, now you are dead,
> these longings that go out to you in vain,
> these eyes on whom you once bestowed
> a lovely light never to gleam again.
> Let this unfortunate lyre that echoes still
> to sounds you woke, perish calling your name,
> and may these clumsy scribblings represent
> black tears my pen has shed to ease its pain.
> Let Death himself feel pity, and regret
> that, bound by his own law, he could not spare you,
> and Love lament the bitter circumstance
> that if once, in his desire for pleasure,
> he wished for eyes that they might feast on you,
> now weeping is all those eyes could ever do.
> (Trueblood, pp. 101, 103)

To the second, Vicereine Maria Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga, Marquise de la Laguna, Countess de Paredes, a frequent visitor at the convent, an avid supporter who took Sor Juana's poems to Spain and had her first book published, she wrote:

> I, like air filling a vacuum,
> like fire feeding on matter,
> like rocks plummeting earthward,

like the will set on a goal—
in short, as all things in Nature,
moved by a will to endure,
are drawn together by love
in closely knit embrace. . .
But, Phyllis, why go on?
For yourself alone I love you.
Considering your merits,
what more is there to say?
That you're a woman far away
is no hindrance to my love:
for the soul, as you well know,
distance and sex don't count.
(Trueblood, p. 39)

The cloistered Sor Juana spent the rest of her life in quarters whose comfort and amplitude made them more salon than cell. Attended by several servants (as were other nuns of her station), she entertained numerous visiting aristocrats, ecclesiastics and scholars, conducted wide (but lost) correspondence with many others, and held monastic offices as teacher and keeper of convent financial records. Four years before her death, she was forced to sell and contribute to charity a voluminous library and her musical and scientific instruments, sign a confession, and dedicate herself to penance and self-sacrifice. She fell victim to an epidemic in 1695 while caring for her sisters.

In the course of twenty-six years of convent life, Sor Juana became the major literary figure of New Spain, producing sixty-five sonnets (including some twenty love sonnets, deemed by many among the most beautiful of the seventeenth-century); sixty-two *romances* (ballads); and a profusion of *endechas, redondillas, liras, dêcimas, silvas* and other metrical forms employed during Spain's Golden Age. For theater Sor Juana wrote three sacramental *Autos* and two comedies (one a collaboration), along with the farces that preceded the plays and were performed between the acts; thirty-two *loas*, sung and performed for religious and viceroyal celebrations; and fifteen or sixteen sets of *villancicos* (carols) for Matins, each with eight or nine songs, all elaborations of religious themes such as the Nativity, the Assumption, the Immaculate Conception, Saint Joseph, Saint Peter, and Saint Catherine.

The poem she herself most respected, is the 975-verse-long, *"Primero sueño"* [First Dream], an exaltation of the poet's insatiable thirst to encompass all human knowledge:

Such an immense assemblage,
a mass so unemcompassable,
though holding out to sight
some chance of being taken in,
. . . . . .
to ascend the lofty stair,
by cultivation, first of one,
then of another form of knowledge
till honor's summit gradually comes in view,

the easeful goal of a most laborious climb
. . . . . .
(Trueblood, pp. 164, 168)

"First Dream" is generally considered the most important philosophical poem in the Spanish language. Paz devotes 30 pages to underscoring its modernity and originality. Trueblood admires its statement "in favor of the human spirit's right to unimpeded growth" (p. 23). Harss understands that St. Catherine (about whom Sor Juana wrote her most feminist religious verse, a few lines of which I quoted above), hovers in the dream, "a constant reminder of the dangers of the Word turned against those who would usurp Its powers" (p. 12).

Indeed, the powers of the word occasioned for Sor Juana the gravest and most persistent conflicts of her life. The consciousness of gender and its implications pervade her poetry with such grace and charm that the more troublesome connotations somehow escaped immediate censure. Once Sor Juana engaged in public theological controversy in prose, art could no longer protect her from inquisitorial mentalities. She ventured to refute a famous Portuguese Jesuit preacher's "Maundy Thursday Sermon" (a disquisition on Jesus Christ's highest favor to human beings that piqued Sor Juana by its claim to better the arguments of Saints Augustine, Thomas, and John Chrysostom). The Bishop of Puebla, greatly impressed, published the refutation under the title "Letter Worthy of Athena," along with an admonishing letter, signed pseudonymously "Sor Philothea." The significance of Sor Juana's one incursion into theological argumentation resides not so much in its admirable reasoning and style, as in its having heightened the envy and antagonism of the ecclesiastic establishment against her and provided the motivation for her most significant prose work. Feeling betrayed by alleged friends, Sor Juana wrote the "Reply to Sor Philothea:"

> Those most harmful and painful to me are not the persons who have pursued me with open hatred and ill will, but those who, while loving me and wishing me well . . . have mortified and tortured me much more than the others, with their: "This study is incompatible with the blessed ignorance to which you are bound. You will lose your way, at such heights your head will be turned by your very perspicacity and sharpness of mind." What have I not gone through to hold out against this? Strange sort of martyrdom, in which I was both the martyr and my own executioner. (Trueblood, p. 218)

The history of Sor Juana's last writings, is a central thread of Paz's biographical narrative. Another important document, fundamental to the story, but discovered while Paz was working on the biography, was left for the appendix. It is a letter Sor Juana wrote ten years earlier—using discursive strategies she later developed in the *Reply*—in which she essentially "fired" her confessor. When she wrote it, in 1681–2, Sor Juana was a leading light in a culturally flamboyant environment. She moved with relative impunity, protected and encouraged, especially by the Vicereines, but also by the Viceroys and a segment of the ecclesiastic hierarchy. Cultivating her intelligence and composing works both secular and religious, over and over she legitimized and authorized her own and all women's subjective integrity.

But by the end of the decade her situation and that of New Spain had changed drastically. Economic, social, and political crisis engulfed the realm. Her most significant supports had returned to Spain or lost favor. The Archbishop of Mexico and her rejected confessor who for years had wanted to press for "behavior more befitting a nun," were about to get their chance.

The Reply is not only an autobiographical self-defense, an infinitely clever retort—laced with anger and outrage—to criticism of her theological opinions and of her dedication to secular learning and writing. It is also a cornered writer's announcement of her imminent decision to still her quill forever. The shadow of the Inquisition was never far away. Faced with a persecution that would silence her, she silenced herself, declaring: "as far as my natural defense is concerned, I will never put pen to paper . . . " (Trueblood, p. 240). So subtly did she hide the declaration among the foliage of her prose that not a critic I know of has sighted it. Unconscious resistance to acknowledging how actively Sor Juana controlled her own sounds and silences may be one reason it has been missed.

The thirty-five page "Reply" itself would assure Sor Juana's position as an important writer, thinker, and feminist. The first American declaration of women's intellectual emancipation, the *Reply* (1691) stands three centuries after Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1404) and a century before Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). It belongs among the basic writings of a long women's tradition that is still being reconstructed.

Sexual and colonialist politics, as well as more general linguistic and cultural attitudes common in publishing, explain why it has taken so long for the Harvard University Press volumes to introduce so major a figure of Hispanic letters to a wide English reading public. North American women (and some men) writers and scholars have written about and translated Sor Juana since the 1920's. The pioneer among them was Dorothy Shons who located important primary sources, announced Sor Juana's significance as an early feminist and left, at her death, an unpublished fictionalized biography.[1] In the early 1980's, Margaret Sayers Peden, who spent several years at the daunting task of translating the Paz biography, with its numerous illustrations of Sor Juana's poetry, published a translation of the *Reply*.[2] Versions of many poems, close to the original, fluent and "sprightly" (Alastair Reed) appear in her bilingual anthology.[3] Sor Juana has been translated into English by others. Samuel Beckett translated a 77-line fragment of the poem. Amanda Powell's renditions, especially sensitive to the subtleties of gender as well as style have been performed on stage.[4]

Octavio Paz's *Sor Juana or, The Traps of Faith*, first published in Spanish in 1982, is a useful and important biographical work, with ample exemplification of the subject's writing in Sayers Peden's close translations. It is also an infuriating book. Alan Trueblood's *A Sor Juana Anthology*, presented as a companion to the Paz biography, stands on its own as a succinct, erudite introduction to, and a lyrically vibrant recreation in English of the poet's writing. Luis Harss's, *Sor Juana's Dream*, changes and complicates the beauty of that long and most difficult of poems, in its English rendering.

Sor Juana or, The Traps of Faith, is a tour de force—biography, cultural history and ideological criticism all in one. It describes the intellectual, political

and religious climate of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Mexico; comments on the poet as rebel against orthodoxy, then and now; and studies the life, times, and art of a woman with whom Paz identifies and to whom he implicitly compares himself. Using T.S. Eliot's criteria for designating a major poet —excellence, abundance and diversity—Paz speaks of Sor Juana, illustrating and analyzing each of these characteristics. Paz's portrayal, however, fails to capture the meaning for Sor Juana—and for other women—of history, of experience, and of the pursuit of knowledge and art. He gives no indication of having consulted the work of feminist theorists, scholars and critics of the last thirty years. In a lengthy digression on the literature of courtly love, for instance, there is no mention of the women troubadours among the Provençal poets. Diffuse elucubrations on Neoplatonism, hermeticism, and literary love in the Western world weaken the book. Simplifying analogies between contemporary communism and the colonial Church contrast with Paz's complex analysis of the Baroque period: "Trotsky affirms with innocent pride that there is nothing personal in his drama . . . Sor Juana's reiterated affirmations, in her critique of Vieyra's sermon, that God had chosen an ignorant woman (herself) to humble a proud man foreshadows . . . the Russian revolutionary's rationale" (p. 487). There was nothing innocent in Sor Juana's protestations of ignorance; she was employing a strategy commonly used by women writers of the time, especially nuns. But it is Paz's sexism and polarized convictions regarding gender that most distort his view of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: "The movement toward the masculine is mingled with the process of apprenticeship . . . she wants to possess masculine values because she wants to be *like* a man . . . [a]ntipathy to marriage, love of learning, masculinization, neutralization: all these revolve into a no less powerful word, solitude. . . . her "masculinity" . . . exists alongside the most intense femininity" (p. 112).

The work of both Trueblood and Harss, as opposed to that of Paz, is informed by a range of recent scholarly and critical essays on Sor Juana that includes studies of her writing from a feminist perspective. *A Sor Juana Anthology* presents a well-selected sampling of Sor Juana's poetry and prose. Paralleling Paz's biographical and critical sequence, it includes poems in a variety of meters, among them her most notable sonnets, and selections from her *villancicos* (lyrics for interludes of song and dance during religious festivities) and *The Divine Narcissus*, the best of her three *autos sacramentales* (one-act plays in celebration of the Eucharist). *First Dream*, and *Reply to Sor Philothea* complete the book. While I would take issue with Trueblood's unquestioning acceptance of Paz's interpretations of Sor Juana's Neoplatonic idealizations—which ignore her and other women writers' counterpointed variations of Petrarchan tradition—and his characterization of the *Reply*'s "almost programmatic feminism" (p. 17), his succinct introductory overview of the various literary and intellectual currents upon which the poet drew synthesizes in a few pages what it takes Paz several chapters to unravel.

Most of the translations are more than felicitous. Nowhere are there the strained attempts to be faithful that often mar the work of academics. Some renditions, nevertheless, raise significant gender issues: "Si los riesgos del mar considerara,/ninguno se embarcara . . . " is translated: "If men weighted the hazards of the sea,/none would embark . . . " (96–97). I wish Trueblood had sought another solution since Sor Juana did not employ the word "men"

in the first line of this sonnet, and especially since the last line bears a particularly autobiographical note, a regret for having chosen "a way of life binding a whole life through." He might have tried "If one should weigh" or "If having weighed" or, literally, "If the hazards of the sea were considered" for example. "Diuturna enfermedad de la esperanza" becomes "Hope, long-lasting fever of men's lives" (98–99). Yet there is absolutely no reference to "men" in the Spanish original. Moreover, in the next line she refers to "mis cansados años," translated exactly as "*my* weary years" (emphasis mine) which makes the gender-generalized term of the previous line seem all the more inappropriate. In the same poem "¿quién te ha quitado el nombre de homicida?" is rendered "Who claimed you never killed a man?" The line might have kept its neutrality: Who claimed you were no longer a homicide? or, Who claimed you no longer committed homicide? As a final example, in the elegy to the vicereine Leonor Carreto, cited above, Trueblood inexplicably employs the pronoun "he" for "la muerte," death, which is a feminine noun in Spanish.

Harss's translation of Sor Juana's longest, most difficult poem, the extraordinary *First Dream*, or simply *Dream*, has the advantage of a bilingual presentation. The introduction and line by line commentary enrich and stimulate the readers' responses. It too could be faulted for occasional lapses in gender consciousness. In a passage in which Sor Juana dwells on the enthronment of feminine *"Naturaleza"* [nature] (p. 59), for example, there is the entirely gratuitous addition of two lines, nowhere in evidence in the Spanish, and both emphatically insistent on a divine male's potency: "on him resting His magnificence,/content with His design" (p. 58). But the two translations could hardly be more different. From the very beginning Harss's version takes more liberties than does Trueblood's; often confusingly unfaithful to line by line sequence, his reinvention of baroque grammatical convolutions manages to recreate the poem's verbal intensity:

Piramidal, funesta de la tierra
nacida sombra, al Cielo encaminaba
de vanos obeliscos punta altiva,
escalar pretendiendo las Estrellas. . . .

A shadow born of Earth,
bleak pyramid, vain obelisk
pretending to scale Heaven
pointed to the stars. . . .
(Harss, pp. 28–29)

Pyramidal, lugubrious,
a shadow born of earth
pushed heavenward its towering tips
like vacuous obelisks bent on scaling stars,
(Trueblood, p. 171)

As male readers of Sor Juana's texts and of her life, all three authors being reviewed, but especially Paz, present us with a polished view of patriarchal culture into which they fit Sor Juana's feminism. This would not have sur-

prised Sor Juana; she read men as a woman reader and writer, noticing the poison darts aimed toward those of her gender (darts so proverbial as to be considered harmless truths). Most critics still treat Sor Juana's feminism as if it were an overlay rather than a point of departure. Paz, Trueblood, and Harss explicate central concepts of modern culture, and invite us to think about art with a broad, flexible socio-cultural outlook. But they fail fully to grasp Sor Juana's persistent and cunning subversions of official ideas and myths regarding civilization itself. A victim of ecclesiastic persecution, toward the end of her life she renounced writing and study. Before condemning herself to silence she had announced her willingness to pay for her daring. She sang:

> . . . to the undaunted spirit
> that, disdaining life, determines
> to immortalize itself in ruin.

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Notes

1. Sor Juana scholar Georgina Sabat–Rivers is preparing an edition of this manuscript. Sabat–Rivers's essay, "A Feminist Re-reading of Sor Juana's *Dream*," and another on the same poem by this reviewer, appear in Stephanie Merrim (ed.), *Towards A Feminist Understanding of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, forthcoming, 1990).

2. Published bilingually (always an advantage) as *A Woman of Genius: The Intellectual Autobiography of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* 2nd ed. (Salisbury, CT: Lime Rock Press, 1987). For the Source Book Series of the Feminist Press, Amanda Powell and I will prepare an annotated version with Powell's translation and an introduction placing Sor Juana's work in the long tradition of feminist writing and the history of the *querelle des femmes*, so well treated, although without mention of this source, by Joan Kelly in her "Early Feminist Theory and the Querelle des Femmes, 1400–1789," *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984).

3. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Poems: A Bilingual Anthology* (Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe: Binghamton, New York, 1985).

4. They appear in the dramatic recreation of Sor Juana's and Anne Bradstreet's life and work I composed ten years ago, and which was published, along with an introduction to the two poets in Bell Gale Chevigny and Gari Laguardia (eds.), *Reinventing the Americas: Comparative Studies of Literature of the United States and Spanish America* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 158–202. Recently published, with a few of her own direct translations, is Diane Ackerman's witty, romantic drama, *Reverse Thunder*, based in part on Sor Juana's life, (New York: Lumen Books, 1988).

Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers edited by Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. Pp. 253. $29.95, cloth; $12.95, paper.

This collection of articles brings questions from contemporary theory to bear on medieval studies and thereby addresses the urgent need for critical self-examination that many medievalists perceive in their discipline. Hoping to end what Eugence Vance has called "the stand-off between medievalists and critical theorists," Finke and Shichtman trust their effort "will initiate a dialogue between the skeptical and the converted, a dialogue that has been too long delayed" (p. viii). Yet they are also aware of the difficulties of this project, which stem from the medieval academy's traditional isolation from other branches of literary studies as well as internal barriers against self-scrutiny.

The collection's introduction addresses the relationship between the present and its distant past which both frustrated and fascinated medievalists long before the current rebirth of interest in literary history. Medieval literature poses a special problem, as the editors note, since the apparatus of its mediation is always so visible, in "the editions, glosses, textual notes, manuscript facsimiles, transcriptions and translations through which medieval literature is filtered and transmitted" (p. 1). While the category of the Middle Ages has been constructed by successive generations of modern scholars, editors, and readers, one dominant tendency has been to hide its constructedness. Such theoretical elusiveness has allowed recent critics to conceive the Middle Ages both as an irretrievable object of nostalgia (a theme, it seems to me, which permeates the rhetoric of the late seventies' "Alterity of the Middle Ages" debates) and as a historical unity open to unproblematic interpretation. In promising to call contemporary readers onto the same stage as the medieval texts they have been invisibly editing, interpreting, and teaching, the title of the collection promises to examine a difficult relationship that has long been veiled. The introduction outlines such a project of critical self-evaluation: "Our contributors suggest in several ways that contemporary literary theory should not imply a simplistic rejection of traditional medieval scholarship but rather encourage an ongoing reevaluation of the critical assumptions currently structuring the discipline" (p. 5). But how successful are the contributors in addressing this most challenging task?

While eager to endorse the application of "theory" to medieval texts, many of the essays in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers* aim to the side of the book's self-defined mark. Though addressed to a stubborn medieval academy, they timidly overlook the bases upon which that academy resists "theory" and thus—despite the introduction's revisionist aim—they too often leave intact the anti-theoretical stances ostensibly being challenged.

A danger in any project of this sort is the tendency to perceive "theory" as a unified body once it becomes a principle of organization. But one purpose common to theoretical examinations may be to expose the assumptions and myths sedimented beneath the stances we take in pretences of neutrality. Such examination would move away from the traditional *explication de texte* to examine critically the act of reading: its institutional structures, our ideological investments, and the particular desire that drives a reader in the twen-

tieth century to seek pleasure in a very old book. Several articles successfully raise such provocative questions; others, however, avoid them.

