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*The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Poetic Style* by Jerome McGann. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Pp. 228. \$19.95 paperback.

In 1956, Northrop Frye called for a new approach to the poetry composed between Pope and Wordsworth. Dubbing this era an Age of Sensibility, he sought to appreciate the liveliest poets of the late eighteenth century—his chief examples were Ossian, Smart, and Blake—according to their own poetics and not as laggard Augustans or precocious Romantics. This meant, for Frye, a valuing of sound over sense, of artificiality over naturalness, of free association over narrative. The Augustan and Romantic eras were, for all their differences, emphatically fixed on the poem as finished product. Not so the interregnum. “Hypnotically repetitive, oracular, incantatory, dreamlike and in the original sense of the word charming,” the poetics of sensibility were decisively processual.<sup>1</sup>

Frye’s essay was enormously influential in all but one respect: his unfeigned affection for the poets in question was not contagious. Apart from Blake—who is now more than ever read as a pre-Romantic—Frye’s pantheon has all but disappeared from the shelves of our bookstores. Notwithstanding an ongoing project of archival recovery and several revisionist anthologies, the visibility of this work has hardly been greater within the academy. A handful of notable exceptions aside, the current surge in eighteenth-century studies has focused almost entirely on prose.

Enter Jerome McGann, whose own revisionist anthology (*The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse* [1993]) remaps the half century from 1785 to 1832, taking special aim at the notion of a *sui generis* Romantic genius. In practical terms, this has meant two things: first, an assault on “the extreme domination of an author-centred perception” of the age; second, an erosion of the artificial barrier dividing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetics. Thus, where Frye gives a definite end to the Age of Sensibility with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, McGann argues for a further evolution, with Romantic poetry growing out of the earlier style, then prospering in active opposition to sensibility’s truer and more popular inheritors—the myriad forgotten authors of sentimental verse. In *The Poetics of Sensibility*, these arguments are carried forward and explored anew, largely through close readings of a wide range of little- and well-known works, extending the purview of McGann’s Oxford anthology by another seventy-five years. The gain of this renewed assault is felt most acutely when McGann takes up the interplay *between* little- and well-known works. Giving ample space to so-called “minor” figures (especially women), he ends up corroborating, on grounds peculiar to his own interests, the feminist program of scholars such as Anne Mellor, who in *Romanticism and Gender* (1993) argues that the “major” figures of the period (all men) “effectively stole from women their primary cultural authority as the experts in delicate, tender feelings.”

Given this fascination with the darker corners of literary history, it's not surprising that McGann's research should reveal a very different eighteenth century than the one described by Frye. Despite a fascinating chapter on Ossian—James Macpherson's fraudulent epic of ancient Britain—McGann pays little heed to the luminaries of the age as Frye proclaimed them. Gray remains—and there are passing allusions to Chatterton, Cowper, and Burns—but Smart is gone entirely. In his place we find two often overlooked oddballs, William Jones and Erasmus Darwin, the former a translator of Vedic hymns, the latter an author of botanical studies in verse. Blake, to be sure, is also present, but McGann treats him as a figure of independent illumination, even less indebted to prior models and ideas than Coleridge (whose "Eolian Harp" McGann reads, after George Dekker in *Coleridge and the Literature of Sensibility* [1978], as an example and critique of eighteenth-century aesthetics).

But by far the most significant difference between McGann's itinerary and Frye's—between the present state of literary study and the 1950s—is the wealth and centrality of poetry written by women. Frances Greville, Ann Yearsley, Mary Robinson, Ann Batten Cristall, Laetitia Elizabeth Landon, and Felicia Hemans are all given extended treatment, while several other poets earn brief but provocative mention. This is not simply a matter of what Charles Altieri calls "enlarging the temple": the very ground on which the temple stands has undergone a seismic shift. Surveying the Age of Sensibility as newly revealed, McGann declares, "The nightwood of lost or forgotten writing . . . what we have *not* made of it—passes a clear judgement on our visions of judgement" (4, 195). McGann's stance is thus explicitly anti-Arnoldian. "We custodians of culture," he writes, "are continually, professionally inclined to imagine that art ought to deliver the best that has been known and thought in the world, and—what is worse—to think of this 'best' as a moral category. The tendency produces grotesque results for anyone interested in promoting the practice of art and imagination" (5).

The key words in this passage are not, as one might suspect, "best" and "moral," but "known" and "thought." McGann is far less averse to aesthetic judgment than his rhetoric suggests, and his rhetoric is itself in the service of a kind of morality—an acute sense of injustice in the renderings of posthumous fame, a conscientious rejection of absolutism in all things pertaining to art, an ethics of reading. What makes McGann's position anti-Arnoldian is not his rejection of judgment per se but, rather, his rejection of the bases on which such judgments are usually rendered. "The problem that concerns me," he writes in his introduction, "is not change or stasis in the canon of what we read. It is the tendency to approach all art, canonical or non-canonical, in rational—in theoretical and philosophical—terms" (5). For McGann, the intellect's status as ultimate arbiter in matters of art and morality is the real issue raised by sensibility's canonical status, something that becomes espe-

cially clear in his reading of “On Being Charged with Writing Incorrectly,” a 1734 poem attributed to an author known only as “The Amorous Lady.” One of several works from the period concerned with “effective emotional expression”—with finding a language proper to the heart—its ultimate point, hinted at in the title, is that “learning and a ‘knowledge of letters’ are obstacles to be overcome rather than aids to reflection,” a proposition McGann himself takes to heart (45, 43).