Laurie Finke's essay on "Truth's Treasure: Allegory and Meaning in Piers Plowman" approaches her fertile subject by using Augustine and Paul de Man to illustrate the failures of allegory as a means for exploring truth. Finke proposes to "examine in more detail the *interrelations* between some medieval and postmodern concepts of allegory" (p. 53, emphasis mine); but rather than pursuing these "interrelations," she suggests that "the contradictions and silences within Augustine's theory of allegory are *archetypal* and hence may illuminate the Yale critics' interest in allegory" (p. 55). Traditionally employed to justify and direct modern interest in the Middle Ages, the notion of "the archetype" suggests a transhistorical bridge between past and present. Here it is invoked at the cost of serious exploration of either.

Other essays make poststructuralist theories seem somehow organic to the Middle Ages and thus avoid important self-examination. Thus, for example, Marina Scordilis Brownlee can find modern concerns reproduced in old texts ("problematic issues of modern reading theory . . . are, in fact, *inscribed* into the dynamic structure of this late medieval Spanish text" (p. 232, emphasis mine), and Alain Renoir can imagine a theory that could elide massive differences in historical periods ("at the close of the twentieth century the oral-formulaic approach to the study of medieval literature is immensely attractive because it allows us . . . to link past and present" [p. 252]). What these accounts lack is a serious inquiry into the historical implications of their theoretical project—and into the relationship of medieval text to contemporary reader—that could make theory anything more than another medievalist's tool, with the usefulness of something like paleography, to help the embattled reader discover the truth about his or her remote object of study.

Theory might help us rethink our notion of the Middle Ages while releasing it from the teleology of literary history that has needed a category to fill in the blank space between two Golden Ages. In this way historiographical inquiry might find in poststructuralist theory a way to reevaluate the category of the Middle Ages itself and to examine its political uses as an eighteenth and nineteenth-century invention. In "Gawain in Wace and Layamon: A Case of Metahistorical Evolution," Martin Shichtman performs a reading of Wace and Layamon through Hayden White and Michel Foucault that accepts and reproduces the historical narratives it would otherwise seem to criticize. "Foucault," he writes, "claims that the 'new history' challenges earlier principles of cohesion . . . It provides for a way of reseeing history and ultimately liberates the historian from the continuous tracing back to origins" (p. 105). He ends by explaining his approach with a traditional medievalist's promise: "Contemporary historiographical theory . . . may, therefore, allow us to see medieval historians much as they might have seen themselves" (p. 118): that is, as creative writers of history rather than remote observers of it. What is striking in this account is the way it skirts its own critique of historiography in order to arrive at an unexamined conclusion: we can separate the past from our own narrative about it. Such a conclusion logically involves a repudiation of White's provocative statement that the contents of historical narratives "are as much *invented* as *found*," (cited p. 105) but Shichtman indicates no inconsistency. Rather than allowing us to question the bases on which we

hold our own myths about the past, including those about the Middle Ages, Shichtman in the end tames Foucauldian historical inquiry into a tool that enables us to see more clearly what we've believed all along.

Several other essays also domesticate theory by using it to tease out thematic concerns while avoiding institutional ones. In "'I Shal Finde It in a Maner Glose': Versions of Textual Harassment in Medieval Literature," Robert Hanning begins an essay on medieval glossing practices—a fascinating and troublesome topic in the field which forces questions about the relations between reader and writer, the book and what is excluded from or literally marginal to it—only to turn back to a thematic reading that, paradoxically, reproduces traditional categories of literariness, along with some disturbingly conventional interpretations of Criseyde and the Wife of Bath.

In his discussion of "Affective Criticism and Medieval English Literature" Peter Travis explains that "*Rezeptionsasthetik* . . . assumes that artistic meaning is determined by the way a text is received by its audience" (p. 202), yet does not consider the possibility that such an audience includes not just fourteenth-century listeners, but also twentieth-century medievalists, as well as generations of readers, editors, and printers who came in between and made the former available to the latter. As a result, the problematics of medieval text and contemporary reader have been willed out of the way in the interest of a unified reading.

The articles most responsive to the challenges of the book's project articulate what is at stake in the conflict without necessarily seeking reconciliation. In "Wandryinge by the Waye: On Alisoun and Augustine" Peggy Knapp turns her unsettling consideration of "*glose*" in the Wife of Bath's Tale onto her own reading as it too functions as a gloss. Asserting that "to gloss is to disclose deep meaning . . . or to prevent disclosure of deep meaning by presenting an attractive but deceptive surface," Knapp then suggests that "these observations point to direct consequences for our glossing of Alisoun's story." (p. 154) Any critical stance implicates not only the medieval text but also the contemporary reader. Foregrounding both, Knapp indicates her own argument's status as a text open to interpretation.

Other contributors suggest non-traditional interpretations of canonical texts, challenging with Knapp the received "medieval world view." H. Marshall Leicester's "Oure Tonges *Differance*: Textuality and Deconstruction in Chaucer" reads the sense of separation from the mythical past that surfaces in *Troilus and Criseyde* as the nostalgia in a textual culture for the imagined wholeness of an oral one. Taken from a wide-ranging article, this example could suggest a radical rereading of Chaucer's poem. Rachel Jacoff challenges conventional readings of Dante's debt to Virgil in "Models of Literary Influence in the *Commedia*," leading to a provocative discussion of Dante's use of gender reversal in metaphors. If Beatrice is a ship's admiral and Virgil a loving mother, Dante has introduced a possibility of feminine mediation certainly missing from his classical models. In addition, in "*Inter Nocturnas Vigilias:* A Proof Postponed," Louis H. Mackey considers the implications of Anselm's debate with Gaunilon over the failure of language to yield its ineffable referent, God, for a culture in which such a question is crucial.

Alexandre Leupin displays concerns that respond to a wider range of questions than are addressed by many of the contributors to this volume. Else-

where Leupin discusses the conflict between medievalists cloistered in their studies and literary theorists who may be, paradoxically, entrenched in a humanist vision of literary history that insists on cordoning off the Middle Ages as a historical Other, criticizing the "logic of history" that insists on an "epistemological break" between a medieval and a modern world-view (see *Diacritics*, 13 [1983], pp. 22–31). In his contribution "Absolute Reflexivity: Geoffroi de Vinsauf" he historicizes the very notion of modernity in a discussion of the *Poetria Nova* with a full understanding of the provocative implications of his project: "My intention, then, is to restore the problem of *modernitas* to Geoffroi's work, to follow the developments of this problem, and to grasp its relation to history; while demonstrating the pertinence of this issue in a thirteenth-century context, I shall also stress its importance for our own age, a period that traces its "modernity" only as far back as the romantic era" (p. 121). Opposite the category of *modernitas* Leupin places the *caduc*, the old or obsolete (p. 124), which is always invoked to enable its refinement. Thus "The *Poetria* . . . theorizes the act of writing as a constant and endless transformation of the obsolete, a perpetual reclaiming of the old" (p. 125). It is the obsolete, marked by its alterity, that allows writing to take place under the name of *rejuvenatio*.

Scholars of Renaissance literature might easily recognize here elements of sixteenth-century rhetorical discussions through which writers conceived their own modernity. Nor is it difficult to see a version of the *caduc* in Sidney's dismissal of Chaucer's "misty time." It is curious, however, that the concept of the Middle Ages has always occupied that space of historical otherness, and indeed seems to have been invented precisely to guarantee the identity that humanist (and even avowedly anti-humanist) critics narcissistically seek mirrored in the texts that they read.

What is at stake, then, in the efforts to introduce critical theory to medieval studies? Leupin and others have suggested that it is nothing short of the dismantlement of medievalism as an institution, as we question categories of literariness as well as literary history that continue to enable its conception. We might be able to see "the medieval" as an interpretive category rather than an event—like the printing press, the Reformation, or the death of Richard III —while we question its function in literary studies as well as its resistance to theoretical inquiry. Serious examination of pre-typographical literature might even challenge the institutions of genre, authorship, and canonicity that structure many departments of literature. Toward these directions efforts like *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers* are vital. Suggesting new perspectives through which we can reevaluate institutional medieval studies, this book establishes the importance of theoretical inquiry to scholars of early literature. The impressive array of established scholars the editors have assembled for this collection indicates that the medieval academy will no longer be able to ignore the challenges of post-structuralist theory to that institution. But the uneven success with which these articles pursue such theoretical challenges also suggests directions for the enormous tasks ahead.

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Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents by Leah S. Marcus. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988. Pp. xiii + 267. $35.00, cloth.

Puzzling Shakespeare, the sixth work to appear in *The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics*, is a thoughtful, challenging book which shares certain self-acknowledged family resemblances to various projects currently prominent in Renaissance literary/cultural studies. Among these features are appropriations of certain propensities of deconstruction and certain methodological aspects of traditional literary historical enquiry as expanded by Geertzian cultural "thick description" and redirected in pursuit of thematic interests in textuality, power relations, gender construction, author function, marginality, and humanist subjectivity. So, for example, in reflecting on her reading of *Cymbeline* as both following and resisting an authoritative "Jacobean line," the author observes:

> In part, of course, we find such resistance because we want to find it—pursuing *différance* is usually more congenial for new historicists and other postmodernist critics than constructing idealized versions of harmony. And yet, there is reason to suppose that contemporary audiences might have felt a similar discomfort with the play's call for unity. Along with an array of relatively commonplace Stuart motifs, *Cymbeline* displays a number of specific mechanisms which work against the communication of its Stuart message, engendering an unease with topicality which is specific to this play. We might call it an unease with Jacobean textuality. (p. 117)

The most distinctive element in the critical synthesis evoked in this representative passage is the complexity of its engagement with "topicality," an aspect of the larger concern with and practice of "local reading" which drives this book's wide-ranging analyses through extended encounters with "Shakespeare," *Henry VI*, *Cymbeline*, and *Measure for Measure* in chapters strategically and respectively titled: "Localization," "Elizabeth," "James," and "London."

The premise, promise, practice, and problems of *Puzzling Shakespeare* may be localized in localization. If finally you can't have one without the other, the fact that the book might make one want to accept the costs of living with the problems in hopes of seeing the promise even partially fulfilled is a tribute to the author and the profound—perhaps "local"—appeal of her premise: a premise no more tellingly embodied than in the "and yet" trope so crucial to the above passage, so movingly and variously reiterated and so deeply inscribed throughout the book—from striking dustjacket to densely scholarly endnotes. The premise is that the historicizing post-modern critic, through the relentless practice of localization—exercised reciprocally upon herself as well as upon her object—might, however tentatively, come to recognize certain contours of the historical/cultural other's "locality" that are not merely reproductions of her own locale. As the author puts it, "'local' reading can be —and should be—a suspension of our ruling methodologies, insofar as that is possible, in favor of a more open and provisional stance toward what we read and the modes by which we interpret; it should be a process of contin-

ual negotiation between our own *place*, to the extent that we are able to identify it, and the local *places* of the texts we read" (p. 36). Yet despite such salutary (and of late almost ritually familiar) acknowledgments of interpretive situation, the problems in the book's *practice* seem to me precisely those which affirmation of a "more open and provisional stance toward what we read" would appear to address in *principle*.

Openness and provisionality appear to be the message of the dustjacket's reproduction of the First Folio's well-known title page portrait of Shakespeare in the defamiliarized and "open" form of a partially assembled puzzle. Indeed, the book's first chapter offers extended analysis of features of the First Folio including its portrait in hopes of overcoming the "humanist overlay" (p. 30), the "mystifications" (p. 35) which have generated an idealized, abstractly human "Shakespeare" for all time rather than of an age. This interpretation appears supported by the fact that the puzzle figure appears to be missing at least one of its pieces, leaving "Shakespeare" forever incomplete—open to the local readings of the ages. *Puzzling Shakespeare* warns us that opening "Shakespeare" to local particularities runs a certain risk: "If we insist on clinging to such ephemera, the [First Folio] seems to tell us, we will lose the 'essence' of Shakespeare and fragment the unstable, generalized figure that the First Folio constructs" (p. 25). This warning is reflected in the dustjacket's design, for its most prominent feature is not its missing piece but its pieces turned askew to allow darkness and fragmentation into the broad expanse of the portrait's otherwise smoothly white forehead. The right brain is severely opened and displaced, but it is the wounded left brain precisely skewered by a round small-calibre hole that might suggest, as I shall argue, that post-modern fragmentation is not the only feature of localization local to our time rather than Shakespeare's.

In the process of combatting certain essentialist readings and their intentionalities, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, although far more intellectually challenging than older literary historical attempts to read "Shakespeare" (or "James," "Elizabeth," or "London," for that matter) in terms of intentionality by virtue of its attention to cultural/political phenomena—e.g. "suppressed anxiety" (p. 64), "anxious fantasies" (p. 66), "projection" (p. 80), "airing through displacement" (p. 83), "styles of legal authority" (p. 175), and the like—nevertheless repeatedly engages in the construction of essences and the ascribing of intentionalities. So, for example, the "essence" of the First Folio's universalized Shakespeare is contested in the name of a counter-essence, premised as unstable, to be sure, but remarkably stabilizing in practice: one reads of the "priorities which Renaissance audiences habitually brought to the theater" and of the "primary object of [their] fascination" (p. 26) in assertions designed to support the claim that "Local meaning was at the center—an 'essence' inherently unstable in that it altered along with shifting circumstances" (p. 26). Similarly, the First Folio's ommissions of biographical and theatrical information become acts of a local (albeit depersonalized) intentionality in such locutions as references to its "suppression of a host of particularities" (p. 25), or to "particularities the First Folio was at pains to suppress" (p. 32), or to an ommission "probably not inadvertent" (p. 106), or to a "reticence about place among the devices by which it sloughs off particularizing details" (p. 160). Such strategic rhetoric—by no means limited to the

instances and applications here cited—would perhaps be undeserving of attention if it occurred in a critical text less self-conscious than this one or, more importantly, in a text less committed to historicizing localization.

Localization is defined by its *openness* to the demands, even the troublesome, conflicting demands, of particularities that resist assimilation to simple intentionality (see e.g. p. 32). If it differs from older forms of topical interpretation, surely, this must be, as the author asserts, part of its distinctiveness. And *Puzzling Shakespeare* does provide a dense exemplification of the energy and engagement such an ideal of openness to particularities should demand, its text and notes providing challenging and enlightening juxtapositions of unruly particulars and thoughtful interpretations. Yet however much one is inclined to accept such major claims as that Elizabethans habitually interpreted plays according to local topicality, that they would have experienced difficulties reconciling rule by a female monarch with widespread fears of female misrule, that *One Henry VI* suggests a very ambivalent, and perhaps locally interventionist, evaluation of female power in the figure of Joan of Arc, that *Cymbeline* stages aspects of James's struggles for union of England and Scotland, that *Measure for Measure* continues jurisdictional conflicts local to London of 1604, the specific particularities marshalled in *Puzzling Shakespeare* to support these and related points are sometimes far more *open* to dispute than the book acknowledges.

So, for example, the assertion that "in 1601, a sudden rash of performances of Shakespeare's *Richard II* was taken by Elizabeth and her chief ministers (and not without reason) as propaganda for the Essex rebellion" (p. 27) functions to close off a remarkable number of "local" openings. As recent work by Leeds Barroll has reminded us, a single, apparently unique, commissioned performance in 1601 of an apparently Shakespearean, apparently long unperformed, play about Richard II is apparently *not* taken by Elizabeth's ministers—at least in surviving evidence—as attempted propaganda, but is described as illustrating, according to Bacon's official *Declaration* the voyeuristic desire of Essex's associate Gilly Merricke to "satisfy" his eyes "with the sight of that tragedy, which he thought soon after his lord should bring from the stage to the state." Or, for a rather different example, the claim that *Henry VI* exhibits "insistent" similarities (p. 69), "highly charged details" or "potentially explosive details" (p. 68) that constitute "strong topical associations between Joan and Elizabeth" (p. 76) and would affect the audience with "immediacy and shock" (p. 93) turns out to rest upon the following particularities: (1) Joan is a powerful woman who claims divine support, rules men, and dons armour; Elizabeth is a powerful woman who claims divine support, rules men, and may have once donned a "cuirass" (pp. 54–66); (2) Joan is a sham virgin who is burnt while claiming to carry an unborn child: Elizabeth was rumored to have secret lovers and burn her unwanted offspring (p. 71); (3) Joan names as lovers the dukes of Alençon and Anjou: Elizabeth comes close to marrying the dukes of Alençon and Anjou (p. 68); (4) Joan is called "Amazon," "Debora" and "Astrea's Daughter" by Dauphin Charles, who promises to celebrate her in festival; Elizabeth is celebrated with festivals and her designations include Amazon, Debora, and Astrea (p. 67); (5) "Catholic" Joan thwarts "Protestant" English forces: Elizabeth fails to support Continental Protestantism to the extent demanded by ultra-Protestants (p. 74); (6) Joan

consorts with demons: Elizabeth's enemies accuse her of witchcraft (p. 81). The author wisely admits "it is hard to judge whether the play would have registered with contemporaries as subversion or containment of subversion" (p. 83), *and yet* through pages of text and notes the claim that these would be "insistent" parallels for contemporaries is scarcely open to dispute, although that very insistence might be one of our most serious and *localizable* doubts. (Compare the later claim: "Given the Elizabethan passion for political lock-picking, we can imagine various ways in which Shakespeare's cross-dressed comic heroines could have registered with contemporary audiences as analogues of Elizabeth" [pp. 98 ff.]).

Such instances of interpretive formulation dominating particularities are not isolated but reflective of a pervasive problematic that is perhaps most striking in the book's treatment of Elizabeth at Tilbury. Elizabeth's inspirational appearance before the troops at Tilbury in 1588, which according to some accounts included her wearing of a "cuirass," is convincingly related to the queen's typical rhetorical strategy of claiming for her princely identity both male and female natures and qualities. But while the book's further argument is based on a reasonable hypothesis—a ruling woman displaying male attributes might have been threatening for her subjects in her embodiment of "a complex of attributes associated with danger and 'misrule'" (p. 62)—the claims that follow are far from convincing. The reasonable "local" hypothesis generates by way of extremely slender evidence such locutionary certainties as the designation of Elizabeth's appearance as "Elizabeth's glorious, troubling appearance at Tilbury" (p. 66) or "the dazzling, enervating image of the queen at Tilbury" (p. 92) as well as such further reaches of hypothesis as the conjecture of "contemporary fears" that "the queen's anomalous self-display as a male warrior had in some mysterious fashion drained away the efficacy of the English forces" (p. 82). The author admits that in 1588 discomfort about "the queen's violation of sex roles was apparently not articulated, at least not in public" (p. 65), and that even a Spanish agent fails to report "any word spoken of her, but in praising her for her stately person, and princely behaviour" (p. 64), *and yet* the book argues for "local" uneasiness about Elizabeth's appearance on the basis of "menacing overtones" that "register suppressed anxiety over the uncanny image of the queen in warlike male attire" (p. 64), which the author reads in a single murky simile in James Aske's laudatory *Elizabetha Triumphans*. Thus does local interpretation—perhaps rather more like other readings than its ideal of openness to provisionality and historical particularity would suggest—read in the interests of a generalized thematics local to the interpreter.

Those of us who have attempted to practice one or another form of localized reading may take heart from the lucid and compelling depiction of the premises and potential of such reading as represented in *Puzzling Shakespeare*, but one may also here acquire a sense of problems that haunt its practice. Other locales have a disturbing tendency to turn into refracted versions of our own backyard, no less subject to being fenced-in and tamed for all our professed commitments to openness and provisionality.

Boston University James R. Siemon

Ben Jonson's Parodic Strategy: Literary Imperalism in the Comedies by Robert N. Watson. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987. Pp. 269. $25.00

Robert Watson's study is a lively, intelligent, largely successful exploration of Ben Jonson's metadramatic impulse, anti-theatricalism, and emulous attitude toward rival dramatists. Like other strong, second-generation playwrights in the late Elizabethan—early Jacobean era, Jonson self-consciously assumed a confrontational stance toward his dramatic predecessors and coevals and the genres they favored. In his most important comedies, Watson argues, Jonson asserts his superiority over past playwrights and sovereignty over contemporary playwrights by systematically debunking, decentering, and generally devaluing their genres while foregrounding and prizing his own. Jonson carries out this program of systematic self-promotion and generic revaluation through what Watson identifies as a thoroughgoing "parodic strategy," the variations thereon and permutations thereof the book is at pains to document.

Fundamental to Jonson's purpose is the notion of genre as gestalt, that is, as a self-contained system with its own values, mores, and assumptions about reality. The panoply of fools that people Jonson's comedies are notable, Watson contends, because their ridiculous mind-sets are reduced, simplified, or parodic versions of popular Elizabethan literary and dramatic genres. Jonson's audience would immediately recognize these "kinds," associate them ignominiously with fools and gulls, and eventually reject them (together with their embodiments) in favor of the superior values and vision of reality promoted by the character, usually a "wit," who is self-conscious about his theatricalism and therefore privileged as Jonson's surrogate. This trick of characterization enables Jonson simultaneously to satirize the self-fashioning tendencies of London would-be's—aspirants to economic, social, and amatory success or smug pretenders to intellectual, moral or religious superiority—and, by parodying the genres he relegates to these fools, to discredit the work of predecessors and rivals while asserting his own sovereignty over the London stage.

It should be said at the outset that Watson's broad thesis about Jonson's parodic strategy and literary imperialism is not wholly convincing. To begin with, Watson never makes clear exactly what Jonson is imposing imperialistically on his dramatic worlds. In *Every Man In His Humour*, the triumphant, subsuming genre is described as a "realistic and ethical type of comedy" (p. 19), a version of new comedy with a naturalistic, moralistic, and satirical coloring that anticipates city comedy. But when we are told that in *Every Man Out of His Humour* Jonson is already exhibiting an "ambivalence toward [his] parodic strategy" (p. 49), and when in *Cynthia's Revels* and *Poetaster* he reveals a "discomfort" with being a city comedian and in *Eastward Ho* the "strategy" really doesn't fit (pp. 80–82), and when in the ending of *Volpone* the satirical perspective of the wits is emphatically un-privileged—it is clear that Watson has claimed too much. What "strategy"? Watson has read a series of plays against his own critical construct.

But Watson's thesis—while too abstract, systematic, and appliqued a construct to be convincing in its own terms—does provide access to the metadra-

matic and parodic impulse everywhere evident in Jonson's best plays and, as a vehicle to critical insight, succeeds admirably, sometimes brilliantly. *Every Man In His Humour, Volpone, The Alchemist,* and *The Devil Is an Ass,* for example, are especially well suited to an approach that highlights the characters' antithetical motives and assumptions that are allowed to jostle for ascendancy on the stage of fools before Jonson finally asserts the superiority of another vision of reality, whether Brainworm's, or Lovewit's, or Wittipol's, or that of severe poetic justice his censors would impose on the world of *Volpone.* And even in plays where the conflict of genres and ultimate triumph of a privileged genre is not at all evident, parody does seem central to Jonson's dramaturgy, and Watson's approach pays rich dividends in illuminating what makes discrete characters tick—such as Old Knowell (pp. 22–25) and Kitely (pp. 31–37), Macilente (pp. 74–78), Celia and Bonario (pp. 90–93), Morose (pp. 107–10), Surly (pp. 125–29), or Overdo (pp. 156–68), to name a few of Watson's most instructive assessments.

Since much of Jonson's parody in the comedies is of poetic genres, one might have expected a chapter on Jonson the poet, establishing his complex relationship to classical predecessors [Jonson as a pietistic "curator" (p. 9) of the past is too simple] and contentious relationship with contemporaries. And since Watson's "hope" is "to encourage further thinking about both the tactics and philosophy of Jonson's entire artistic project" (p. 14), certainly he ought to have been conversant with Helgerson's *Self-Crowned Laureates,* which would have occasioned Watson's own "further thinking" about the nature of Jonson's self-assertion. Still, these oversights notwithstanding, *Ben Jonson's Parodic Strategy* is a valuable addition to Jonson scholarship and highly recommended for students of Elizabethan-Jacobean drama in general.

University of Southern California Richard S. Ide

One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton by James Grantham Turner. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. Pp. 320. $55.00, cloth.

If you liked *The Politics of Landscape* (as I did), you will love *One Flesh.* It is an example of how excellent work is being done while the arid theoretical controversy about the new historicism preoccupies writers for and readers of *PMLA, SAQ,* and *NLH.* At once a cultural historian and a literary critic who orients his book toward a major canonical author, Turner is one of the scholars who address major texts in a wide cultural field, made up of seventeen centuries of opinion on questions of sexuality, gender, and constructions of human identity. To approach the representation of the relationship of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost,* Turner summons interpretations of Edenic sexuality, gender-relations, and interpretation of the Word from "the Church Fathers, the Radical Reformation, Renaissance Platonism, and English Puritanism" (p. vi). This book about a classical topic could not, however, have been written until Turner could draw on recent critical theories that inform his work: reception theory in successive interpretations of Genesis, feminist theory for

gender construction and defence of male supremacy, the concept of Genesis as an indeterminate text, and the analysis of conflicting ideologies—all marshalled for a context in which to read a complex Milton, divided along several mentalities.

Each chapter addresses a part of "this problematic inheritance." The first chapter defines central issues of the contradictions within Genesis, of the interpretations of Paradisal sexuality, of questions of trust in human reason and imagination, and these concerns are traced throughout the Christian era. The next two chapters concentrate on sexuality and sexual politics, beginning with Augustine, but concentrating largely in the Reformation thinkers and the ideologies of Milton's contemporaries. Another chapter is devoted to visionary and libertine theories of primeval sexuality in the seventeenth century. The final chapters are addressed to Milton's divorce tracts and to Edenic sexuality in *Paradise Lost*.

Turner demonstrates with engaging detail the range of interpretations of Paradisal marriage and fallen sexuality in the longer tradition, but especially in the seventeenth century: "Genesis could thus inspire wildly different conclusions and consequences, ranging from quietism to activism, from restitutionist fervour to alienated despair. No consensus or doctrine emerged to regulate this unpredictable variation—a lack which helps to explain the unstable, schismatic quality of Christianity, especially in the seventeenth century" (p. 7). Large questions of imagining the unfallen state of Adam and Eve, of married sexuality in the fallen world as an "Eden of felicitie," of imagining the original marital relationship as egalitarian or subordinationist, are read through Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Spiritual Libertines, Adamites, Ranters, Boehme, and van Helmont. But Turner's "Christian tradition" is anything but the monolithic concept of past scholarship: "I see this tradition as profoundly and incurably restless, condemned perpetually to shuttle between dichotomies that it must raise but cannot solve: between a beatific and tragic sense of life, between a lapsarian and a non-lapsarian view of human nature, between a redemptive and a diabolical vision of sexuality . . . between the equality of all believers and the ratification of hierarchy by the 'Father,' and above all between two meanings of 'one flesh'—evil substance, divine incarnation" (p. 8).

Turner's Christian tradition is not only profoundly contradictory and divided, but his presentation of Milton's English contemporaries is similarly "thick" in description. Yoking Milton's magisterial epic to William Heale's *An Apologie for Women* (1608) or Emilia Lanier's *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum* (1611) simply would not have happened in earlier Milton studies, yet, as Turner comments, "*Paradise Lost* is generated out of essentially the same materials" (p. 2). The Milton that emerges from this heritage and from this context is memorable: "I see him as a figure of abundance rather than inhibition, a heroic synthesizer of incompatible materials, continually engaged in the imaginative transcendence of conceptual limits. But I also show him deeply divided between radical and conservative mentalities, between Platonist idealism and psychological realism, between dualistic rejection and monistic acceptance of the physical world, and between patriarchal and egalitarian conceptions of Paradisal marriage" (p. ix). The same historical abundance, synthesis of incompatible materials, and transcendence of conceptual limits

Turner admires in Milton, the reader may also find in Turner's work. One cannot think about Genesis or read *Paradise Lost* in the same way after this book: read *One Flesh.*

Wayne State University Marilyn L. Williamson

Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writings, 1649–1688 by Elaine Hobby. London: Virago, 1988. Pp. x + 269. £11.95 paperback. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1989. $29.95, cloth; $11.95, paper.

This is a timely and useful book, based on thorough research and dealing with an important period of women's history. In 1640 censorship broke down in England, and access to print was suddenly easier than before. There was an astonishing outburst of publication by people to whom the press would previously have been closed. Men took advantage of this more than women: but gradually taboos on publication by women were broken down, and a quite new era began. Women were being drawn into political activity during the crisis of the civil war—petitioning for peace, for social and political reform. Simultaneously the breakdown of the church's monopoly permitted congregations of ordinary people to gather, unsupervised by a university-educated minister, and to discuss whatever they wanted to discuss—religion, politics, economics, marriage.

In these congregations women played an important part. Some preached, drawing their own congregations; others participated in discussions. In some sects women had their own separate meetings. There were many Biblical precedents for women prophesying; they were thought to have special supernatural gifts, whether as prophetesses or as witches. More than half the texts published by women in her period, Elaine Hobby tells us, were prophecies (p. 26). Elizabeth Poole was received by the leaders of the Army in December 1648, when she brought them a message of encouragement from the Lord. Their interest in her subsided later when she told them that God did not want them to execute the King. Anna Trapnel underwent trances, during which she dictated reams of verse which her admirers eagerly wrote down. There were many others.

Elaine Hobby has discovered three forgotten women poets. The anonymous author of *Elizas Babes, or the Virgins Offspring* (1652) has a remarkable freshness of expression:

> Since you ask me, why born was I?
> I'll tell you; 'twas to heaven to fly,
> Not here to live a slavish life,
> By being to the world a wife.
> (p. 56)

> But those that grovel here below,
> What! I love them? I'll not do so.
> (p. 57)

Eliza for, ask now not here,
She's gone to heaven, to meet her peer.
For since her Lord on earth was dead,
What, tarry here? she'd not, she said.
And to the heavens she took her flight.
(p. 56)

All you that goodness do disdain,
Go, read not here:
And if you do; I tell you plain,
I do not care.
For why? above your reach my soul is placed,
And your odd words shall not my mind distaste.
(p. 56)

But Elaine Hobby's object is not to reveal unknown literary masterpieces, but to cover all women's writing during her chosen period—good, bad and indifferent. The great names are here—the Duchess of Newcastle, Lucy Hutchinson, Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn; but the book covers female prophets, and prophecies, conversion narratives, books on housewifery, medicine, midwifery, education as well as literature proper. She rightly emphasizes that liberty of printing during the "Puritan" Revolution saw the beginnings of "home-grown pornography" (pp. 86–88) as well as a translation of Aretine. Methods of birth control and abortion, presumably long transmitted by word of mouth, got into print in the sixteen-fifties.

It is in many ways a pity that her book starts in 1649—too late for the main activities of one of the most colorful of radical women, the Leveller Katherine Chidley (p. 69). Some women petitioners expressed very radical views. *The Womens Petition* of 1650, employed the phraseology of Gerrard Winstanley the Digger: the head of tyranny had been cut off with the execution of Charles I, but its body remained in the oppressive legal system which derived from the Norman Yoke. Other women used the same metaphor and made the same demands in October 1651 (p. 16). The Fifth Monarchist Mary Cary called for legal reforms to give wives the right to own property, and denounced the greed and idleness of the rich. She wanted a ceiling of £200 a year on earnings—which would at a stroke have transformed society (p. 31). Parliament's view of women's right to participate in politics was expressed in 1650; in prescribing those who must swear an oath of loyalty to the Commonwealth the word "persons" was changed to "men;" women were included in their husbands (p. 17).

The Quakers are important in this study, among whom women found more freedom than in most groups. Elaine Hobby indeed plausibly suggests that women like Sarah Blackborow and Elizabeth Hooton had already developed their ideas before the Quakers existed. George Fox made his first recorded interruption of a church service in support of women who had heckled the minister (p. 36). Quaker women countered the Pauline prohibition of women's speaking in church by arguing that when Christ spoke in either the male or the female he was not to be silenced. Fox took over this argument. Quaker women, like Quaker men, toured England denouncing minis-

ters and universities, going naked for a sign; Quaker women missionaries set off to convert the Great Turk and the Pope, or (far more dangerous) to convert Puritan New England. It must have been an extraordinarily liberating experience for women thus to roam unaccompanied by men.

But the heroic age did not last long. The experience of defeat had a sobering effect on dissenters, and on women. Quaker women's meetings soon came to devote themselves to "such things as are proper to us, as visiting and relieving the sick;" the elder women instructed the younger "to be discreet, chaste, sober, keeping at home, that the work of God we profess be not profaned" (p. 47). *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673)—attributed to Bathsua Makin, though Elaine Hobby believes it was written by a man—sums up: "God hath made the man the head, if you be educated and instructed, as I propose, I am sure you will acknowledge it, and be satisfied that you are helps, that your husbands do consult and advise with you (which if they are wise they will be glad of) and that your husbands have the casting-voice, in whose determination you will acquiesce." This, as Elaine Hobby concludes, "marks a retreat to quiescence, a retreat to the home and the schoolroom: but a retreat armed with Latin and Greek, the keys to male knowledge, and therefore the hope of not being defeated entirely" (p. 203). She rightly stresses that "under the developing bourgeois-aristocratic alliance of the later seventeenth century" only wealthy women were able to write and publish. Their contribution was very different from that of the political radicals of the revolutionary decades. "Their vision of 'womanhood' did not extend very far down the social scale" (p. 163).

A primary object of Elaine Hobby's book is to show how difficult it was for women to publish, even after 1640. Traditionally women's role was to listen to their fathers, husbands, and ministers. It was immodest, unfeminine, for them to force themselves into male conversations. To write, let alone to publish, was far worse. Elaine Hobby shows the lengths of apology and pretence to which women had to resort when they broke this taboo. "Finding myself crowded into print with calumny and reproach, I was the rather prevailed upon by some of my best friends not to be silent lest my innocency suffer. I have therefore according to my capacity, in the plain style of a weak woman (with all sincerity and meakness, however provoked). . . ." Thus Hester Shaw in 1650, defending herself against her minister who had called her a "malicious slanderess" in print (p. 10). This is the point of Elaine Hobby's title: Hester Shaw made a virtue of necessity. So did Mary Blathwaite in 1654, who was persecuted by Cumberland royalists. "After much labour in vain, and many a weary step, to no purpose," she felt that she had "to make myself a fool in print. . . . My oppressions are so great and so insufferable, that I cannot do less than to crave for justice, from which I have been so long detained" (p. 15).

Twenty four years later, in the very different political atmosphere of the Popish Plot, Elizabeth Cellier, who had been imprisoned and attacked in ballads and pamphlets, still found it necessary to apologize for defending herself, even to women. "As to my own sex, I hope they will pardon the errors of my story . . . though it be thought too masculine. . . . None can truly say but that I preserved the modesty, though not the timouressness common to my sex" (p. 23). Apology was necessary for entering into public controversy. And great courage.

Prophetesses could call upon a divine commission. Mary Cary in 1651 declared "I am a very weak and unworthy instrument, and have not done this work by any strength of my own, but . . . could do no more herein . . . of myself than a pencil or pen can do when no hand guides it" (p. 30). The author of *Elizas Babes* addressed God direct: "I dare not say, 'I am an ignorant woman, and unfit to write,' for if thou will declare thy goodness and thy mercy by weak and contemptible means, who can resist thy will?" (p. 55). Authors of religious autobiographies, or of biographies of deceased husbands, could also claim to publish out of a sense of duty. But what of creative writing—non-religious poetry, prose fiction, plays?

The first resort was one that gentlemen had often used—the author had only written for friends, but manuscripts had been purloined and pirated by unscrupulous printers. Katherine Philips, like male courtiers, circulated her verses in manuscript to a privileged coterie. When they were printed in 1664 she felt it necessary to protest and apologize. But nevertheless she became "an important example that it was possible for a woman to be praised for her writing, as long as she was sufficiently modest in her claims" (p. 142).

But she was not the first. In 1653 Margaret, Marchioness of Newcastle, published *Poems and Fancies*. Elaine Hobby insists on calling her "Margaret Cavendish." This is an amiably democratic way of referring to a lady who from being Miss Lucas ultimately became a duchess. But—apart from the fact that no one ever addressed her as "Margaret Cavendish"—her title was the most important fact about her, even during the Revolution. A duchess can flout convention as lesser women dare not. The Duke, remarkably and creditably, seems positively to have encouraged her literary undertakings, in which he sometimes shared. With his approval she could be as eccentric as she liked. So she blazed an important trail, continuing to publish poems, plays, stories, philosophical essays and an autobiography as well as the famous life of her husband. She helped to make it possible for women to go on publishing even "in the post-restoration world, where acceptable female behaviour was again being narrowly defined" (p. 142). I share Elaine Hobby's disapproval of hereditary aristocracy; but I think the Duchess (and her husband) deserves a niche among liberators of women.

The Duchess used her impregnable position to go over to the offensive. "Since all heroic actions, public employments, powerful governments, and eloquent pleadings are denied our sex in this age, or at least would be condemned for want of custom, is the cause I write so much" (p. 82). She wanted to encourage women "lest in time we should grow irrational as idiots by the dejectedness of our spirits, through the careless neglects and despisements of the masculine sex to the female, thinking it impossible we should have either learning or understanding, wit or judgment." So women "are kept like birds in cages, to hop up and down in our houses. . . . By an opinion, which I hope is an erroneous one, in men, we are shut out of all power and authority, . . . we are never employed either in civil or martial affairs, our counsels are despised and laughed at. . . . Women that are bred together, idle and ignorant (as I have been) are not likely to have much wit. . . . It were very fit and requisite they should be bred up to masculine understandings" (*Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, 1655). The Duchess was laughed at; but she held her ground.