That a deep immersion in sensibility should lead a critic of McGann's abilities to adopt this anti-intellectual stance is hardly accidental. Nor is it accidental that McGann should draw so conclusively for support on despised poetry written by women. As Janet Todd succinctly notes in *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986), sensibility was characterized by its critics as “female, unstrenuous, anti-social and self-indulgent, a physical manipulation and a sensation of the body”—a sensation “felt by men and women alike, but . . . especially associated with the selfish, effeminate side of the personality which, in men, needed proper and manly curbs.” Whether this misogynist response to sensibility defines the movement *ipso facto* as a feminist project is a matter of critical debate—Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen were two who had their doubts—but there's no question that McGann's embrace of the movement contributes to a feminist literary history.

Until now, only a few of the poets taken up in this book have received serious attention, none of it as resolutely focused on artistry—or as unguardedly admiring—as here. Donna Landry, for example, turns the milkmaid Ann Yearsley into an object lesson for materialist feminists in her *Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in England, 1739–1796* (1990). McGann's concern instead is the problem of form. Drawn into the coils of Yearsley's “splendidly convoluted lines,” he discovers a structural model for the poet's “spiritual agon, which readers must re-experience to understand” (57, 59). In *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (1999) Julie Ellison finds Anna Laetitia Barbauld's writing an allegorical description of sensibility as philosophical “system.” McGann's focus is instead on how “the act of writing substantiates its subject” (66). This persistent emphasis on form, structure, writing, beauty, imagination, creativity, poetics, and such-like matters of aesthetic performance is decidedly out of fashion, but McGann, whose ebullient historicism helped prepare the way for cultural studies, draws acute lessons throughout. Thus, of Laetitia Landon he writes: “Her poetry recreates a factitious world and she is shrewd enough (and cursed enough) to see that her own perceptions are part of that world, as is the language in which she can speak of it” (146). Of Ann Batten Cristall: “Her single volume of work, and the single surviving copy known to us, are alike emblems of her mortalized and unworldly aesthetics. For her poetry should not be defined by measures of fame and endurance. A thing of beauty is not a joy forever, it is a joy for now” (204-5).

The heart of this book, and by far McGann's most audacious chapter, is his rehabilitation of the Della Cruscans, a short-lived *fin de siècle* movement entombed in literary history by its contemporary critics as "a knot of fantastic coxcombs . . . perfectly unintelligible, and therefore much read."<sup>2</sup> The group first came to notice with the publication of the *Florence Miscellany* in 1785, a collection of seventy-nine poems in English, Italian, French, and Latin whose most notable characteristic was the "direct expression of personal emotions and impressions."<sup>3</sup> (It is probably not a coincidence that the twentieth-century American poet Robert Duncan once edited a journal with the echoing title of *Berkeley Miscellany*. For Duncan, "even embarrassing sentiments" were proper material for poetry—a stance that eventually drew the ire of critic M. L. Rosenthal.)<sup>4</sup> But by far the group's greatest sensation came a few years later, when Robert Merry published his "Adieu and Recall to Love" under the signature of "Della Crusca." These amatory lines were soon answered in kind by "Anna Matilda" (Hannah Crowley), inspiring an ongoing poetic correspondence quickly joined by a number of other writers, all of them adopting pseudonyms.<sup>5</sup> The poems were ultimately gathered together in a volume called *The British Album*, and they were deemed disturbing enough to call down several satirical attacks. The most notable were those of William Gifford (*The Baviad* and *Maeviad* of 1791 and 1795, respectively) and Richard Polwhele (*The Unsex'd Females*, 1798), but as late as 1809 no less a figure than Byron was joining his voice to the chorus of satirists, declaring in his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers":

Though Crusca's bards no more our journals fill,  
Some stragglers skirmish round the columns still,  
Last of the howling host which once was Bell's,  
Matilda snivels yet, and Hafiz yells,  
And Merry's metaphors appear anew,  
Chained to the signature of O. P. Q.<sup>6</sup>

According to the movement's principal historian, W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, the Della Cruscans were "literary scapegoats in a political witch-hunt," victims of a backlash against the French Revolution (*The English Della Cruscans and Their Time, 1783–1828* [1967]). McGann agrees with this conclusion, but sees the anti-Jacobinism as one element in larger pattern of response to sensibility's wider claims. Focusing on Mary Robinson, and especially Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon*, he argues for the Della Cruscan movement as an essential if forgotten episode in sensibility's war against patriarchal authority. More pointedly, McGann views the "excision" of this movement from the history of English poetry as a loss of poetic possibility tantamount to "cultural disaster" (96), a perverse but wonderful claim which measures more precisely than any cockpit instrument the height of our ascent from the ordered world of

Cambridge dons, who in the 1914 edition of the *Cambridge History of English Literature* decreed Della Cruscan verse “inconceivable balderdash,” “the nadir of the art”—without quoting a single line!