Elaine Hobby is her own best critic. Most students of this period have regarded Aphra Behn as its most significant woman writer. Elaine Hobby is curiously ambivalent about her. "Her most well-known story, *Oroonoko*, sits uneasily in my account of female romance." "The heroine's bravery in battle and her subjection to the ever-present threat of rape" are all right, but the central characters are black slaves, and the theme of white racism "introduces a further set of issues which cannot be fitted into my argument. Both I and others need to rethink our work on white women's writings to take account of these concerns" (p. 96).

This is a characteristically honest and generous admission; it is also just. Elaine Hobby might have been better able to fit Aphra Behn into her story if she had appreciated how much men and women radicals had in common, and had not tried to isolate the feminist issues as self-sufficient (cf. p. 27). Aphra Behn speaks up for women's equality. But she also wrote the first anti-slavery novel, and helped to create the myth of the noble savage. She shared the anti-racialism of Roger Williams and the author of *Tyranipocrit Discovered* (1649), the critical attitudes towards the Bible of Winstanley, Clement Wrightly and Samuel Fisher. Her *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister*, which Hobby barely mentions, combines an attack on church marriage with a defence of romantic love, both of which recall Milton. Some of the best epigrams in her plays are directed against mercenary marriage—from the point of view of both sexes, not exclusively from the woman's angle. Hobby is admirable on aspects of Aphra Behn's plays which fit her interests. But Behn was competing for a living, alone, in an aggressively male world.

This courageous book is full of information and new ideas. I have done nothing like justice to its scope. It opens up whole new areas for discussion. Elaine Hobby's own self-criticism is better than I can offer. In her last chapter, entitled "Beginning Again" she says she must think through the implications of race as well as gender; she hints at work on lesbianism, and advocates "a systematic search of posthumous works by men" which might "reveal much forgotten women's writing" (pp. 205–6). This work is already a splendid beginning: she can and will take its insights further.

Sibford Ferris, Oxon. Christopher Hill

Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy by Kristina Straub. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1987. Pp. viii + 237. $22.00.

The contradictory nature of the late eighteenth-century domestic novel is the subject of Kristina Straub's study of Frances Burney's early writings. Until the last decade, Burney tended to be patronized by literary critics, and Straub has produced the first serious full-length critical work on this important writer. The last ten years have seen efforts by scholars such as Patricia Meyer Spacks, Judith Newton, Susan Staves, and Mary Poovey to give Burney's place in the development of the English novel its due, and Straub's work has been followed by the publication of Margaret Anne Doody's literary biography of Burney (*Frances Burney: The Life in the Works*, Rutgers University

Press, 1988) and by my own critical study (*The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* [Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1989]) as well as by a wave of welcome new, predominantly feminist, readings of Burney's fiction. Finally, then, the writer who used to be thought of as a poor woman's Jane Austen without Austen's irony has been granted her rights to the laurel crown for having virtually invented the modern woman's novel.

Divided Fictions concerns itself with the literary version of *Evelina*'s subtitle; this is the study of a young writer's entrance into the world. Three of the book's seven chapters discuss *Evelina; or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), Burney's first and best-known work of fiction, with one chapter on her second novel, *Cecilia; or, Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), one chapter on Burney's conceptions of her audience in her novels, journals and letters, and one chapter Straub calls a "coda" that extends these feminist readings to Burney's last two novels, *Camilla; or, A Picture of Youth* (1796) and *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814). In addition, Straub provides a useful opening chapter concerning her use of the methodologies of feminist criticism.

Straub posits a crucial doubleness in Burney's juxtaposed depictions of female autonomy and female self-doubt. She explains the divided and "apparently self-contradictory" nature of Burney's writings by arguing that this doubleness, far from representing either duplicity or subversion, instead derives honestly from the ideological inconsistencies and gaps in Burney's "cultural circumstances as woman and writer" (p. 3). It is too easy, Straub believes, to resolve the tension in Burney's work by seeing it either as a challenge or a submission to ideological conformity. Instead, Straub uncovers "the constant welling up—and, hence, exposure—of contradiction between the two opposing ideological impulses of Burney's duplicitous desires—to be human and a woman" (p. 5). Burney's texts are in fact, Straub argues, divided against themselves, and we must give up our worship of aesthetic unity and cease to look for coherent political or aesthetic statements if we are to understand the operations of Burney's art.

Straub turns most of her attention to *Evelina* "because it most clearly reveals the genesis of Burney's strategies for gaining 'unfeminine' control over self-identification while retaining the traditional power of femininity—the power of the 'other,' the romantic 'treasure,' . . .—a kind of control that is all too likely to recoil on its user" (p. 7–8). Straub's readings themselves are cogent and insightful; she is especially good on specific characters and passages. For example, Straub interprets the infamous footrace in the last volume of *Evelina* as part of the novel's complex metaphor of "gaming"—the old women mirror physically the economic and psychic exploitation of their sexually desirable younger selves, and the whole scene represents a "structured play, a kind of emblem for social interaction" (p. 44). Straub is also good on the "moral chaos" (p. 29) of Evelina's rowdy and appealingly vulgar grandmother Madame Duval, on the Mirvans' marriage and "the everyday, garden-variety pathos of attempting to defend familiar serenity and sanity against a culturally powerful male's disruptive behavior" (p. 61), and on the complicatedly free Mrs. Selwyn, whose liberation from immediate male control is counteracted by her desire to dominate the novel's male wits (p. 27).

Straub uses the conventional plot outlines of *Evelina* to analyse the ideological functions and realities of marriage in the eighteenth century, and sug-

gests that while Burney used her writing to manipulate conventions for her own wish-fulfillment, "Evelina's happy ending should not blind us to the implied, though ultimately incomplete, plot of the heroine's negative progress toward emotional deprivation, the barren realms of institutionalized failure" (p. 77). She contrasts Burney's own complex ties to her father with the Oedipal impulses of Evelina's relations to Villars and Orville, and offers an interesting alternative to the deprecating view (first proposed, with some personal justification, by Germaine de Staël) that Burney was a perpetual adolescent by proposing that it is no wonder, given the prevailing comparisons between carefree youth and the trials of maturity and marriage, that any woman would wish to prolong the former state.

Straub's strongest chapter on *Evelina* concerns what she calls "trivial pursuits": middle-class women's everyday occupations. Deftly using Pope's Belinda and Swift's Dorinda and Celia as cultural figures of feminine action, Straub refers work-play activities such as needlework and the bodily artificiality of the toilette to the contradictory ideologies Burney uncovers in her depiction of the constant devaluation of women's pastimes. In *Evelina*, Burney's stance, according to Straub, is one of "guileless duplicity"; without intending to deceive, she is trapped by "a contradiction inherent in the ideological terms of eighteenth-century, middle-class female self-identification" (p. 82). Evelina's situation differs measurably from the situations of Cecilia, Camilla, and Lady Juliet Granville, in that she is never entirely on her own, and the analysis Straub offers of "trivial pursuits" and the economy that underlies them might be profitably turned to an understanding of the later novels.

Straub reads *Cecilia* in part within this framework, but her emphasis is on the relation of what she sees as its dual plot structure, weaving a conventional romance plot with a "*Rasselas*-like" (p. 110) search for an appropriate life's work for the middle-class woman. The love plot, Straub believes, eventually decenters the public and economic themes of the novel. One of the strengths of this chapter is its analysis of the story of Albany, a bizarre and deliberately unsettling character whose transgressive past can easily be overlooked in a casual reading. Straub demonstrates the centrality of his story to the novel, and makes use of the recent work by Terry Castle and Mary Russo on the carnivalesque to read the importance of the masquerade in *Cecilia*. Finally, she concludes, *Cecilia* fits into the trajectory of Burney's writing career by "chart[ing] the contradictions between romantic love and a course of life, between affection and work, personal autonomy and social duty, as part of the identity [Burney] defines for herself through her fiction" (p. 151).

The place of the act of writing itself in Burney's self-definition forms the subject of Straub's chapter on "The Receptive Reader and Other Necessary Fictions." She argues here for an understanding of Burney's analysis of woman as text: to know Evelina is to read her letters; to know Frances Burney is to be her reader. This notion leads to a useful and original interpretation of the mother's posthumous letter in *Evelina*, where the heroine's mother appears only as disembodied words on a page many years after her death. Straub carries this to its logical endpoint and interprets reading (and, therefore, misreading) as central to all Burney's novels, arguing that activities such as Cecilia's and Camilla's "running mad" are rhetorical acts, "a way of

naming the threat of self-victimization implicit in acts of female power in the context of a male-controlled society" (p. 176). In each of Burney's novels, Straub holds, a central moment of crisis occurs when the heroine fails to receive a just "reading" and her own self-alienation results.

While the focus of *Divided Fictions* is on the beginnings of a woman's literary career, Straub offers provocative readings of Burney's last two novels, with especially useful analyses of the importance of clothing and cross-dressing in both novels, and sections on Sir Hugh's complicit role in *Camilla* and on theatricality in *The Wanderer*. This chapter teases the reader a little. Straub never claims to pay the kind of attention to these novels that she does to *Cecilia* and especially to *Evelina*, but their inclusion here takes some of the book's emphasis away from its goal of interpreting beginnings rather than discussing an entire literary career. Still, Straub fits the later novels into her argumentative frame, concluding that "the dissonances of Burney's fiction reveal not aesthetic failure but an impressive ability to resist false unities and resolutions designed to mask the real difficulty of her historical and personal circumstances. Burney's novels body forth contradiction, allowing her power over her identity as a woman writer and giving her the ability to confront her audience with the often-painful evidence of the difficulty in sustaining that identity" (p. 181).

From her analyses of Burney's self-division, Straub concludes that "Burney did not have the political consciousness to bring her intuitions about the debilitating effects of male-centered ideology on women's lives to the point of explicit social critique" (p. 33); that her "historically determined inability to do more than expose the contradictions in the ideology that shaped her sense of female maturity—the conflict between a happy-ever-after romantic marriage and the depressing 'gulphs, pits, and precipices' of futurity—left her vulnerable to debilitating self-doubts from which a more fully conscious critique of received ideology might have protected her" (p. 51); and that Burney's "creative energy did not run to criticizing the informing assumptions of female life, but to revealing, without resolving, basic contradictions within ideology" (p. 107). Though no scholar would argue that Burney rivalled Mary Wollstonecraft as a feminist political theorist, these statements undervalue the courage and political power of exposing, as Straub's analyses deftly demonstrate, the culturally imperilled and socially constrained situation of women in the late eighteenth century. The social critique in *Evelina* is veiled by the gauze of broad humor and subtle wit, though in the later novels, as Straub shows, that critique is pointed. Indeed, *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, and *The Wanderer* provide as sharp and angry and telling a depiction of the "wrongs of woman" as anything written during the period.

Burney's fictions challenge social ideology and work to disrupt convention at the same time that they ultimately reintegrate their heroines into conventional social structures. The central (and vexed) question for feminist critics interested in the complex politics of these fictions concerns authorial intention and responsibility. Until recent work on Jane Austen began to propose a more overtly political understanding of her work, Austen critics resolved the problem with arguments about the aesthetics of irony. But Burney is a far darker and angrier writer than Jane Austen. Burney's novels participate in the political gothicism of the late century, and her narrative strategies are "femi-

nine" within a context of revolutionary social and political change. Does her patina of propriety cover deliberate subversion? Or is she truly self-divided, wanting to be acceptably decorous yet producing fiction and drama that push against the borders of decorum? The richness of Burney's later work lies in its very forcefulness. The strength of Kristina Straub's *Divided Fictions* is that it presents the genesis of Burney's narrative and political power in her youthful efforts to have things both ways, to be a reformer as well as an observer.

Divided Fictions makes a plea for recognizing the complexity, subtlety and seriousness of Burney's fiction, and of the particularly female power in its analysis of the eighteenth-century's ideological thwartings of female desire. Kristina Straub's reading of Burney's entrance into the literary marketplace offers an analysis of a single writer that fits with the recent more theoretical and general work of Nancy Armstrong, Mary Poovey, and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall. A lot must necessarily be omitted from this study because of its primary concern with literary entry—Straub mentions Burney's career as a playwright only in relation to the aborted *The Witlings*, for example—and readers will disagree with some points and wish for further elaboration of others, but *Divided Fictions* raises some crucial issues concerning our critical treatment of writers who cannot comfortably fit a political agenda. What did it mean for this socially constrained woman to insist on a career for herself as a writer, to make public her insidiously dangerous analyses of her social world? The first responsibility of a critical study is to ask the important questions, and *Divided Fictions* does that.

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Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment, edited by G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988. Pp. x + 280. $35.00.

"It is tempting to write the history of sex as if all in darkness lay till God said 'Let Freud be' and all was light" (p. 1). One might easily purloin this rather successful opening one-liner from Rousseau and Porter and, in the place of Freud, substitute Foucault. However, one of the main virtues of this collection of ten essays is that, while it acknowledges and draws on Foucauldian revisionism, it favours "nitty-gritty historical research" before his preferred "bird's-eye view" (p. 64). The editors are concerned with inclusivity as a criterion for truer history. Hence their plan for two further volumes in this series dealing respectively with the Orient and with "sex, discourse and society in Western Europe" (p. ix).

The impressive scope of the research in this first volume, ranging from Randolph Trumbach on London prostitution to Gloria Flaherty on Shamanism in Africa, offers a welcome contribution to the contextualisation of our understanding of sexuality in the period. Porter and Rousseau seem needlessly defensive about the admirably "greater eclecticism" which characterises their selection of primary sources (p. vii). In an ill-placed reversion to canonical standards, they plead not to "be adjudged to be second-rank" for studying "second rank or lower" authors (p. 9).

Lawrence Stone is rebuffed for his invalidation of Paul-Gabriel Bouce's forerunning *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* because he arrogantly dismisses it as written by mere "scholars of English literature" (p. vii). Despite the largely democratic approach to all texts in the body of their book however, Porter and Rousseau momentarily seem to hanker for more supposedly objective documents, somehow magically devoid of the ideological influence of discursive practices. They appear to deny the spilling over of the "self-referential play upon . . . itself" which they regard as characteristic of "art," into texts that fall beyond their categories of fiction and the visual arts (p. 9).

In an effort to guard against the cruder equations of art with "life or . . . mass ideology" they suggest a purely formal, perhaps even trans-historical, and hermetically separate matrix for works of art (pp. 8–9). In practice though, the essays (including their own) elaborate circumstances of production and mentalities of reception thus gauging the way "art" and all manner of texts interact with, and not simply react to, society. An awareness of this constitutive relation leads to such interesting studies as that of Randolph Trumbach investigating "Modern Prostitution and Gender in *Fanny Hill*". The novel in question is interrogated using Foundling Hospital petitions and court records—the discourses of its social context.

Though the first contributor to *Sexual Underworlds*, Theodore Tarczylo, attacks the blinkered selectivity of a traditional movement in art history and literary criticism which, rather unhelpfully, translates from the French as "lascivious erudition," he gives us scant guidance in discovering an alternative methodology (p. 27). For he dismisses "the new history" as a blunt "Marxo-Freudian" instrument obsessively dependent on statistics which are then interpreted with no feeling for regional or cultural variations (p. 28). Antony Simpson's later essay, associating notions about the curability and prevention of venereal disease with the incidence of rape on minors, seems to challenge Tarczylo in its highly informative and sensitive statistical and legal analysis.

Simpson's taut exposition also heeds the editors' warning about the increasingly "politicised, polarised and polemical" nature of "interpretations of sex and sensuality" in the period (p. 6). While such a timely reminder against self-indulgent ranting is welcome it seems neither possible nor desirable to eradicate politicisation (in its broadest sense) from those interpretations. A heightened awareness of the political contexts of the production of such "interpretations" as distinct from the political contexts of the period seems preferable to pretended impartiality in ensuring the least distortion of materials under scrutiny.

In citing so-called "feminist sectarianism" as a contemporary source of undesirable politicisation, Rousseau and Porter leave their objections precariously unsupported (p. 6). Elsewhere too, "certain feminist scholars of the 1970's" are said to have "discovered a new model of the eighteenth-century woman" (p. 15). But who are these scholars? No foot-note tells us. Similarly unlisted "recent feminist historians" are accused of being "all too ready to impose the role of victim upon women in the past" (p. 15).

While the dust-jacket boasts "a special focus" on "the sexual behaviour of women," it is predominantly what other people (mostly men) wrote about "the sexual behaviour of women" which features. Lynne Friedli's essay on women who "passed" for men, and Terry Castle's discussion of travesty in the period constitute the two chief exceptions to this comment.

Even if we accept the scarcity of women's surviving writings and the bibliographical problems of recovering them, there are moments at which the contributors unreasonably exclude the discussion of works by women. Though Bouce discerns a "devious latent anti-feminist discourse" in his very full exploration of concepts of the effect of the female imagination in pregnancy, he too readily dismisses female midwifery treatises as slavish copies of their male counterparts without offering us proof or seeking to explain why this might be so (p. 99). Porter too cites only male discussions of the man-midwife, since women midwives allegedly reproduced only a "standard litany of arguments" (p. 216).

While conveniently deciding that "this is not the place to adjudicate the issue" of whether male midwives constituted a regression for women, Porter goes on to elaborate what amount to counter-claims without fully facing the "feminist" arguments he has dismissed in passing (pp. 216, 221). He ponders the "choice" of male practitioners by women without considering the influences and controls that conditioned that so-called "choice" (p. 216). The implication that eighteenth-century suspicions of sexual relations between patient and practitioner diminish the modern view that male practitioners enhanced "patriarchal subordination" surely depends on an elusive notion of female liberation (p. 221). To see the woman and man-midwife as allies in concealing illegitimate births is a separate, less debatable matter but one which, though he refers to it, Porter fails to distinguish in its implications.

Though the editorial introduction contains an intelligent reminder that any projected "erotic golden age" may not be so "golden" for all sectors of society, there is a tendency to regard things from the masculine standpoint (p. 4). Even Terry Castle alludes primarily to new sexual possibilities open to the masquerading woman, but one might equally see these as opportunities merely for the greater exploitation of bodies.

Any elision of the (mainly male) contributors' approach with the highly objectifying nature of the texts explored towards women could be guarded against by a more bold and systematic definition and use of the terms "pornography" and "erotica." Evidently such divisions and definitions constitute a study in themselves, but to attempt a working definition, as Roger Thompson has done in his study of seventeenth-century pornography, *Unfit for Modest Ears* (1979), might have strengthened their stance in a problematical terrain. Simpson and Castle refer to "pornography," while Peter Wagner, discussing paramedical texts, prefers "erotic" and "erotica," rather alarmingly labelling such "discourses" as "providing some sexual relief" without speculating on their negative effects more than to say that they offered "a mixture of correct and false information" (p. 64).

Sexual Underworlds does however confront the "false" consciousness induced by previous effacements or avoidances of eighteenth-century discourses relating to homosexuality. Rousseau demonstrates compellingly the significance of Richard Payne Knight's treatise on Priapic worship as a focus of topical anxieties with its sub-textual attack on contemporary Christianity. Yet, in discussing the related issue of Payne Knight's sexual orientation (irrespective of whether passive or active), he seems too ready to assert that "contemporary psychologists and psychiatrists have shown that . . . bisexuality or homosexuality consists of a symbolic transaction: the symbolic taking

in of the father to assuage the pain of the mother" (p. 139). Surely this is only one psychoanalytical model, not a conclusive and universal blueprint. Furthermore it relies on an acceptance of the highly debatable Freudian construct of female as castrated male. His concluding references to "a golden age of the phallus" invoke only the projected emancipatory aspects for the homosexual male, while he remains evasive of the less than "golden" ramifications of "phallicism" for women (p. 141).

In his wish to avoid reviving "a minor ancient work by endowing it with a microscopic reading it probably does not deserve," Rousseau restates editorial anxieties (p. 103). For Rousseau and Porter feel compelled to defend the exposition and description of little-known material in their volume, thereby unfortunately inserting themselves in the over-stressed theory/anti-theory paradigm. "We hope," they assert, "that in this era of Theory information has not sunk into such disrepute that fresh material can only be presented if it displays a new conceptual blueprint" (p. ix.). One is reminded of Brown and Nussbaum's discussion of "the resistance to theory in Eighteenth Century studies" in their introduction to *The New Eighteenth Century* (1987), where they recognise that "'theory'" has become not only an occasion for a certain amount of confusion, but a location of ideological struggle . . . for many critics in this field" (p. 1).

Unnecessarily so one feels in the case of *Sexual Underworlds*, since only studies with the freshness and depth of those assembled by Rousseau and Porter, can permit us to continue re-theorising models of eighteenth-century sexuality, as these authors, despite the modesty of their introductory statements, have indeed begun to do.

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Blake and Spenser by Robert F. Gleckner. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins. Univ. Press, 1985. Pp. 416. $42.00

This book is a welcome attempt to find the most fruitful ground for comparing Spenser and Blake. Robert Gleckner approaches the poets by choosing two general areas for analysis, the poets' systems of thought and Blake's visual depictions of Spenserian subjects. In his book's first half, he examines Blake's criticism of the *Amoretti*'s Petrarchan presentation of sexual roles, the transformation of Spenserian temperance in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and Blake's general perceptions of the inadequacies of allegory as a mode of poetic thought. The second half consists of a detailed analysis of Blake's tempera *The Characters in Spenser's Faerie Queene*; Gleckner elsewhere discusses Blake's portrait of Spenser and *Spenser Creating His Fairies*, one of the illustrations for Gray's *Bard*.

The book has considerable virtues. Gleckner is best when reading Blake's poetry closely, as in the chapter on Petrarchanism. He treats the *Amoretti* not as an individual cycle but as an epitome of a larger Petrarchan tradition. Although, as he realizes, the *Amoretti* are more a criticism than an epitome of that tradition, he claims that "with a studied and deliberate obtuseness Blake

interprets the *Amoretti* . . . as a kind of epitome of Petrarchan error . . ." (p. 5). He argues convincingly that Blake's early poetry absorbs and literalizes Petrarchan images to suggest the violence inherent in them, as in "The Golden Net." By tracing Petrarchan images throughout Blake's work, he demonstrates how the epics not only continue the earlier rejection of Petrarchanism but also revalorize its images, as in *Milton*'s famous "Arrows of desire" and "Bow of burning gold."

Illuminating as Gleckner's close readings are, he is less successful in his characterization of the overall relation between the two poets. For him, the attitude taken by the narrator of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* toward Milton becomes a model for Blake's stance toward Spenser: ". . . we must find evidence of Blake's turning the 'angelic' Spenser against himself to reveal the devilish Spenser that was hid . . ." (p. 26). This division into angelic and devilish, which Blake employs so cleverly in the *Marriage*, is less helpful as a model for the progress of the relation between Blake and Spenser because it threatens to turn Spenser into an ideological strawman. Noting that Blake "hardly needed" Spenser or Milton to find "benighted ideas" to attack, Gleckner claims that for Blake, Spenser and Milton "should have known better" because they "were *poets*, not philosophers or theoreticans" (p. 86). He is rightly uncomfortable locating the relation between Blake and Spenser in the realm of "benighted ideas," and his last chapter warns eloquently against reducing poets to doctrines.

Yet Gleckner does not always heed his own warnings. He argues that Spenser is an "allegorist extraordinaire and therefore, to Blake, a devotee of memory, reason, and the moral virtues" (p. 105). Blake's task is to free Spenser from the "intransigence of allegory" (p. 135) through his "allegorical anti-allegory" (p. 133). Gleckner is certainly correct to point out that Blake's discussions of allegory as a mode are harshly critical; in Blake's poems the adjective "allegorical" almost always has a pejorative sense. Yet the complex spectrum of poetic levels of representation in both Blake and Spenser is not adequately suggested by his neat division into Spenserian allegory and Blakean anti-allegory. Though *The Faerie Queene* contains moments of the kind of flat allegory that Blake found so inadequate, Gleckner's premises rule out detailed investigation of how Blake responded not to the poem's moral teaching but to its evolution of its own mythic structure. He overlooks how moments of flat allegory, such as the House of Alma in Book II, are called into being as contrasts to moments in the poem, such as the river-marriage near the end of Book IV, that are hardly allegorical at all, at least not in the same sense. What Blake may have learned from Spenser is that allegory can be the most, not least, flexible of modes.

For Gleckner, "Milton's and Blake's superiority, in Blake's eyes, quite rightly resides in the fact that they are 'generators' of values rather than conformers to those that already exist . . ." (p. 150). He sets the radically revisionist Blake against the more traditionalist Spenser, whose poem allegorizes only the received categories of virtue, and is impatient with attempts to read Blake's poems as flat allegories, in which, for example, Urizen equals reason in a simple one-to-one correspondence. Yet our understanding of the relation between narrative and abstraction must be as supple in Spenser as in Blake. The historical definitions of the values to which Spenser, according to Gleck-

ner, is supposed to conform, are of surprisingly little help in understanding *The Faerie Queene*. Is chastity a feeling, activity, intellectual concept, physical state, personal goal, communal ideal? It is all these, and Spenser's ability to adapt the ground rules of his poetics to represent them is one source of Milton's famous praise of him as a "better teacher."

Gleckner's treatment of the House of Busirane is characteristic of his special strengths and weaknesses: " 'Thought alone can make monsters,' Blake once said very early in his career, 'but the affections cannot' (*Annotations to Swedenborg*, E603). That saying is a measure of his unhappiness with Spenser, for Amoret's 'affections' are clearly her 'phantasies,' products not merely of her sexual fears but also of her imagination. . . . It is 'Thought' (Britomart) that comes to her rescue as the monster-slayer rather than the monster-maker, a true knight 'errant' for Blake, since she is not merely Reason but Chastity, the latter a 'monster' created by the former. No wonder Britomart fares so badly under Blake's furious brush in *The Faerie Queene* painting . . ." (p. 137). Britomart, for Gleckner's Blake, represents the repressive forces of reason and chastity that conquer the dangerous forces of Amoret's "diseased imagination" (p. 136) personified by Busirane. Gleckner suggests interestingly that Blake was troubled by Spenser's ambivalent attitude toward the imagination and would have seen in such an episode a negative model of the relation between imagination and reason. Yet if the House of Busirane is, as he claims, a projection of Amoret's mind, it is equally a projection of Britomart's and Busirane's, a representation of the harmful power that masculine conventions of love exercise over women, a revision of the Bower of Bliss, and perhaps most importantly for Blake, an example of the dangers of becoming entrapped by imaginative systems. Gleckner's identification of Britomart with reason is puzzling, for little in her appearances in the poem connects her with reason, particularly the lifeless abstract reasoning that Blake so often reacts against. The radical redefinition of chastity in terms of fidelity that Britomart represents makes her less an ancestor of Rahab and Tirzah, as Gleckner claims, than of Blake's Oothoon and Ololon, women who, like Britomart, make the painful transition from innocence to experience.

More attention to Milton's position in the Blake-Spenser relation would also have been helpful. One of Gleckner's most valuable conclusions is that Spenser's Book II is the most important for Blake, yet he pays too little attention to how Milton's own revision of Book II mediates between Blake and Spenser. Gleckner discusses in detail Eumnestes's chamber in the House of Alma, where Arthur reads the history of Britain, and Guyon that of Faery. Yet he fails to note that at the climax of *Comus*, Milton returns to this moment and borrows from Spenser's history of Britain the story of Sabrina and Gwendolen. Blake's own characterization of Gwendolen in *Jerusalem* involves a response to both of the earlier poets as complex as his images of Los's furnaces. Gleckner bypasses these literary relations, so that Eumnestes's chamber becomes for him merely a Blakean nightmare, a library devoted to memory and history rather than to the imagination. He argues that Blake's printing house in Hell in the *Marriage* reveals the negative implications of Spenser's episode: "All these books and paintings, which Spenser himself calls 'memorable,' are the very excrementitious husks that must be corrosively etched away in Blake's printing process to reveal the 'real' infinite wis-

dom or 'history' that was hidden" (p. 110). Yet Guyon's history is Spenser's myth, and the complex intersection between the two in *The Faerie Queene* provides Blake's precedent in his own epics, which are never so bound up with mythic imagination that British history is far from their center. He recalls Spenser's retelling of British history at the end of *The Four Zoas*:

> Next *Huddibras* his realme did not encrease,
> But taught the land from wearie warres to cease.
> Whose footsteps *Bladud* following, in arts
> Exceld at *Athens* all the learned preace,
> From whence he brought them to these saluage parts,
> And with sweet science mollifide their stubborne harts.
> (II.x.25)

> . . . Urthona rises from the ruinous walls
> In all his ancient strength to form the golden armour of science
> For intellectual War The war of swords departed now
> The dark Religions are departed & sweet Science reigns
> (*FZ* 139:7–10, E407)

Blake follows Milton's lead in *Comus* by transforming a small episode from Spenser's history and giving it climatic, redemptive significance. His development of the image of "sweet Science" from the learning of Athens into the severe contentions of friendship becomes in itself a metaphor of those severe contentions, a powerful example of how a later writer can expand and revitalize the vision of an earlier one.

Gleckner devotes over one-third of his book to a systematic, ambitious analysis of Blake's tempera, *The Characters in Spenser's Faerie Queene*. In a painstaking discussion, he demonstrates that the painting represents how "Spenser's phantasmagoria of shifting identities seems to focus our attention on the fallen world of Generation and its multifaced 'evils'" (p. 280). Despite the intelligence of Gleckner's argument, I find this section the least satisfying in the book because of a certain arbitrariness in the way Gleckner evaluates the figures: "He [the poet-figure] is under a rainbow . . . and that is obviously good. But the rainbow seems to emanate from Jove's aurora borealis and terminates, to our right, in the right wing of the spread-winged Presence; and that is apparently bad" (p. 197). Much of the analysis depends on an analogy between this portrayal and Blake's more famous one of Chaucer's pilgrims; Gleckner argues, for example, that the similarity of Britomart's figure to that of the Wife of Bath's suggests that they are both representatives of Rahab-Tirzah for Blake. No detailed consideration of how Blake might have viewed the relationship between Chaucer and Spenser reinforces the equivalences he finds between the two pictures. Yet one of *Milton*'s most powerful images suggests Blake's response to the relationship between the two: the "infusion sweete" of Chaucer's spirit into Spenser's in Book IV of *The Faerie Queene* provides Blake with a precedent for the image of Milton's spirit entering his left foot.

While Gleckner is frequently perceptive and original in what he has to say about Blake, he seems nervous about advancing original interpretations of Spenser. He often appeals to previous Spenserian critics, as if for reassurance:

"Only Una, as A. C. Hamilton observes, needfully reminding us of the obvious, 'cannot be divided *in* herself, being one'" (p. 147). The opportunity that a comparison of Spenser and Blake could offer of developing a distinctive interpretation of each poet in light of the other does not emerge as often or as powerfully as it might. He comes closest when he begins to unpack Coleridge's notion of mental space, noting brilliantly that Blake's characters, like Spenser's, seem "groping, lost, in the similar labyrinthine ways of their own minds, gropings externalized and displayed in his version of a monster-, dragon-, magician-, warrior-, damsel-, and villain-ridden landscape" (p. 265). As Gleckner suggests, a mental space involves more than mere pictorial description. It is defined not only by how it looks but also by what surrounds it in space and time, by events that have happened, might happen, and could never happen there, and by its similarities to and differences from other spaces in the poem. Near the opening of *Jerusalem*, Albion hides Jerusalem on the banks of the Thames and Medway, a likely reference, as Gleckner notes, to the river-marriage near the end of Book IV of *The Faerie Queene*. For Gleckner, this episode "hardly suggests a sympathetic reading by Blake" of Spenser's picture of concord in the natural world (p. 323). I agree that Blake's treatment of the rivers suggests an agonistic revision of Spenser, but it also demonstrates Blake's ability to see how context modifies the significance of Spenserian spaces. By following the river marriage with the harshness of Book V, the Book of Justice, Spenser suggests that its mythic, natural concord is only transient and must give way to the ugliness and discord that attend the imposition of justice in a social world. In *Jerusalem*, Blake puts a Book IV event, the marriage of the Thames and Medway, in the discordant context of Book V, presenting simultaneously what Spenser presents sequentially. Blake recognizes the Beulah world of the Thames and Medway as a figment of antiquated pastoral, but the setting he poses against it, the "incoherent despair" of the world in chaos, has its precedent in Spenser as well.

What a detailed treatment of mental space might provide that Gleckner's book does not is a sense of Blake the student of Spenser as well as Blake the critic of Spenser. In both poets, the stable identity of a place is in tension with the increasing layers of meaning that it acquires in a poem's wider context. Spenser's Bower of Bliss takes on new significance in relation to the Gardens of Adonis. Both are beautiful gardens, but he transforms the negative, timeless world of the Bower into the vital, fertile one of the Gardens. Blake's Beulah is both the Bower and the Gardens; he again presents as one space the positive and negative spaces that are sequentially related in Spenser. Los's transformation of Gwendolen's falsehood in *Jerusalem* represents Blake the student of Spenser at his most profound. The falsehood at first becomes "a Space & an Allegory" with a "tender Moon," a familiar Blakean mock-pastoral like the Bower of Bliss. Unexpectedly, Los redeems the space by planting in it "the Seeds of beauty," and it grows into the garden called "Divine Analogy." The bower of Gwendolen's falsehood does not have to be destroyed as the Bower of Bliss was. Rather, only from falsehood and the "Winding Worm" can a more fertile place like the Gardens of Adonis spring. The space is elected because of, rather than in spite of, the falsehood involved in creating it.

Gleckner's achievement is to point the way to such analysis; his consider-

able ability to notice interesting clashes (and parallels) between the poets makes his book worth reading for both Spenserian and Blakean scholars. Yet his narrow concentration on Blake's intellectual mistrust of Spenser's supposedly conventional morality and reductive allegory occasionally diminishes both poets. There are also a few small errors: Florimell does not pursue an "endless flight" (p. 147) throughout the poem, but marries Marinell in Book V; on page 155, he seems to think that Spenser wrote the introductory epistle to *The Shepheardes Calender*, but there is considerable debate about whether its author, E. K., was Spenser. But these are minor points; on the whole, Gleckner's successes are provocative and his failures instructive. They provide a foundation on which others can and should build.

Yale University Andrew Elfenbein

Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism by Herbert F. Tucker. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988. Pp. ix + 481. $37.50.

This book is a most impressive achievement in close reading and in what its author calls "specifically *literary* biography" (p. 9). Limiting himself to the first part of Tennyson's career, the poetry from the Juvenilia to "Maud" (1855), Tucker undertakes to demonstrate thematic and rhetorical constancy as well as development and change in Tennyson's work in the years between 1828 and 1855. Among the book's rewards is the unusual attention given to Tennyson's unpublished poetry and to the poems of 1832, as well as to some of the idylls: less often discussed poetry that is treated here in its own right and not as a mere propaedeutic to the later, more famous works. The result is a plotting of Tennyson's career that Tucker derives from the pervasive sense of doom, the foreclosure of possibilities for self-existence, that Tennyson was repeatedly negotiating in his writing. This negotiation is a habit Tennyson adopted early on and never released. The later poetry reveals this sense of doom to have a wider range of meaning than the intensely private early poems may have suggested, but the fundamental mood of Tennyson's work —and Tucker makes clear that Tennyson's is a work of atmosphere and mood—goes unchanged. As such, it is not surprising that the literary self, whether Tennyson's or his speaker's, is a crucial, if finally somewhat problematical, category in this book.

So thorough is Tucker's exegesis of Tennyson's texts and so careful is he of their place in English literature and culture, that it is difficult to imagine this book being soon surpassed as a presentation of the first half of Tennyson's career. Yet this is a book without an explicit critical program. As I shall explain, that has advantages as well as disadvantages. Positively, it means that Tucker can pursue as freely as possible the full internal complexities of Tennyson's development and thus serve his end of literary biography. Negatively, however, it gives the impression of a reluctance on the author's part to draw the final consequences of his own exemplary groundwork. Let us look first at that groundwork.

Tucker's approach to his task is instructive and consequent. Calling Tenny-

son's "a poetry of aftermath" and referring to the poet's "fascination with inevitability," he notes that this "retrograde approach," more than describing the familiar Victorian belatedness, describes as well the poet's own method of composition: "In Memoriam" is only the most famous example of a Tennyson poem that knew a "backward genesis" (pp. 13, 12). Even when not literally writing backwards, the poet preferred to give poems a retrospective cast. It is this temporal mode which brings out a certain recognizable quality of character and voice in Tennyson—call it social reluctance, introversion, preoccupied gloom—and diminishes others.

Since time flows backwards in Tennyson, the past inevitably looms before his subjects as the locus of power, the prior scene of decisive events and actions. Whereas the present is characterized by passivity and inertia, the past is determining. The consequences of this for Tennyson's work are extensive: description replaces narrative, mood action. Characters are passionately responsive, displaying all degrees of affect but little ethical sense (pp. 14–17). The self, accordingly, is a vacated, or ethically absented, being. Delivered over to inevitability, selfhood is permanently experienced as something lost to oneself (pp. 22–23). An excellent passage in Tucker's discussion of "Ulysses" puts this problem into relief: "As the memory of a desire thus shades into the desire of a memory, the self that was and the self that would be divide between them the self that is" (p. 228). Yet this is Ulysses speaking. The fate of Tennyson's Victorian speakers is still more doomed, for they have no self that was, no history of their own, but only the substitute self of their temporal inheritance: that is, they have only their doom, not at all the same as an achieved self-history.