In celebrating this work, McGann draws particular attention to those qualities of eighteenth-century writing which register most forcefully as elements of postmodernism: self-conscious artificiality, an acute sense of the limits of agency, the privileging of affect over sense. These are not accidental emphases. With strategic allusions to experimental writers Lyn Hejinian, Kathy Acker, Veronica Forrest-Thomson, John Ashbery, James Merrill, Laura Riding, and especially Gertrude Stein, McGann suggests something like an interrupted, recommencing history. Indeed, like the Todd Haynes of *Velvet Goldmine* (who posited an otherworldly link between Oscar Wilde and David Bowie), McGann offers Stein as a latter-day Della Cruscan. I only wish he had seen fit to argue the point in detail. Quoting from an obnoxious, uncollected review by T. S. Eliot, McGann shows just how consistent the terms of condescension remain from century to century. But just because two writers are attacked in similar terms doesn't mean that their enterprises are in fact the same. Nor are the terms of approval any more specific in their indications of lineage. When McGann upholds the poetry of sensibility as the first to treat “the physique of language” as “in itself a cognitive field,” he might just as well be describing Charles Olson's “Projective Verse” as Stein's *Tender Buttons* (23). The disparity between these two projects—between the Olsonian and Steinian approaches to language—only underscores the difficulty of claiming a literary heritage for writers who never expressed any interest in the estate.

And yet, for all the distance and invisibility of eighteenth-century poetry, for all the difficulties which beset its reassimilation, the poets of sensibility have again begun to speak to us. The young Canadian poet Lisa Robertson relies on Lady Mary Wortley Montague in her reinventions of the pastoral (*XEclogue* [1993]); Susan Howe mentions Sir William Jones in her long poem “Melville's Marginalia” (in *The Nonconformist's Memorial* [1993]); Gerrit Lansing, an associate of Robert Duncan and Charles Olson, has written one of his finest recent works (*Heavenly Tree/Soluble Forest* [1995]) in homage to Erasmus Darwin. Particular claims aside, McGann is surely correct in supposing that some strains of postmodern writing have roots that sink down into eighteenth-century soil. This shows most powerfully, to my mind, in the sheer suggestiveness of his descriptions. Reading McGann's account of Mary Robinson, I was forcefully reminded of Leslie Scalapino. Likewise, McGann's chapter on Ossian made me think in surprising new ways of Nathaniel Mackey (another writer who “erodes the sharp divisions of matter and spirit . . . at every textual level,” 37). Casual as these associations may be—other readers will surely draw their own, perhaps antithetically—they make a compelling case for the critical relevance of a lost body of writing whose aesthetic interest isn't always apparent.

*The Poetics of Sensibility* is a milestone of critical recuperation, but interested readers unfamiliar with the historical terrain will have to overcome several obstacles before they are able to appreciate both the ingenuity and aptness of McGann's readings. Style is not one of these obstacles. Passionate in his advocacy, exuberant in his claims, McGann's writing is a model of seduction and bravado. Though dense, often to the point of opacity, his elastic, allusive language is invariably witty. McGann's erudition is also impressive, but he has a tendency to assume an equal knowledge on the part of his readers—a flattering assumption which becomes a little maddening when the writers under discussion are all but unknown even to experts. An appendix of poems nowhere else in print, or even an annotated bibliography, would have helped this book immeasurably.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, *The Poetics of Sensibility* is like the English translation of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's *The Literary Absolute* (1988), a study of German Romanticism which in its French original accompanied a short anthology of primary materials. In each case, the segregation of text from commentary works to the reader's disadvantage, rendering concrete analysis needlessly abstract.

These difficulties are unfortunately compounded by a haphazard organization. Casual about chronology, McGann sets his chapters in an order that defies a narrative of development and obscures pertinent arguments. Thus, we learn about the reader response to Laetitia Landon's poetry a chapter before we examine Landon's work, and are told that Mary Robinson feminizes "the Schillerian dialectic" a chapter before Schiller's ideas are presented and discussed (100). Presumably, the book was written as a series of separate essays and not as a preconceived whole, but diligent copyediting would have solved the majority of these problems. A second reading also does the trick, especially if one assembles the relevant texts beforehand.

These are, in any case, quibbles. The book is uncommonly rich and lively—one chapter is a vigorous debate between three of McGann's alter egos—and unique in its passionate reinvention of an entire era of forgotten poets. Rarely does a scholar bring so precise an understanding of current issues in poetry and poetics to a study of the past, and never (so far as I can recall) to a past as repudiated as this one. The ultimate impact of McGann's labors is impossible to guess, but the effort alone has significance. No reader of this book will ever again—if he or she ever did—hear the phrase "the judgment of history" without a narrowing of the eyes. And if, by chance, we experience a renaissance of eighteenth-century possibilities, a poetic rebirth akin to the Metaphysical revival of the Modernist era, our debt to McGann will be as great as our earlier debt to Eliot—an irony no less precious than the poetry itself.

### Notes

1. Northrop Frye, "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," in *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963), 131, 133.