Tucker's word "doom" is a highly probable one for the overdetermined sense of foreboding that besets the world of Tennyson's poems. In his discussion, the word has literary-historical as well as cultural resonance. The author's note that his book "argues for the thematic and strategic importance of a highly literate Victorian poet's allusiveness, principally to Romanticism," suggests the influence of Harold Bloom, though without a full application of Bloom's poetics of misprision. Tucker holds instead to an unspoken middle ground which I should like to try to identify in terms more precise than "specifically literary biography."

Rather than posit a rivalry between Tennyson's poetic self and the Romantics, above all Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, Tucker is concerned to tease out of the texts Tennyson's non-agonistic use of the Romantic precedent. To this extent his understanding of Tennyson's relation to the romantics is revisionary: a rereading in the act of weighing and pondering their use. It is an approach which makes for judiciously subtle readings of Tennyson's "allusiveness," as in analyses of references to "Alastor" in "Mariana in the South," to the "Intimations Ode" and "Adonais" in "Ulysses," and to Keats's odes nearly everywhere (pp. 142, 223–27, 236–38). Tucker thus sees Tennyson carrying on a critically reflexive turn in Romanticism itself: "It is not eighteenth-century originalism but a critically reconstructive, Romantic perspective on tradition that we find Tennyson adopting in 'Timbuctoo'" (p. 54). And on the same page we find that Tennyson, "having knowingly addressed Romantic themes on the Romantics' ground," must already have been aware of the predetermined overfamiliarity of Victorian belatedness.

This is a familiar gamut in the book. Whenever Tennyson's voice nears a past or contemporary precedent, whenever he nears parody or echo, Tucker argues for a self-conscious attitude in the poet, yet without saying what that self-consciousness should mean to us or should achieve.

Ambiguity also crops up around the term "doom." Apparently, it is belatedness that defines the doom of Romanticism. But if this is what defines Romantic doom, it does not define it nearly enough. It does not tell us for example whether Romanticism's doom designates an epoch, an historical ending, or whether it designates an inherent characteristic of Romanticism; whether, in other words, "the doom of Romanticism" is an objective or subjective genitive. The question may be unanswerable, especially when one considers that Romanticism has tended to define itself in terms of its own frustratedness, in terms of a self-failing: what has not yet been cannot begin to come to an end. But that is not the line on Romanticism that Tucker explicitly takes up: "reports on the death of Romanticism are as greatly exaggerated now as ever; and in any case literary history could imagine nothing more Romantic than the demise of a cultural movement at the hands of a single genius" (p. 29). Rather than answer the question, Tucker's statement rephrases it in the terms of a self-historicizing Romanticism. As such, the statement is indicative of a tendency in the book as a whole to finesse issues of history, genre, and reception with elegant and paradoxical yet questionable utterances of a historical wisdom. Thus Tucker can write that "the gorgeously stunted growth of Tennyson's art, when exposed to the light of his more capacious Romantic predecessors, is found wanting . . . but . . . the hothouse beauties of the inbred Tennysonian imagination . . . are found wanting by Tennyson himself" (p. 134). Or again: "It has been objected that Tennyson's descriptions of nature sound too much like Victorian interior decoration; but this outdoor scene . . . is so evidently filled with artificial furniture that we may credit Tennyson with having raised the objection long before the anti-Tennysonians did" (p. 156). And in his discussion of "The Gardener's Daughter" he writes, "The central picture is 'full and rich,' as Tennyson said, heavy with the inarticulate knowledge of doom that, mingling love and death in the profoundest of earthly marriages, dwells in the body of the idyllic text" (p. 285). Although in this section Tucker is discussing the special suitedness of the idyll as a means of escaping the "anxiety about time," the point holds for Tennyson's work as a whole: the occupation of time as doom is a means of escaping it (p. 287). So Tennyson continues a "Romantic poesis [that] is never the construction of a new home from the ground up but always in part the occupation of an echoing haunt." Tennysonian affect remains most closely allied after all to the arrested temporality of the Keatsian bower. But the question about the doom, whether it is the doom of or in Romanticism, remains unanswered because Tucker himself seems more intent on describing rather than interpreting it.

Without questioning the truthfulness of any of Tucker's characterizations of Tennyson, the reader may well wonder about the critical idiom of this book. The adverbs "never" and "always" in the last quotation and the adjectives "profoundest" and "gorgeous" in statements quoted above are all designations of absoluteness, temporal or qualitative; and all partake in the same overdetermined sense of tradition. The use of "gorgeous," strikingly frequent

in this book, is perhaps the most significant, as it indicates the engorged and engorging mood and temper of the Tennysonian subject. Tucker notes in various ways that many of Tennyson's speakers survive by engorging the very time and situation which subjects them. That kind of indulgence, dramatizing acceptance and submission as an act of will, reflects a deceptive reification of psycho-social processes into impersonal and irresistible powers. The result is loss on all fronts: personal, natural, social. (See the fine discussion of the middle of "The Princess," pp. 361–67). The question, though, is whether this critical idiom itself is not excessively determined by a representation of the self, however bereft that self may be, as the locus of articulation. Here one doubts the sufficiency of "specifically literary biography."

Yet Tucker himself suggests another approach to Tennyson's pervasive sense of cultural doom. I have noted that Tucker does not execute Bloom's antithetical criticism, even as he acknowledges a clear debt to Bloom. That is for the good reason that Tucker is ultimately more concerned with the text as cultural discourse than he is with the text as a means of staking poetic selfhood. This is most apparent from a number of passages in the last quarter of the book where Tucker seems concerned with articulating for Tennyson's text a hermeneutical rather than contestatory relation to the past. In these passages are some hints, albeit not registered in the notes, that Tucker has read H.-G. Gadamer with a sense that Gadamer's work has a particular relevance to Tennyson's situation. Significantly, it is in the conclusion of his discussion of the idylls, the genre repressive of social context, and preparatory to his discussion of the longer poems, where Tennyson is most explicitly the ideological subject of Victorian culture, that Tucker broaches the question of hermeneutic penetration and ideological critique (p. 345). In a tactful book, Tucker tactfully does not bifurcate the two. He understands quite well the logic of ideological imprisonment: "committing the alienated self to an accountable language means committing the self to the cultural world that language occupies and shapes" (p. 385; cf. pp. 415, 421). Not a relaxation of critical attentiveness, the hermeneutic mode points precisely to the problem of belonging to and accepting a cultural discourse without merely repeating it. It is the problem at stake for Tucker in the idylls, in "The Princess," "In Memoriam," and "Maud," that is, in those texts in which the poet played out most fully the role of a representative cultural voice. In this way the book leaves off where it began, with the cultural pre-determination of Tennyson as a Virgilian poet (pp. 28–30).

But here, too, difficulties arise. First, the question of hermeneutics and ideology critique is left open, or hanging. Speaking of "The Princess," Tucker cites "the fidelity of the text as a register of cultural suppositions shared among a number of minds" (p. 371). This is a critical reflection that ought to lead into a critical engagement, not one that can be left to stand by itself. Second, does the doom of Romanticism ominously announced in the title not turn out to be Romanticism's Victorian doom? a phase of its reception rather than its closure? The meaning of the title is, more exactly, Victorian doom and Tennyson's Romantic allusiveness. Looked at this way, Tucker's work is eloquent testimony to the timeliness of redefining the relationship between Romantic and Victorian.

These are prominent, even if residual, issues in a book meticulously well

researched and written and which one is reluctant to fault. Tucker himself may take them up again in future studies. If not, anyone who does will gratefully acknowledge a debt to this study.

The book is handsomely produced. Set in a generous and most legible print, it also contains a comprehensive bibliography and an exhaustive and reliable index. At a time when one routinely finds typos and printer's errors in texts, I recall finding none here.

The University of Tulsa John Jay Baker

The Historicity of Romantic Discourse by Clifford Siskin. New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988. Pp. viii + 225. $24.95.

Clifford Siskin's bold and challenging new study of *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* attempts nothing less than a new literary history of Romanticism. Rejecting traditional assumptions that literature is bound and defined both by period-specific criteria and by common, identifiable themes and features, Siskin advances a definition of Romanticism that is grounded in a theory of genre. The explanatory power accorded to genre is meant to free his argument from institutional claims about both literature *and* history, and to open an intellectual space for the analysis of Romantic-historical phenomena in a variety of discursive modes—including literary criticism—from the eighteenth century down to the present. Drawing heavily upon Michel Foucault's theories of power and knowledge, and upon Ralph Cohen's theories of literary history, Siskin provides a *constructive* literary historical analysis that shows how Romantic discourse produces and authorizes the knowledge, formal strategies, and value structures that constitute its durable power. While so ambitious a project will inevitably encounter difficulties in some areas (I will mention some of these momentarily), the overall accomplishment here is remarkable: Siskin is historically aware, politically sensitive, and intellectually rigorous.

In what follows, I will provide a general descriptive sketch of the main trajectory of Siskin's argument, following this with a brief discussion of issues that I believe bear further consideration. I want to stress, however, that even as I suggest my differences with Siskin's argument, I do so from a position that recognizes and applauds the originality and importance of a study that tries to conceptualize Romanticism from an entirely new direction.

Siskin's expository strategy follows two related lines of argument. First, he exposes "the formal and conceptual limitations of different kinds of literary histories" (p. 9)—from the traditional arguments of Abrams to the progressive ones of McGann—showing how these often distort both history and literature by taking as starting points certain explanatory categories and assumptions that themselves need to be explained. (For instance, most scholars of Romanticism, past and present, tend to accept uncritically the Romantic understanding of the autonomous subject, or of the redemptive powers of nature, or of the transhistorical character of the creative imagination.) Second, in constructing his own explanation of Romanticism, he attempts to

avoid the errors of other literary histories by turning from the traditional conceptual tools used to discuss Romanticism (e.g., he refuses the traditional definitions of literary periods) to "a classification system that avoids absolutes" (p. 10). He finds this system in what he calls generic history, which "uses genre to construct history rather than the other way around" (p. 10).

Genre possesses superior explanatory power, Siskin argues, because it makes possible the investigation of texts both synchronically and diachronically; that is, it provides a means of studying texts both in terms of change and continuity, for it "categorizes every text as a member both of an ongoing kind and of a synchronically distinct set of relationships among different kinds" (p. 20). According to this view, genre is not an essentialist or objective category standing beyond the realm of investigation or explanation; rather it rises "according to its increasing visibility in the changing hierarchies of all other forms of writing with which it is always related" (p. 10–11). Among those other forms is criticism itself, which, according to Siskin, must also be explained generically.

Siskin's argument divides into three broad sections, each devoted to a major conceptual category traditionally used to control discussions of Romanticism: Part I focuses on the concept of Lyric, Part II on the concept of Development, and Part III on the concept of Mind. Each of these categories, in turn, is set within a frame of complementary concerns (present and past, parts and wholes, desire and discipline) that mark its specific discursive-historical contours, and is then particularlized in terms of a variety of discursive forms. For example, lyric is examined in terms of its various expressions from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries and at the same time set within the context of the seemingly disparate powers of the imagination and criticism; it is shown to rise in the generic hierarchy as seemingly disparate discursive forms (including literary criticism) take on lyric features. Development is presented as the means by which Romanticism makes sense of historical change, as it seems to suggest connections between various historical threads and to point toward discernible and meaningful goals for human experience (e.g., the past is seen as a model for the present; innocence provides hope for experience; the child is the father of the man). The invention of literature, the actual work of literature, and the power of nature all participate in this developmental-teleological scheme. Finally, the Romantic mind is shown to be a self-made region ripe for inquiry by the Romantic self. This inquiry, in turn, functions as a kind of self-discipline as it invites ever-more specialized intervention; the self-disciplinary nature of the mind's desire is seen in such various areas as economics, sexuality, and addiction.

The constructive and unifying conceptual energy behind Siskin's critique of these Romantic conventions and interests derives from the view that they are all—whether features or experiences, verse or criticism—formal constructs, which, within standard literary histories, are virtually always mistaken for objective realities. When their formal character is fully understood we can correct this mistaken assumption, which Siskin refers to as our Romantic addiction. This addiction, he argues, has trapped critical and historical studies within a difficult, confining Romantic net, allowing us only to draw intellectual distinctions of degree *within* the parameters set down by Romanticism itself, never allowing us to draw distinctions of *kind* that might be capable of

offering non-Romantic explanations of Romanticism and literary history. Only by constructing a generic history of literature can we understand that literature—and the discourses that would explain it—in culture-specific terms.

The interventionist historical-political approach of Siskin's book is most welcome at a time when many studies in Romanticism are turning enthusiastically toward non-historical language-based criticism and scholarship. At the same time, however, his argument might give certain politically-minded critics pause, for its method and conclusions—despite their radical political vocabulary—might seem to run the risk of leaving everything just as it is. For Siskin, the Romantic subject is suspect as a conceptual category and human agency does not exist, at least not in the way it is usually conceived. Rather, the human is *subject to* institutional control, to the institutional "gaze." Similarly, human desire—the utopian impulse seen in so much Romantic literature—is, in Siskin's analysis, most often presented as little more than a psychologizing of politics, as a product of limitation rather than an active energy capable of directing social change. If this view is correct, then we must ask what it means, not only for our understanding of the past, but also politically and intellectually today for certain individuals and groups whose politics are integrally connected to subject or identity construction and to utopian desire. Does it mean that (say) blacks and women are hopelessly lost in Romantic mystification when they construct group identities to unify radical political movement? Does it mean that political movement is always and only formal and discursive, never practical and human? If so, then what, other than our conceptual categories and critical vocabulary, can be changed by our understanding of the historicity of Romantic discourse? In his conclusion, Siskin remarks that he can offer no cure for our Romantic addictions, but that the new literary history he proposes will enable us "to hear that tale [of addiction] within Romantic discourse and thereby recognize that discourse's ongoing power" (194). Certainly this is something. But we must ask whether it is enough, or whether it is even all that is possible at this historical moment.

Several smaller items might be briefly noted. Siskin's prose at times is quite turgid. Perhaps this is because the argument itself is complex, but nevertheless the difficulty of the prose often threatens to defeat even the most sympathetic of readers. (Note, for instance, the sentence on p. 170, 23 lines up, or the last sentence on p. 164.) The difficulty is exacerbated by numerous grammatical errors (for instance, sentence fragments on pp. 34 and 180, dangling modifier on p. 84) and spelling errors (Charles Rzepka's name is consistently spelled incorrectly, pp. 8–9).

These quibbles aside, Siskin's book is large, important, and thought-provoking. It radically re-situates literary historical studies in a way that challenges an entire range of primary concepts and features often associated with Romanticism and Romantic texts—nature, creativity, imagination, organic growth, and so on—attempting a positive, constructive literary history of Romanticism that does not depend on essentialist or objectivist assumptions. For this liberating effort, and for its unflinching critique of the formal-discursive strategies used in studying Romanticism, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* is likely to be discussed for a long time to come by both traditionalists

and non-traditionalists. In unsettling the complacent and in providing a model theory to spark new kinds of thinking and writing about Romanticism, Siskin has contributed admirably to the study of Romanticism and to the fields of discourse and genre theory.

Duquesne University Daniel P. Watkins

Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America by Alicia Suskin Ostriker. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986. Pp. 291. $19.95.

In the 1987 movie, *Crossing Delancey*, the character played by Amy Irving passes in front of the upscale Greenwich Village bookstore where she works, allowing the camera to linger for a moment on the shopwindow's glossy display of Alicia Suskin Ostriker's *Stealing the Language*. This unlikely cinematic moment probably has its explanation in something like an Ostriker cousin in the film industry, but it is somehow right. *Crossing Delancey* deflates the silliest pretensions of the New York literary crowd so that Amy Irving, guided by her grandmother, can find true love. For its part, *Stealing the Language* eschews fashionable and dazzling theorizing about poetry in favor of passionate and intelligent readings of a body of poems. In both cases, the message is that the ability to get beyond seductive flamboyance is rewarded with the most enduring of pleasures.

Though *Stealing the Language* is unpretentious, it is a highly ambitious work encompassing more than a hundred North American poets in its construction of a taxonomy of women's poetry in the United States (and, to a lesser extent, Canada) since 1960. Ostriker's first chapter is a lucid short history spanning three centuries of poetry written by women in the United States. The chapter effectively places the post-1960 poets who are the main subject of Ostriker's study within a women's poetic tradition. While Ostriker identifies the feminist movement as a crucial factor in the explosion of women's poetry since 1960, she suggests that it is possible to understand contemporary women's poetry only as the flowering of an already strongly rooted plant. The tradition itself, however, is far from static; Ostriker presents it in the context of the changing meanings of gender, womanhood, and poetry as the United States changed from the agrarian colonial society in which Ann Bradstreet wrote to the independent industrialized nation of the mid-twentieth century.

According to Ostriker, the women's poetry movement born around 1960 is centrally concerned with "the quest for autonomous self definition" against a cultural past that has denied women's autonomy. Relying on feminist thinkers from Woolf and de Beauvoir to Adrienne Rich, Alice Walker, and Mary Daly, as well as working with and within a growing body of feminist poetry criticism (Homans, Juhasz and Lauter are three of the critics she invokes), and more general feminist literary theory and criticism, Ostriker makes sense of the explosion in poetry written by women in the United States in the last thirty years. Each of Ostriker's chapters focuses on a key thematic issue in the poetry: the quest for identity, writing (about) the body, anger and vio-

lence, eroticism, and revisionist mythology. While formal issues are not ignored, they are inextricably bound to subject matter. Ostriker's abundant examples are drawn from the work of both well-known and lesser-known poets, lesbian and heterosexual women, white women and women of color (though she appears much more familiar with poetry by Black women than she does with the work of Latina, Native American, or Asian American poets). Ostriker never reads the more marginalized writers in terms of the others, rather each of the voices contributes to Ostriker's nuanced and subtle discussion.

Ostriker's second chapter, "Divided Selves: The Quest for Identity," discusses the need she sees expressed in contemporary American women's poetry to establish identity, and in her final chapter and epilogue she suggests how that has begun to be achieved. In this poetry, the gendered body is a critical factor in the establishment of identity. Chapter Three, "Body Language: The Release of Anatomy," examines contemporary women poets' hard-won freedom to write openly about the female body both in celebratory poetry claiming women's bodies as a source of power and in poems concerning women's physical vulnerability. It is in this section that Ostriker looks at nature poetry, with particular reference to her poets' understanding of the body's relation to the natural world. Interestingly, Ostriker takes up the issue of eroticism not in this chapter, but rather later in the volume, under the title, "The Imperative of Intimacy: Female Erotics, Female Poetics." Here she discusses poetry and pleasure as communication and connection, an erotics that includes childbirth and motherhood as well as sexuality and the intimacy of lovers, and a poetics that is, in Adrienne Rich's terms, "the drive to connect. The dream of a common language" (quoted by Ostriker on p. 209). Ostriker's chapter, "Herr God, Herr Lucifer: Anger, Violence, and Polarization," which separates and connects her analyses of body and erotics, explores victimization writing as well as the articulation of violence. These poems of anger, Ostriker argues, do not offer either catharsis or resignation, but rather leave the reader trapped in a painful, polarized position from which there is no escape. Only in her final chapter, "Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythology," does Ostriker suggest where escape might lie. By telling a new story about women, using and transforming scraps gleaned from the old ones, women poets in the United States have begun to envision a new way of being in the world that embraces and contains the divided, fragmented self.