2. William Gifford, *The Maeviad* (London, 1795), vi.
3. Edward E. Bostetter, "The Original Della Cruscans and the Florence Miscellany," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 19 (1956): 293.
4. Robert Duncan, *Fictive Certainties* (New York: New Directions, 1985), 220. Rosenthal criticized Duncan's 1964 book *Roots and Branches* as "sentimental philosophizing." See Duncan's response in the preface to his own *Caesar's Gate: Poems 1949-50* (Berkeley: Sand Dollar, 1972).
5. The influence of this writing reached even to America, where "Philenia" (Sarah Wentworth Morton) and "Menander" (Robert Treat Paine, Jr.) carried out a poetic correspondence in the pages of the *Massachusetts Magazine*. See chap. 6 of James L. Onderdonk's *History of American Verse* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1901), "Della Cruscan Echoes, 1785–1815."
6. Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, vol.1, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980), 253.
7. The lack is especially surprising given McGann's own talents as a textual editor and his valuable role in making rare imprints available on the world wide web. See, e.g., *British Poetry 1780-1990: A Hypermedia Archive of Scholarly Editions* at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/britpo.html>, as well as McGann's essay "Textual Scholarship, Textual Theory, and the Uses of Electronic Tools: A Brief Report on Current Undertakings," *Victorian Studies* 41.4 (summer 1998): 609-19.

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*Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627–1660* by David Norbrook. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. xiii + 509. \$64.95.

Long after it was all over, Thomas Hobbes looked back at the civil war to search out the causes for an event he continued to think unnatural. How was it that men abandoned the duty owed their governors and instead followed the guidance of their own wits? Envy and ambition had a great deal to do with it, of course, Hobbes contended in *Behemoth, or The Long Parliament* (ed. Ferdinand Tönnies: 2nd ed. [1967]), but the critical element in promoting insubordination was attendance at the universities, where such men became persuaded that they lacked no "ability requisite for the government of a commonwealth, especially after having read the glorious histories and the sententious politics of the ancient popular governments of the Greeks and Romans, amongst whom kings were hated and branded with the name of tyrants, and popular government . . . passed by the name of liberty" (23). Hobbes hammers

the point time and again, concluding at last with the question: "Who can be a good subject to monarchy, whose principles are taken from the enemies of monarchy, such as were Cicero, Seneca, Cato, and other politicians of Rome, and Aristotle of Athens, who seldom speak of kings but as of wolves and other ravenous beasts?" (ibid., 158). It is easy to write off Hobbes's comments as exaggeration, and to treat the "classical republicanism" to which they refer as a minority opinion, held by a few malcontents, but of no real political importance. Easy, yes, but perhaps not altogether correct. For we have been learning that the language to which Hobbes referred was in use long before the fighting started, and was understood even by those who did not share its assumptions. In 1628, for example, the Duke of Buckingham, warned of the danger of assassination, replied, "We have no Roman spirits now" (quoted in Dorothea Townshend, *Life and Letters of Mr. Endymion Porter* [London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1897], 97. Townsend unfortunately does not supply a source). Then, when the unthinkable happened, and Buckingham's career was ended by Felton's knife, an anonymous poet in turn praised the assassin because "His valor great did proue a Roman spirit" (54). Similarly, Sir John Eliot, speaking in Parliament in 1626, compared the Duke of Buckingham to Sejanus; King Charles immediately picked up the reference, noting that Eliot must thereby intend the king as Tiberius. This is not yet treasonable talk, though it verged close enough for Eliot to be sent to the Tower. In Tacitus, once Tiberius was informed of the evil behavior of his subordinate, he took steps to have his "favorite" disposed of; presumably, Eliot hoped Charles would react similarly. Both sides here spoke the same language of classical politics. In the midst of these events Thomas May then published his translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the book with which David Norbrook opens his long, complex, and altogether fascinating story.

At first glance, there is no reason to believe that May's rendition of Lucan differed significantly from previous translations, either of that poet or of other classical authors. Admittedly, the *Pharsalia* exalted Pompey at the expense of Caesar, and praised Cato and others of the last generation of Roman republicans. But if this is to be thought suggestive of a latent political intent, then why was not the same true of Arthur Gorges's translation of the same poem, published in 1614? What then makes May's work different? Norbrook argues that the dedications of the individual books, and of the volume as a whole, were all to men involved in opposition to government policy. They were among those who had recently opposed the forced loan, at a time when discussions of resistance to "tyranny" were common, in a language all understood. On this occasion, however, political circumstances ratcheted up interest; without a knowledge of those circumstances, no full understanding of May is possible. And, as Norbrook points out, it was the same set of circumstances which, a year later, drove Thomas Hobbes to

answer May by publishing his translation of Thucydides, with its bitter attacks on the vagaries of the populace.

Norbrook's account of May—and the accounts of George Wither, Andrew Marvell, James Harrington, John Milton, and many others that follow it—are hardly recognizable as literary history or criticism as we have been accustomed to understanding those categories. Instead, he has created something new, a sort of literary-intellectual history, based in part on the speech-act philosophy of J. L. Austin, and rather more on the histories of political theory worked out by John Pocock, most significantly in *The Machiavellian Moment* and his writings on Harrington, and Quentin Skinner, as philosopher and analyst of Hobbes. Lying behind these, in turn, are the classic studies of early fifteenth-century Florentine republicanism by Hans Baron, whose influence is also discernible. In addition, Norbrook acknowledges a debt to Zera Fink's work on the English classical republicans, though he is much less inclined than Fink to concentrate on English indebtedness to the Venetian and Dutch republics. Norbrook's method relies heavily on a reconstruction of political language, not as something fixed in time but as evolving from and simultaneously constraining a series of choices. To make the method work requires astonishing feats of research because such a language may be found anywhere, not merely in the works of the great poets or philosophers—and indeed Norbrook's diligence in discovering sources is clearly visible on every page of the book. It also requires careful study of the political (and, very occasionally, the social) history of the half-century under consideration. There is no way of doing this in brief compass—and this book, indeed, runs to nearly five hundred closely-packed pages.

There is yet one more methodological consideration. Norbrook is adamant in his belief that it is possible to construct a single, coherent narrative of the emergence and development of republican thought spanning the years between May's *Lucan* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and that such a narrative need not—indeed, should not—be forcibly divided in 1649. Moreover, the narrative must take equal account of poetry and prose: the latter is not to be considered as mere background to the former. Norbrook contends that, for instance, Milton's decision to write a poem or a prose pamphlet depended primarily on the political demands of the moment rather than on any inherent considerations of genre. This is to see Milton's writings as a continuum, rather than as a series of great poems interrupted by occasional pamphlets; it is also to see them as in continual counterpoint with a variety of other works, some famous, others virtually unknown, to which Milton was responding. There is here something of the effect of watching an intellectual game of tennis, but the effect can be gained only by Norbrook's keeping the narrative in strict chronological order. In addition, by keeping his book fixed constantly on the present moment, by seeing events (and writing) in terms of a series of actions and

counter-actions without any implied teleology, Norbrook is able to avoid the excessive Whiggism of earlier accounts: this is not the seventeenth century as seen by the Augustans, a point that emerges most clearly in his account of a republican sublime quite different from (if still noticeably akin to) the sublime of the Age of Pope.

What is clear from these preliminary considerations is that any attempt to summarize Norbrook's study rapidly becomes both reductive and fatuous. Instead, I would point out as of peculiar interest (at least to this reader) the long chapter on Marvell and the commonwealth which does much to clarify that poet's political position by unraveling his ambiguities and seeing through his own retrospective obfuscations; or a segment treating James Harrington as a literary figure which sheds light on his slightly off-center political theorizing. The discussion of the politico-literary scene of the brief interval between the death of Oliver Cromwell and the return of Charles Stuart, by refusing to take refuge in invocations of chaos and confusion, makes more sense of those years than anything else I have come across. Interspersed among the lengthy analyses of major writers lie men like George Wither, whose life and ideas are perhaps more appealing than his verse; Henry Marten, rescued from his relegation as a kind of republican court jester; Edmund Waller, who makes a useful mirror in which to observe the careers of others more consistent than he; and Thomas Hobbes, whose brooding shadow hovers over the whole scene. The concluding chapter, on *Paradise Lost*, takes us back once more to Lucan, to the problem of the villain as hero, to the question of what limitations may be placed on a ruler. The recursiveness serves as a reminder that there is indeed an armature underlying the wealth of detail—though, in the end, many may feel that it is the detail that is most satisfying.

There remains a further question that I have thus far evaded: the meaning of republicanism itself. Norbrook takes up the challenge early in his book. Recognizing the differences among the many who might be called republicans, he still sees commonalities among them: "They were ready to criticize customary hierarchies in the state and the church, to see the state as a political artifact rather than a mystical body handed down in a virtually natural order. They could unite in seeing monarchy as a central obstacle to a society of open speaking and just behaviour, and in trying to offer 'the people', defined with various degrees of narrowness, freedom from old political, religious and, perhaps, economic monopolies" (18). It seems almost ungenerous to ask whether that is not perhaps too simple. A case can be made that early modern republicanism need not necessarily be opposed to monarchy. A variety of efforts to limit monarchy rather than abolish it, particularly by specifying royal counselors, were floated during the civil wars, and these had a long and equally classical history. Moreover, in England such ideas had the advantage of familiarity by making an appeal to a very different tradition, that of the

nobility as the monarch's "natural advisers." Norbrook is of course well aware of all this—he has discussed it in earlier works, and it emerges more than once here—but he does seem reluctant to work out the argument to its fullest. One result of doing so would be to extend the English republican tradition much further, a line taken first by John Pocock and, more recently, by Markku Peltonen in *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570-1640* (1995). As Norbrook himself argues, the idea of republicanism was still being defined throughout the critical years, 1626-1660, and indeed his account of its shaping and reshaping is one of the most interesting aspects of his book. Yet the overall history of republicanism is hardly limited to those years. Norbrook has, in this remarkable volume, done much to erase 1649 as the great "invisible barrier." Perhaps the next step will be to broaden the territory still further.

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*Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* by George Haggerty. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Pp. 214. \$49.50 cloth; \$16.50 paper.

The meaning of love in Western culture, as argued by George Haggerty, is deeply ambiguous; it can refer to kinship relations, nonsexual friendships, conjugal relations, sexual liaisons, long-term affectionate partnerships, and so forth. As this list suggests, love may include a sexual component, and it may not. Moreover, love often describes relations of power without foregrounding power differentials. The ambiguity of "love" has often served, according to Haggerty, to render heterosexual relationships unquestionable and homosexual relations invisible. He argues that "love has functioned in Western culture precisely because of the ways in which it euphemizes desire (lust), and a heteronormative culture has always been able to use it to short-circuit, as it were, questions of sexuality and/or same sex desire" (18). Haggerty wants to appropriate this euphemistic term to examine relations between men. The ambiguity of "love" is particularly useful for examining eighteenth-century definitions of masculinity and sexuality because of these terms' profound state of flux; over the course of the eighteenth century, the shifting nature of "masculinity" and "sexuality" was provoked by the diminishing importance of status and the rising importance of gender as markers of social identity.