Despite her title's echo of Claudine Herrmann's 1976 text, *Les Voleuses de langue*, Ostriker's *Stealing the Language* is a quintessentially American study, in the best tradition of U.S. feminist criticism. It is historically and politically grounded, and it is practical. The thematic concerns that, in Ostriker's reading, are central to contemporary American women's poetry necessarily resonate beyond the texts themselves to a political feminism in which questions of sexuality, violence, anger, identity and power derive from and speak to women's lived experience.

Ostriker is, unapologetically, an embodied reader and writer of poetry, who assumes that other embodied women, reading and writing, also exist. This is hardly a case of essentializing "woman," for in fact the diverse situations—the sites from which her poets write—emerge in her respectful, subtle

readings. For Ostriker, however, the diversity of class, or sexual affinity, or race, for example, does not negate the power of gender; and she affirms the validity of the category of women's poetry, likening it, as a classification, to "American poetry." Both, according to Ostriker, are categories that explain rather than limit. Like American poetry, women's poetry has, in her words, a history and a terrain, and, she notes, "many of its practitioners believe it has something like a language." Thus does Ostriker grant women's poetry its history and its geography while hedging on the thorny issue of a specifically female language.

Ostriker's stated intention in this book is to attempt "to understand the powerful collective voice in which [women poets] participate," to "gain perspective on an emerging image, to describe a woman's equivalent of what Whitman meant when he said he heard America singing in various voices mysteriously united" (p. 8) and to answer the question "What happens when 'we who are writing women and strange monsters,' in May Sarton's phrase, begin to write with a freedom and boldness that no generation of women in literary history has ever known?" (p. 8)

Ostriker succeeds admirably with a comprehensive study of great breadth, generously laced with poems and poem fragments. Her primary method is to juxtapose the texts of many different poets to develop a coherent analysis of a particular subject matter. Equally successful, however, are her suggestive (rather than exhaustive) readings of whole books of poetry, again within the context of thematics. Ostriker's discussion of Sexton's *The Jesus Papers* in the chapter on anger, violence and polarization, and of HD's *Helen in Egypt* in the chapter on revisionist mythology, refer not only back on themselves as enclosed texts, but outwardly, suggesting connections with the writing of other poets. After reading *Stealing the Language* the attentive reader must come away with the conviction that American women poets are not lone voices speaking in isolation, but rather contribute to a rich body of work that is further enriched by reading it in the context Ostriker elaborates. Alicia Suskin Ostriker takes us through the terrain of contemporary women's poetry in the United States, so that once we have read her book, we see the landscape, as well as the individual flowers, trees, and shrubs that are its components.

Ostriker is a poet herself, and her writing does justice to the poems she explicates and contextualizes. She does not try to upstage the poetry; she writes, rather, with the maturity of a critic who is certain of her craft, which makes this book a pleasure to read.

University of Minnesota Amy Kaminsky

No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar; Volume I: *The War of the Words*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988. Pp. 256. $22.95. Volume II: *Sexchanges*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989. Pp. xviii + 455. $29.95.

I remember walking down a tree-lined street in New Haven, between the library and a small, set-back bookstore, when a fellow graduate student

rushed up to me to announce that the first "feminist poetics" had arrived. No longer would the French have a monopoly on discourses that addressed the intersection of literary theory and gender. No longer would members of clandestine reading groups seek out unpublished manuscripts that made such discourses available to those unfortunate few who only read English. No longer would every seminar paper on feminist criticism require a rationale. The year was 1979 and the "poetics" was Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination.*

Ten years later I find myself reviewing the first two volumes of the sequel to that "poetics." Ten years is a long time to wait and a long time to sustain the same project, especially in a field as transformational and transformed as feminist criticism. Gone is the exhilaration and trepidation of the "first," perhaps because Gilbert and Gubar's edition of *The Norton Anthology of Women Writers: The Tradition in English* has stolen the limelight. Perhaps because so much of the material in *No Man's Land* is already familiar, having been published elsewhere. Perhaps because Shari Benstock's encyclopedic survey of the modernist women (at least those who made it to *Women of the Left Bank*) has already appeared (1986). It is not a sense of "belatedness" (the apprehension underlying Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence") that one is left with at the end of almost 800 pages. Rather, it is a sense that even though the co-authors "had to rethink everything we had ever been taught about twentieth-century literature," that rethinking does not include the category of Literature nor the project of a literary history.

While *The Madwoman in the Attic* attempted to construct a distinctly female literary tradition in the nineteenth century, *No Man's Land* focuses on the "social, literary and linguistic interactions of men and women from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present." Gilbert and Gubar have abandoned both the (feminist literary critical) notion of a separate literary tradition and the (literary historical) notion of periodization strictly by century. Instead they have retained the spatial metaphor, substituting the figure of female confinement and escape borrowed from *Jane Eyre* with a soldier's description of the trenches from World War I, subsequently borrowed as trope by numerous writers. The self-division of the woman writer has been replaced by the war between the sexes. An internalized conflict between the author and her enraged double has given way to the externalized conflict between an impotent and hostile "no-man" and an anxious because potent New Woman over primacy in the literary marketplace. The pen, which was once a metaphoric penis, has become a metaphoric pistol.

The first volume, *The War of the Words*, offers "an overview" of literary production from 1850 to 1980 in the United States and England by means of stories and poems which are read allegorically in order to reiterate *ad infinitum* the meta-story of the sexual battle. The second volume, *Sexchanges*, focuses on the period between 1880 and 1930 and analyses fewer texts in greater detail, with entire chapters devoted to Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton and Willa Cather. The assumption of the second volume draws on that of the first: "the sexes battle because sex roles change, but, when the sexes battle, sex itself (that is, eroticism) changes." Because the second volume treats "eccentric subjects" like "necrophilia, parthenogenesis and transvestism," and

because some of its topics are not only "eccentric but painful," such as imperialist xenophobia, lesbianism and the Great War, the authors feel the need to include a disclaimer: "About such disturbing material, all we can finally say is, Reader, we felt we had to write it, but please don't kill the messenger." Still hearing the echoes of Bronte's heroine, it doesn't take long to realize that the repressed double, not the Creole but the lesbian writer, has moved out of the attic and into the closet.

The "anxiety of authorship" which named the conflict for nineteenth century women writers between accepting and rejecting a literary tradition based on paternal authority in the absence of literary foremothers has been replaced by the "female affiliation complex." The source is still Freud ("Female Sexuality"), the woman writer is still a literary daughter and her story is still told as a family romance:

> If we translate this model of female psychosexual development into a map of literary paths, we can see that, whether the female artist turns to what Freud would judge a normative renunciation of her desire for a literary mother to the tradition of the father, whether in what Freud might see as a frigid rejection of both allegiances she attempts to extricate herself altogether from her own aesthetic ambitions, or whether in a move that Freud might define as "defiant" and "homosexual" she claims the maternal tradition as her own, she has at last to struggle with what we would provisionally define as a complicated *female affiliation complex*. (Vol. I, p. 168)

But given the fact that there is only one metastory, namely the battle of the sexes, how many of these paths will be not just described, but valorized (using terms like "normative" and "homosexual")? In Freud's own words, the three options are asexuality (the woman gives up on her "masculine proclivities" because boys are better at them), homosexuality (she forms a "masculinity complex" by refusing to give them up) and heterosexuality (the masculine is the love object rather than the source of identification). On the one hand this set of relations between the feminine and the masculine is much more complicated than the simple binarism of the battle. On the other hand, given the metaphor of (hetero)sexual conflict (for Gilbert and Gubar as well as for Freud) the only legitimate battle and/or sex is with men. On some basic level, the two sets of paths are not even comparable, given that Freud never mentions the maternal or the relations between women.

If the nineteenth century was characterized by a powerful father-daughter paradigm, the twentieth is marked by "anxiety and exuberance" over finally having, not a mother, but a choice of literary parentage. Literary foremothers produce as much if not more ambivalence than fathers once did. Rather than "influence" from outside, there is now a choice. And because there is a choice, women writers can decide with whom to affiliate (although one cannot choose not to affiliate). And having chosen, they become linked (once again) to a genealogy with its own "quasi-familial inevitability." Should one choose the mother,

> the literary daughter finds herself in a double bind. If she simply admires her aesthetic foremother, she is diminished by the originatory

> power she locates in that ancestress; but, if she struggles to attain the power she identifies with the mother's autonomy, she must confront . . . the peril of the mother's position in patriarchy, the loss of male emotional approval paradoxically associated with male approbation—as well as the intimacy with the mother that would accompany daughterly subordination. (Vol. I, p. 195)

In other words, the relation to the mother, and thus to other women, is not the solution either. Although Gilbert and Gubar suggest that the "monolithic pattern" of an earlier women's literary history has been displaced by a "variety of patterns," it is clear that the same patterns keep repeating themselves. The one who wins the battle is the one who keeps it going longest and the author who claims that distinction is Edith Wharton.

The chapter entitled "Angel of Devastation: Edith Wharton on the Arts of the Enslaved" is truly exceptional. Like Gilbert and Gubar, Wharton addresses the same issues "book after book, story after story," namely *"The subject creature. The arts of the enslaved."* In other words, she provides "a feminist analysis of the construction of 'femininity.'" But presumably unlike her co-critics, she repudiated both the "bonds of sisterhood" (of a woman's separate sphere) and the "shoulder to shoulder feminist solidarity" (adopted by the New Woman). Instead, she was nicknamed "John" and expressed more concern for what she would wear than for what she had written before her first meeting with Henry James. What distinguishes this chapter is that contradiction has replaced dualism, a search for "Herland" (the utopian alternative to "No Man's Land") has given way to an analysis of patriarchal gender formations (at least for the leisure class of the Gilded Age) and revealing social ills is seen as a separate enterprise from curing them. Wharton was not a feminist but she can be read as offering a feminist analysis of gender relations which ultimately indicts men for the formation and perpetuation of the leisure class. In spite or because of her "ferocious irony" she offers no alternative for the feminine except "contact with the stronger masculine individuality." She was both a "man's woman" and a "self-made man" and within that contradiction one finds the most complex rendition of "sexchanges," not as redemption but as critique.

At the same time Wharton's depiction of sexual arrangements can do nothing but repeat itself, finding variations only in the multitudinous character formations and plot structures of her novels and short stories. Because there is no solution, the battle must go on: "For though this writer was never consciously to align herself with the female camp in the battle of the sexes, her secret feelings toward men, even toward men she loved, were often, and not surprisingly, at least subtly hostile." This statement makes explicit the fundamental paradox of patriarchal gender relations and thus of Gilbert and Gubar's argument. Like the plot of a popular romance, the point is not to avoid or settle the dispute but to keep it going in the name of love for the purpose of marriage. What makes Wharton additionally attractive is that female rage once again undergoes repression and reappears in the subtext, in this case, the ghost story. There Wharton can safely imagine turning on her master by portraying the erotically illicit.

A similar attempt to rewrite eroticism on the part of lesbian writers en-

counters a quite different critical reception. Even though the chapter "'She Meant What I Said': Lesbian Double Talk" ends with the statement that its subject matter has been the "first, fully self-conscious generation of lesbian writers," the authors nevertheless choose as their analytic categories the loneliness of the lesbian in heterosexual society and thus of the lesbian writer in literary history, an aesthetic of mutuality or "double talk" that can turn collaboration into collusion, and a principle of pain which seems to persist in same-sex relations, primarily because these relationships so isolate the lovers that each one must constantly fear the loss of a separate identity. "Perpetual, ontological expatriation" becomes the plight of those who live in the "supposedly native land which is heterosexuality." The real danger is not the "no man's land of sex" but the attempt on the part of any woman writer to create "her own land" and thus put into question not only the "female affiliation complex," but the very notion of a literary history: "In their attempts to write new and strange words that evade the territorial battles between literary men and women, the lesbian expatriates looked back to an ancient, almost mythic literary history or forward to the total annihilation of literary history." In either case, not to the kind of literary history that Gilbert and Gubar want to construct. Here the chief offender is Gertrude Stein.

The reading of Stein is the least successful in the entire two volumes. At one point the co-critics go so far as to begin a paragraph: "While a number of readers have felt victimized by Stein's impenetrable sentences or resentful about their failure to makes sense of her nonsense, even the responses of her admirers identify her authorial audacity with male mastery." (A footnote corroborating the first point of view refers the reader to a male critic whose book appeared in 1958). Certainly Gilbert and Gubar include themselves among "a number of readers" and their main complaint about Stein has to do with the fact that she created "her own land," put herself at its center and from there engaged in a "self-authorizing aesthetics" that exploited not only Alice, but continues to exploit us as readers. Neither a utopian "Herland" nor a battle of the sexes, Alice simply cannot be portrayed as the enraged but repressed dark double of Gertrude nor can Gertrude be described as an anxious and thus hostile "no-man." Instead (in Gilbert and Gubar's emplotment) Alice becomes the author of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* which she gives to Gertrude as a subversive gift by producing the only readable Stein.

Since even Gilbert and Gubar complain that Stein herself is always the central focus of any treatment of her work, it might be useful to consider what the stakes are, besides lifestyle. Worse than being manly in the most masculinist way, Stein puts into question three fundamental principles underlying the project of *No Man's Land*: she refuses predecessors, thus rejecting the "female affiliation complex"; she engages in an "aesthetics of solipsism," thus undermining the very notion of Literature; and she turns collaboration into collusion, thus challenging the premises of co-authorship ("We feel this book is fully collaborative," Gilbert and Gubar write in their introduction). Paraphrasing their own words: Stein claims all literary history as her own; she refuses to produce representational works; she rejects the notion of revision; and she creates only for herself. What could be more frustrating, more anxiety-provoking, more antithetical for two critics who want to create their own (definitive) literary history based on representational works

required to substantiate a meta-story, having done so for over ten years in the hope of reaching the entire community of literary critics? Stein's worst crime is that she turns words into weapons, not against men, but against women readers, and not because her topics might be "eccentric and painful," but because there are none that lend themselves to recuperation by Gilbert and Gubar's history. Her textual/sexual strategies make us rethink everything, not just "twentieth century literature."

From Freud's point of view (according to Gilbert and Gubar) "the 'masculinity complex' could be carried no further." For Gilbert and Gubar, "The father had been turned into a fat-her" (based on the insights of six year old Molly Gubar). Perhaps an even more fundamental anxiety lies at the heart of their project, a fear of the female body which in its "excess" usurps the position of the father and/or abuses the role of the mother. In an otherwise interesting and provocative discussion of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, one finds the following statement: "If Tant' Sannie is the only mother figure on the farm, we can understand the dilemma she poses by crystallizing it into the sentence, There is no mother and she is huge." Both of these sentences, in their aphoristic brevity, in their focus on fatness, in their concern with the parental, point to issues that can't be dealt with simply by including a chapter on lesbian writers or by suggesting that daughters can choose with whom to affiliate. They reflect an unquestioning attachment to the family romance, to Freudian discourses on sexuality, and to quotable quips. What, then, one might ask, has feminism done for anyone besides the publishing industry?

The point is not to reveal and revel in the unexplored anxieties of Gilbert and Gubar. The point is that a feminist criticism which thought that the daughter would be better off having a choice of parentage than an "anxiety of no-authorship," must eventually recognize that some choices are more valued than others and that choosing peaceful co-existence with a woman can be more threatening than engaging in battle with a man. More importantly, the privileging of analytic paradigms like the "battle of the sexes" not only laments but produces forms of epistemic violence by categorically excluding lesbian writers who can then only be included as nostalgic, lonely expatriates. The move from the attic to a "no man's land" has proven perhaps more advantageous for the modern woman writer than for the feminist literary critic. The fact that there are no men or men with "no-manhood" means that there might be women who embody those attributes once thought to be inherently masculine.

The University of Michigan Anne Herrmann

Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory by Barbara Herrnstein Smith. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988. Pp. 229. $22.50.

History and Value: The Clarendon Lectures and Northcliffe Lectures 1987 by Frank Kermode. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988. Pp. viii + 150. $29.95.

Revising the canon: who's in, who's out, on what grounds, and how long will today's judgment last? The debate is extensive and often heated. "We must save the young from the prejudices of the past"—or, with equal urgency, "We must pass on to our children the values that enabled us to survive." Who's right? Who's wrong? Who knows?

One thing, however, is sure: this discussion, which sounds so contemporary, is not new. Frank Kermode is also struck by a sense of *déjà vu*. In the two series of lectures gathered in *History and Value*, he approaches the modern problem of canon revision by way of a review of the fiction he read as a student in the thirties. The terms then were "art" and "propaganda," but the notes of that discussion echo in today's—can artistic form ever be decoupled from the socio-political point of view of the artist? Kermode wonders how well the deliberately proletarian fictions of the thirties hold up after fifty years and whether or not a look back at them will yield any guidelines for distinguishing good literature from bad—for forming a new canon. As befitting the lecture mode, Kermode's method and tone are discursive and anecdotal, and the book in general is a pleasure to read.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith's monograph, on the other hand, is a strictly academic affair. It brims with the jargon of modern criticism as she argues subtle philosophical distinctions. Though far less fun, *Contingencies of Value*, however, is a much more helpful guide to the aesthetic problems at the root of the contemporary debate. Finally, though good and wise things are said in both books, the reader should come to neither expecting anything remotely resembling a list of literature's saints.

What is so scary about revising the roster of Great Books? I suspect that much of the anxiety comes from a perception that what is happening in academia today is different from revisions of the past. Reference is no longer made to "permanent human truths" that explain our interest in the productions of past ages. Instead additions and deletions are made with an apparently whimsical democracy. Evaluations are blown by the winds of politics. As a result, my straw objector seems to feel, students may no longer be compelled to read Shakespeare and Keats and Joyce; instead they'll be handed second-rate, third world authors selected to give racial or sexual balance to a curriculum. No longer are we allowed to say one piece of writing is better than another. Art, Truth, and Morality will fall (if they haven't already) to the pure relativism of "my ideas are just as good as your ideas." Civilization is doomed. My straw objector may have an overly simple mind, but the argument *is* recognizeable, and perhaps in some of its elements even supportable.