On the one hand, “love” between men implies a new mutuality in relations between men, a mutuality that is made possible by the shifting relations between classes and the waning of aristocratic privilege. The uncertainty of relations based on status and class in the eighteenth century can be contrasted, according to Haggerty, with an early-modern libertinism that revolved around strict hierarchies of power. The libertine was always the one who penetrated boys, who lack power due to age and status, or women, who lack power due to gender. On the other hand, “love” also suggests a relationship that may or may not have an ambiguously erotic component, and thus defies modernity’s obsession with the divide between hetero- and homosexual relations. In Haggerty’s eyes, the very ambiguity of “love” makes it well suited to examine eighteenth-century relations between men, relations which are typified by an ambiguity that is historically unusual. Haggerty then uses this term as a point of resistance: male “love” resists the strict hierarchies of status that define early modernity and the rigid binaries of male/female, homo/hetero that define modern sexuality.

Avoiding reference to any unitary model of male love in the eighteenth century, Haggerty capitalizes on the vagueness of the term “love” by using it to group together a variety of different relations between men in the eighteenth century. By loosely grouping these different relations together, Haggerty intends to reveal the various ways they differ from both early-modern sexualities and our own modern models of sexuality and gender. The book’s first section, “Masculinities,” breaks the category of male love down into several tropes, each examined in a separate chapter: heroic friendship, fops, and man of sensibility. As his first example of a departure from libertine sexuality, the chapter that follows the introduction examines the eroticized bonds of male friendship in John Dryden’s *All for Love* (1677), Nathaniel Lee’s *The Rival Queens* (1677), and George Lillo’s *The London Merchant* (1731). Haggerty argues that, in these plays “sexual desire between men and women is seen as dishonest, scheming, and debilitating,” while, on the other hand, “[m]en must love men in a homosocial configuration in order for culture to function smoothly” (31). Haggerty rightly acknowledges these relationships between men as forerunners of the “kind of male-bonding that is familiar enough to us in contemporary business settings” (43). Though not explicitly sodomitical, the relationships depicted in these plays resonate deeply with erotic behavior and do little to bury such eroticism in homophobic denials. This explicit eroticism becomes an excess that cannot be simply incorporated into the model of heterosexual male bonding. In these examples, male love “show[s] how far Restoration culture is from naturalizing a gay/straight dichotomy” (31).

In a chapter on the eighteenth-century fop, Haggerty points out that in the early part of the century, “[e]ven when fops are accused of ‘run[n]ing into ‘unnatural Vices,’ as if they have taken up gambling or drinking, they are not

accused of *being* unnatural" (53; original emphasis). The equation between the fop's effeminacy and homosexuality appears uncertain, not as self-evident as it would later become: "the social behavior of these men surely includes the possibility of same-sex object choice as often as not, but no homo/hetero dichotomy results" (53). Examining portraiture, Haggerty goes on to show that the languid posture our contemporary culture associates with effeminacy and the erect posture we associate with masculinity had opposite connotations in the eighteenth century. In his third chapter, on "Sensibility and Its Symptoms," Haggerty looks at early examples of sensibility, like Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*; where men have access to a closer relation to the body, a closeness that was formerly gendered female and given deeply negative associations. Arguing that, in early examples of sensibility, it is not "so easy to distinguish masculine and feminine behavior" (89), Haggerty suggests that sensibility may have the power to "undermine male supremacy and effect an equality between the sexes through feeling" (89). Later in the century, however, the possibilities opened up by the move from libertinism to male love seem to be closing down as a more modern association of effeminacy with homosexuality emerges. Thus, "it is possible to see in mid-century figures a more pronounced comment on sexual practice in descriptions of fops" (69). Similarly, as the century progresses, the attention to physical sensation upon which sensibility based its model of sympathy is transformed into hypochondria. This hypochondria, Haggerty asserts in a discussion of James Boswell, represents a male bourgeois retreat into the individual body in order to escape the demands of sympathy that identifications with women and working-class subjects evoke.

The second section, titled "Sexualities," focuses more specifically on individuals as the creators or manipulators of models of sexuality and gender. Here, in chapter-length discussions, Haggerty examines Thomas Gray's relation to mourning, William Beckford's experience of pederasty, and Horace Walpole's expressions of love to other men as key moments in the development of a modern homosexual role. Haggerty judiciously examines these examples of male love not simply in terms of modern sexuality in which modern readers, more "liberated" than eighteenth-century counterparts, can see evidence of repressed homosexuality. Rather than reading Thomas Gray's melancholy in terms of psychological repression, Haggerty argues that "Gray eroticizes the regret itself in this poetry of loss, not because he is afraid of expressing his sodomitical desires but because he knows that his love has cultural meaning only as loss" (125). As Foucault suggests, prohibitions and incitements are often elements of a single discourse. In readings like those of Gray's poetry, Haggerty asserts that the expressions of male love in these texts are in fact produced or incited, not simply repressed, by historically specific formulations of masculinity and sexuality.

Using an ambiguous term like “love” to highlight the very ambiguous nature of the object of study has certain benefits, as I suggest above. The difficulty of working with such an ambiguous term, however, comes through when Haggerty tries to assert what “male love” is. Writing of Walpole’s flowery expressions of affection to other men, Haggerty argues that “in our need to impose a homo/hetero binary that Walpole defies; and in our demands for ‘proof’ of sexual desire, we are distorting the remarkably simple and notably unqueer fact of these erotic feelings: this is the love that dare not speak its name” (159-60). Male love is not homo/hetero and not sexual, but what is it? A reading that makes male love “remarkably simple and [a] notably unqueer fact” positions such “love” as transparent, and such transparency quickly becomes a rationale to withhold that definition that we are, it appears, all supposed to know. Here, and in moments like this one, Haggerty appears to get caught up in the very ambiguity that he can also deploy so successfully.

The historical aspect of Haggerty’s argument is an attempt to give some specificity to the term “male love.” The sense that eighteenth-century male love is distinct from our contemporary models of sexuality works well, since readers are intuitively familiar with the structures of modern sexuality. However, the attempt to contrast eighteenth-century relations between men with libertinism, while suggestive, requires more evidence than is marshaled here: libertinism itself only gets a couple of pages of explication in this study, and the Earl of Rochester serves as the sole example of what is putatively a significant model of sexuality with widespread resonance in early-modern culture. Does libertinism sum up early-modern relations between men, especially when we consider those relationships between men that—in comparison to libertinism—are both marked by declarations of affection and reflect less baldly the tyranny of power relations than Rochester’s poems? Indeed, some of Haggerty’s own sources (such as Alan Bray’s work) suggest that eroticized male friendships play an important role in sixteenth-century England. Haggerty’s historical discussion does not always supply the needed specificity to his central terms. Yet even if it feels like the central terms of this study are not always adequately grounded, Haggerty’s insistence on the ambiguity and catholic nature of male love allows him to conduct deeply insightful readings into the men who are its subjects. It is no small accomplishment that these readings also reveal a deep generosity towards these subjects and a sensitivity that prevents the critic from quickly affixing a twentieth-century meaning to eighteenth-century experience.

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*Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* by Miri Rubin. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999. Pp. xiii + 266. \$30.00 cloth.

It is difficult to imagine a scholar more suited to an exploration and analysis of late medieval host desecration narratives than Miri Rubin, whose earlier *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), is a definitive study concerning the cultural centrality of eucharistic cult and symbol in the Middle Ages. In *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*, Rubin brings her considerable historical and analytical skills to a sustained scrutiny of a particularly virulent form of narrative, the host desecration accusation, which developed from the increasing importance of the eucharist as sacrament and symbol around the end of the thirteenth century. In its most generalized form, the host desecration narrative tells the tale of a Jew who procures the eucharistic wafer (frequently from a Christian woman) and proceeds to subject the host to various forms of abuse including piercing (as if in imitation of Christ's Passion); the abused host miraculously bleeds, and often undergoes a second miraculous transformation into a child or Christ. The terrified Jew attempts to rid himself of the host, but wherever it is hidden the host reveals itself to Christians who then enact varied forms of vengeance on the Jew and others in the Jewish community: violence often follows upon these accusations, as do conversions and banishment. In this detailed and meticulously researched book, Rubin's aim is to investigate not only the presence, transformation, dissemination, and popularity of these narratives of abuse, and the violence that accompanied them, but to recognize the contingent nature of these narratives, the ways in which they were "historically situated" (3), and thus open to doubt and contestation. Rubin's departure from the more traditional, albeit increasingly debated, ideology that "narratives of abuse, particularly those about Christians and Jews, are taken as eternal, unchanging" (1) signals an important development in historical, and particularly, in Jewish historical studies. Medieval anti-Semitism has been, with few exceptions, constructed as a monolithic and universal response to Jews, and we have ample evidence of the ideologies and representations that emphasized Jewish otherness, and the ways in which these representations could easily translate into violence against Jewish communities. Rubin is informed and thorough in her assessment of the representations and patterns of violence that followed upon host desecration accusations, yet she also seeks "to measure and assess the limitations of those representations and identify those who chose *not* to follow the route to violence offered by the tale" (5). With the elegant clarity we have come to expect from her writing, Rubin

reveals the full range of complexities inherent in late medieval Jewish-Christian relations, particularly the complexities that form and inform host desecration narratives.