According to Smith, however, there are several flaws in this reasoning. First, although permanent human truth may no longer be a viable idea (and I'll come back to that), it does *not* follow that evaluation no longer takes place. It does. Second, even without a universal, objective standard, evalua-

tion is not merely relative. (The operative word here is "merely," which implies whimsy.) There is a way between the rocks of absolutism and frivolity, if we take as a guide the metaphor of relativity. In science, relativity means there is no absolute rest (or standard) against which to measure something. Space and time are not firmly fixed aspects of the universe; rather they are dependent upon the observer's perspective on natural phenomena. The most familiar example of this comes from the subatomic world in which either the position or the velocity of an electron can be measured accurately, but not both: the process of measuring one inevitably changes the other. Criteria and perspective, then, are as important as the measurement itself, because they are the limiting factors. Moreover, one never really knows where a particular electron is, no matter how well it is measured. One only knows where the electron has a high probability of being. Similarly, physicists have found that electrons are either particles or waves depending upon the criteria an observer uses to measure them. Questions like 'what are electrons *really*?' don't make sense. The certainty of Aristotelean causality has been replaced by the uncertainty of probability. Undeniably, twentieth century physics has produced a paradigm of the world that is less comfortable—at least until we get used to it—than the world of Newtonian mechanics (which, we should not forget, was a new shoe at one time too).

The concept of relativity has provided philosophers as well as literary critics with a metaphor to describe a world whose diversity is becoming more and more apparent. Our growing awareness of different cultures and points of view has brought with it a skepticism about making rigid pronouncements of ethical or artistic value. As a result, our belief in the existence of some absolute transcendent truth or objective standard against which to measure or evaluate human experience has evaporated. Platonic ideas of Art or Truth—or anything else—simply don't appear to exist. Alas. We may mourn their loss, but it's just not possible to regain the confident old Eden.

Thus we have come to the contemporary idea that truth—like the real nature of the electron—is relative. Evaluations of truth—of artistic merit, moral or political rectitude, what have you—are made not according to some absolute standard (what, after all, might that be?) but relative to the position, perspective, and need of the observer. Quite simply, Smith asserts that evaluation is not done in a vacuum (it never was). Evaluation is always done BY a particular human being FOR a particular end. To evaluate the evaluation, then, we must identify who is making it and why.

If I understand Smith correctly, she is arguing here for a more self-conscious kind of criticism, one that explicitly defines the criteria upon which its evaluations are based. This is not a particularly easy task, nor is it freed from potential complaints that someone's criteria are simply rationalizations of a different cultural prejudice. Yet the point remains: we need to know what we are doing and why, and we should ask the same of others. *What is this evaluation for?* If we are revising the academic curriculum to reflect a broader political point of view, that's alright. But we ought to understand that that's what we are doing and not confuse the issue by asserting that this revision will thereby produce a *better* curriculum. Better in what sense? Is it possible to say artistically better? That is the particular mire the Marxian critics had difficulty skirting in the thirties. They desperately wanted artistic merit and political correctness to be synonymous. But they're not.

And so someone—a group, you, me—begins to make a list of things people should read, of things students should read. Call it, if you will, "the canon"—but remember it is just a collection of literary examples—not holy texts—that we as a group want to share because they speak to us—somehow. And this, of course, is where things get difficult. Why does one piece of literature speak to us? What is it we want to share? Answers will probably be couched in terms of *how* the poem or novel or play says *what* it says. Form and theme. Art and politics. Who really wants to make one aspect of literature more important than the other? Both are essential.

And this brings me right back to the metaphor of relativity: the space and time of literature are, if you will, politics and art. When a critic evaluates a poem in terms of its (political) message, aesthetics tends to shift out of focus. When the evaluation is made solely in aesthetic terms, the message of the poem recedes. It is difficult, if not impossible, to look at both simultaneously and with equal emphasis. The form and the message of literature are connected, but not, unfortunately, by means of simple cause and effect. It just doesn't work to equate artistic merit with political "correctness"—nor, for that matter, political merit with artistic quality. The medium both is and is not the message—at the same time. Clearly, intellectual life—like subatomic physics—is complicated and uncomfortable.

Smith and Kermode agree that all evaluations of art, and other experiences, take place within a context of history. This means the evaluator (the critic) is located in a particular position in space and time. There is nothing too astonishing about this assertion. It has been repeatedly shown that human values are a product of culture and that different cultures are likely to display different values.

Problems arise, however, when we begin to recognize that human culture is not homogeneous. Even Western Culture itself is far from homogeneous: there are within the western tradition all sorts of variations based on race, gender, class, nationality, religion, and on and on. As a result evaluators are going to come up with different evaluations. And as we move in our understanding towards individualized criteria, goals, and perspectives, evaluation will more and more resemble personal prejudice. Does this then mean that ultimately all evaluation is reduceable to prejudice?

If I have any criticism of Smith, it is that she spends much too much energy arguing the necessarily limited quality of all human descriptions of experience and too little discussing the rather crucial question of how then *do* we evaluate something objectively—be it literature, art, or scientific theory—from within that necessarily limited and subjective perspective. That evaluations do take place, and should take place, she has no doubt—nor do I. She is also clear that evaluations themselves are never pure and transcendent, that evaluations are always *for* something. This latter point is quite right, and needs to be remembered. We evaluate and select texts *for* a class to demonstrate some property or idea students need *for* doing or knowing something. We select movies *for* a series *for* a particular audience. Evaluations, in other words, always have within them implicit goals. However, all of this leaves us with no very good way to validate various evaluations. Given the lack of an absolute standard, it is still necessary to winnow good evaluations from the bad. The only thing we're offered by Smith is that a good evaluation will

some how "work better" or "fit the criteria better" than a bad one. I, for one, find this explanation not very satisfactory.

Perhaps another tack could be taken, along lines laid out by psychoanalysis. Granted, it is both intellectually and culturally honest to identify the criteria upon which one's evaluation is based; moreover to do so also improves the evaluation. According to psychoanalytic theory, disorders can be overcome when their unconscious or subconscious roots are exposed, for one cannot deal with something until it is recognized and understood. Would it not be fair to say that subjectivity and its attendant prejudice can be overcome by a similar process? Only by understanding our personal and cultural limitations and by explicitly articulating our criteria and goals of judgment can we open the possibility of a truly objective evaluation. Thus, we might validate an evaluation by assessing the completeness of the criteria upon which it is explicitly based. Certainly I can see where this process would be enormously useful in assessing evaluations that make assertions like "classical music is better than rock" or "classical Greek literature is better than Latin American." For what? On what grounds?

Such a paradigm for the process of evaluation suggests that indeed some evaluations are legitimate and others are not. I am not a better human being than you—what, after all, could be the criteria for that statement? However, I may be a better gardener—my tomatoes are bigger; my roses are free from black spot. Similarly it is impossible to say whether tragedy or comedy is better drama (on what grounds?), but Shakespeare is a better dramatist than Marlowe (plotting, character development, imagery, thematic complexity). I gather that is what Smith is talking about when she says there is no transcendent value (*qua* human being, *qua* music) but only relative values (for something, from a perspective). And what this means is that we become a lot more self-conscious about our assumptions. Although we cannot avoid the fences of cultural limitation, we can at least recognize them and thus see over them.

All of this has a great deal to do with revision of the so-called canon. Neither Smith nor Kermode would do away with the canon. Nor would most other critics, even the most radical of revisers. A set of books or authors commonly considered important voices for the culture is both useful and necessary. It is, remarks Kermode, a primary tool for making sense of our history. We've come a long way from Matthew Arnold and his touchstones. Arnold, of course, was the product of a small but dominant intellectual elite in England, who all more or less agreed on what they liked: it was not necessary to justify their choices to those who spoke, as it were, an entirely different language. Such homogeneity does not exist in America at the end of the twentieth century. Moreover, we are increasingly aware of the diversity of artistic production throughout the world, each creation stuck in some time and in some place, reflecting different values, using different techniques. Comparing diverse artistic productions can be like comparing apples and pears. One must be self-conscious about setting criteria. Note, this is not the same thing as saying, that there aren't good apples and bad apples. There are fresh apples suitable for pie and rotten ones (bad pie apples) suitable for compost. One does not make pie out of compost, although compost is a very helpful kind of mulch. We must get better about defining the categories. We ought

not to be wasting energy asserting that Melville is better than Kate Chopin, unless we can state the criteria relative to which we are working. This is the important lesson of Smith.

Kermode's discussion of literature in the 1930s complements this lesson nicely. He offers a demonstration of the transience of criteria and thus of all evaluations. The political and artistic agendas of the Marxian realists no longer stimulate passionate argument. Many of the novels read with enthusiasm by another generation as illustrations of proletarian art have lost their glow. Those criteria of value have been forgotten or no longer interest us. Other novels, however, still do move us. Why, Kermode wonders? Are these novels sifted out by time better novels? Why didn't they appear to be at first? Are there criteria that will winnow the fiction that will last from the passing fancy? For after all, isn't that what we want when building a canon? Something stable and lasting. Such an effort strikes an immediate chord of sympathy, of course; that *is* what we want—a standard in the midst of flux. But is it possible? It is useful here to remember Einstein, the father of relativity yet a man who could not find it in his soul to give up causality. It is difficult to accede emotionally to a major paradigm change, even as one fully understands it intellectually.

Kermode makes a stab at a solution, but he is not successful. Lasting has something, if not a lot, to do with luck, he says (that's the new man speaking), but it also has something to do with permanent human values (the old man speaks). How I wish there were permanent human values, and that Kermode could define them. But he can't. (Could Joseph Campbell, perhaps?) Kermode does make various suggestions: works that "surprise by their own complexity, and by the force with which they violate commonplace perceptions"; works about "a struggle across the frontier"; works that "break the social order." But this won't do anymore, and I suspect Kermode knows it, for the argument is not pursued. Though he may have found some useful generalizations about the thematic interests of certain kinds of fiction, this does not justify turning descriptors into universal imperatives.

Which brings us back to an unresolved problem. Why does the whole discussion of evaluation feel fruitless? Because, I think, we cannot step out of history to make evaluations. The only help comes from understanding the process, articulating the relationships among factors, and figuring out what is relative to what.

The canon is our link with the past. But the books we consider necessary today are different from those valued by the Greeks, by the Elizabethans, or even by our grandparents. There are overlaps, of course, which is as it should be. The list is also constantly being revised, just as we constantly revise the stories we tell about our own histories. The canon is a paradigm of our literature. It is how we understand our history; it is what we want to pass on, what we want to remember. It should change as our understanding of ourselves and our history changes. But, as Kermode remarks, it should also not change too fast. The link must be maintained or we will lose who we are. Politics and concepts of art do influence evaluation, but politics and art too are the products of limited human perspectives.

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Where the Meanings Are: Feminism and Cultural Spaces by Catharine R. Stimpson. New York and London: Methuen, 1988. Pp. xx + 235. $22.50.

Where the Meanings Are is about feminism and culture, and particularly about the relationship between sexual politics and writing as it has developed in the course of the last two decades. Catharine Stimpson identifies feminism as a space, a place of questioning and questing, of tracing, challenging, and making meanings, a place of plurality, debates, and reconciliations. Feminism is thus not univocal: the feminist cultural consensus, Stimpson acknowledges, has fallen apart and is now beyond restoration. But difference ("herterogeneity," she calls it) is cause for celebration, not regret: feminism can well live with fragmentation. Stimpson enters into the current debates in feminist criticism without acrimony and without anxiety. Anyone who is satisfied with rigid distinctions between French poststructuralist feminism on the one hand, and homogeneous Anglo-American humanist feminism on the other, would do well to read this book, which crosses those boundaries with ease.

But for Stimpson feminism is more than a series of topics for discussion. It is also, and very clearly, a sharply defined project. Her declared sexual-cultural politics is a commitment to defining the restrictions which operate against women, probing women's resistances to oppression, and reconstructing the world of meanings to include women and women's interests.

Some of the feminist debates of the last two decades, and the corresponding developments in theory and practice, are either inscribed or recorded in *Where the Meanings Are*. The first of these essays was originally published in 1970 and, as the author herself disarmingly points out in her introduction, it uses the generic *he*. Stimpson does not change the pronouns for republication. I wondered about this: what would I have done? would I have reproduced my own he-man language of those days? I might not have had the nerve . . . But I am so glad that Stimpson has left her essay as it was originally written. It is important, after all, to remind ourselves of how far we have come. Kate Millett and Germaine Greer also took masculine pronouns for granted in 1970; most of us didn't think twice about them in those days; and now we flinch. That change is a tribute to the achievement of feminism in installing women in everyday language.

On the other hand, this first essay, "Black Culture/ White Teacher," nearly twenty years old now, is a good deal more than a historical curiosity. I outraged a liberal British audience very recently by registering a similar unease about "teaching" Black writing as a white academic. Was I criticising my audience's well-intentioned efforts to share the Black experience? Or merely uncertain about a concept of reading and writing which saw truth to experience as recoverable? Or is there a more important question of voice here, a problem of who is speaking, and for whom? Wisely, Stimpson concludes that if white teachers must continue to help to present Black literature, for regrettable numerical reasons (reasons which still obtain now, in Britain, at least), we should teach it *otherwise*, surrendering some of the teacher's conventional authority.

Such wisdom is a recurrent characteristic of this book. In the course of the essays Stimpson brings it to bear on Shakespeare, on cultural history, on the theory and practice of teaching Women's Studies, on androgyny and homo-

sexuality, the company of children . . . And every time her reader is invited to share the sense of thoughtful reflection on real and important issues.

Among these issues two recur consistently in the essays. How should women read? How should we write? These are the questions which, whether explicitly or implicitly, have dominated feminist criticism for the last twenty years. They are also questions which haunted Virginia Woolf, and others before her. And if they are not finally resolved after all this time, that is testimony to the vitality of feminism, which moves to take account of the changes it is partially responsible for bringing about. While the reciprocal meanings of *man* and *woman* continue to shift as an effect of feminist debates and conservative reaction, feminist criticism needs to go on developing new analyses, new styles, new modes of address.

Stimpson's own reading practice is acute, focused and concise. Commenting on *Shirley*, she writes: "Charlotte Brontë deconstructs patriarchal religion, a phallic dominance of politics and the economy, constrictions on female autonomy and work, a sexual double standard, the sufferings of a displaced working class. Yet, even her hatred of deprivation, even her analysis of the interlocking systems of class and gender, cannot generate a revolutionary narrative. . . . . Her narrative closes in a double marriage and a brooding elegy for the nature, mystery, and magic that industrialism has erased" (p. 158). This sharp account occurs in the course of an essay about reading, "Female Insubordination and the Text," first published in 1986. Stimpson understands feminist reading as an active process, a matter of picking up signals, selecting, dwelling on the enabling characteristics of the text, recognising its analysis of patriarchy, without necessarily ignoring the limitations of the liberalism which confines a novel to elegy where we might hope for revolution. She is in consequence a generous reader herself, as she demonstrates again and again, and particularly in a detailed account of the poetry of Adrienne Rich. Stimpson draws the line only at anti-feminist women: Midge Decter is accused of having written "a feisty, yet snivelling, little polemic," *The New Chastity and Other Arguments Against Women's Liberation* (p. 186). I haven't read it, but in view of the title, I'm with Stimpson.

Reading, she argues, matters. The active nature of the process enhances the reader's sense of power. Reading can be a kind of guerrilla warfare, a raiding of the text for materials, empathy or anger, to motivate and define the necessary reconstruction of our own culture: "Reading women will secretly school themselves in the tactics of disobedience" (p. 159). And this process in turn intensifies the reader's sense of her own strength.

Reading is always a political act, rooted in resistance to women's oppression, but also in reconciliation with the readings of other feminists. "Feminism and Feminist Criticism" engages with the issue of gynocritics, the quest for women's writing. Sceptical about basing political analysis on anatomy, Stimpson also doubts the existence of a permanent, repressed female being, especially if the utterances attributed to the eternal feminine can be shown to reaffirm patriarchal myths of women as primitive, irrational, babbling creatures. None the less, her proposal in this essay is precisely that we should find out, that we should pursue the quest for women's writing, and analyse it to see what in it, if anything, is permanent, and permanently different. At worst, we shall have laid a myth to rest; at best, we shall release into our cul-

ture what it has rendered marginal, and so transform the culture itself in unforeseen ways.

These essays about women reading are also, therefore, about women writing. Here too the emphasis is on difference: women do not all write in the same way. But Stimpson finds that women's writing tends to have in common a play between subordination and insubordination, an invocation of formal and narrative strategies that at once reveal and conceal women's self-assertions in language. Not all women's writing is feminist: sometimes subordination is simply dominant; sometimes initial rebellion gives way to despair. But Stimpson also locates instances of radical writing by women who refuse to accept the place their culture has allotted them. What characterises their work is, she unexpectedly concludes, not only a political commitment, but a willingness to take risks—and the patience that effective rebellion requires.

Her own writing changes in the course of the book, tracing once again the history of its production. The early essays are more transparent, more evidently well constructed. And yet even in the first of them marginality is inscribed in the form, as italicized passages of personal, experiential narrative and reflection intercept the rational argument. Later the prose becomes more allusive, more inclined to foreground the device, more condensed. But it is never impenetrable, always pleasurable. Abstraction alternates with the concrete, theory with wit. In "Nancy Reagan Wears a Hat" Stimpson, who knows all about it, follows an account of the poststructuralist interrogation of signifying practice and the conscious subject with a description of a Koren cartoon from the *New Yorker*. A little girl at her birthday tea, surrounded by friends and family sighs with pleasure."I'm about to experience the totality of who I am," she exclaims. "Poor Birthday Princess," comments Stimpson. "For what if her identity were not such a piece of cake?" (p. 190).

With increasing self-consciousness about its mode of address, one current of feminist writing tends to inhabit the stylistic spaces defined by tradition, but to occupy them *differently*. In this way it refuses to *take the place* of patriarchy, but instead *displaces* it, drawing attention by its own breaches of convention to the relentless linearity and conclusiveness of patriarchal forms. Stimpson's recent style is frequently lyrical, often unexpected, sometimes disarmingly honest, not afraid to be vulnerable, economic, pointed, and never, *never* magisterial.

The essay on Adrienne Rich concludes with a meditation on writing:

> Language lies. Language invents. Poetry lies. Poetry invents. Rich accepts that "truth." Writing tells stories that matter. Writing gives us images from the mind and of the body, for the relief of the body and the reconstruction of the mind. Rich accepts that "truth" as well. If some words ("lesbian") constrict the throat, say them. Open them up. Only then can we speak enough to wonder seriously if language lies, because it is language; if language invents, because it is language; or if language lies because people are liars who invent to control, rather than to dream, and justly please. (pp. 153–4)

Language offers endless possibilities of invention, of pleasure. Colloquialism and popular journalism, as well as poetry, demonstrate the delight of linguis-

tic transgression, until creativity stales into cliché and impels renewed inventiveness. Language is in this sense always a space to be inhabited otherwise, from the margins. But for exactly this reason we need to distinguish between those who invent in order to coerce, and those who do so to release new meanings, new possibilities, new ways to be. Stimpson—and feminism—have made their choices clear.

After the essays, the next best thing about *Where the Meanings Are* is the jacket photograph of Catharine Stimpson in a silk dress in front of a mountain. She is evidently having a good time. The mountain is only marginally taller and thus more impressive than the woman—but then she is relaxed and leaning on one elbow.

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