*Gentile Tales* is divided into five chapters (the brief Introduction serves as chapter 1), plus an Interjection between chapters 4 and 5 in which Rubin explores Jewish responses to the eucharist and the violence it incited, a conclusion, and an appendix which gives the text of Rabbi Avigdor Kara's *All the Afflictions* (*Et kio ha-tala 'a*). *Gentile Tales* also includes four maps and twenty-five figures, many of which are illuminating plates from Books of Hours or altarpieces depicting full or partial narratives of host desecration. Rubin assumes a degree of expertise on the part of her readers concerning medieval culture, religion, and the complex issues involved in Christian-Jewish relations, yet she is generous and deft in providing background, context, and explanation when necessary. The Introduction is a compressed discussion of the parameters of Rubin's project: the accusation of host desecration was "both *history* and *story* and thus encompassed authority and universality while allowing space for individual participation and the working of fantasy" (2). Drawing on narrative theory (Ricoeur, 1983; White, 1987; Segre, 1979; de Certeau, 1984; Davis, 1989; Ginzburg, 1992; LaCapra, 1983), Rubin, perhaps unnecessarily, establishes the legitimacy of the study of narrative for a historical project. For some readers in the field of literary studies, Rubin's justifications may seem somewhat dated, yet historians and others will find her argument for the study of narrative and textuality as a mode to understanding authentic historical reality to be a compellingly persuasive and necessary introduction. Rubin is less concerned with literary analysis of the desecration accusations and the narratives which encoded and promulgated them, than she is with understanding the narratives within their historical frames. Yet some of the tales are so rich in detail and variations they virtually cry out for close, theoretical analyses, and Rubin provides a fine entree for subsequent literary readings. That she does not offer this form of analysis herself is perfectly in keeping with her project to "situate" the narratives historically, and Rubin more than compensates her readers with the compelling way in which she does situate them not only historically, but also culturally. Indeed, as she repeatedly demonstrates, a full understanding of the host desecration narratives is impossible without the kind of contextualization that *Gentile Tales* offers.

Chapter 2 ("From Jewish Boy to Bleeding Host") begins the real work of the book as Rubin looks at early medieval narratives and traces the emergence and development of new kinds of tales about Jews in the thirteenth century. With their dual role as witnesses to Christianity's truths and eschatologically essential because their conversion will augur Judgment Day, "Jews formed a familiar presence in the theological discussion, homiletic reflection and didactic tales of early medieval culture" (7). Rubin begins her exploration of the

development of the host desecration narratives by concentrating on the popular Jewish Boy tale, one of many stories in the corpus of Marian literature, in which witness and conversion, but also punishment and violence, intersect. In one early Latin version, a young Jewish boy takes communion and when he tells his father, is thrown into an oven from whence his mother tries to save him. His salvation comes instead from Mary, who, according to the young boy, covers him with her cloak to prevent his being burnt. The boy's explanation effects his own and his mother's conversion, which example leads other Jews to convert, while the father is thrown into the oven. This is, as Rubin notes, "a perfect tale of the Virgin's mercy, in saving an innocent child, and opening the eyes of misguided Jews" and it is "significant as a typical example of the *witness* tale, where a Jew effects the conversion of others through the personal experience of miracle and illumination to Christian truth" (9). Rubin lays out the tale's growth and transformation from its Greek origins in the sixth century to its embellishment by English monastic writers in the twelfth century to its translation into vernacular languages and subsequent wide dissemination in the thirteenth century. She details the various and changing emphases of the tale and demonstrates how, by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this tale combining Jews, children, and the eucharist was "gaining values which were new, related to violence and often overtly eucharistic" (22). No longer an unambiguous tale of Jewish witness and conversion, the narrative begins to reflect anxieties concerning the perceived danger posed by Jews both to the Christian community and to the increasingly accessible eucharist host. With a layered density of resources and research, Rubin traces the narrative trend which "would ultimately produce the eucharistic tale of abuse, the host desecration accusation against the Jews, which offered no place for forgiveness, ending in revenge and destruction" (39).

In Chapter 3 ("Patterns of Accusation"), Rubin turns to a thorough and fascinating examination of the ways in which the host desecration accusation was brought against Jews, beginning with the case in Paris in 1290. Although the Paris accusation was the "first fully documented case of a complete host desecration accusation, from discovery to punishment" (40), it is "atypical in its relatively 'benign' result" (47): those immediately concerned in it are brought to trial and burnt, innocent bystanders convert, and the house of the Jew accused is "confiscated and dedicated to the erection of a chapel, but there is no other sign of violence, regional persecution or further destruction" (47). Rubin attributes this "relatively 'benign'" aftermath to the "bureaucratic efficacy" of Paris, where "judicial process was followed: arrest, examination, deliberation by judicial and theological experts, execution . . . in most other cases of host desecration accusation, community action preceded that of officials and magistrates" (47). The distinction which Rubin notes here is important to an understanding of the violence which followed upon later desecration accusations and it is an excellent preview to the kinds of historical and

cultural situating Rubin accomplishes in this chapter and in her chapter 5 discussion of how the narrative did or did not work. Rubin follows her discussion of the Paris accusation with accounts of other accusations in Jewish settlements in regions of the Holy Roman Empire (Franconia, Bavaria, Austria, southern Bohemia). Drawing on chronicles, ecclesiastical documents, *exempla*, and letters, Rubin provides detailed accounts of accusations, regional massacres, and investigations (including testimonies), and her analysis of each case provides a provocative object lesson on the ways in which issues of class, politics, authority, and economics framed both the accusations and the varied responses to them. The chapter also, and importantly, demonstrates how, according to Rubin, the patterns of accusation established the host desecration narrative within “local religious culture” in a “multitude of accounts . . . which related the truth of the new accusation against Jews” (69).

Chapter 4 (“Persons and Places”) lays out the cast of characters and locations involved in many of the host desecration accusations. Throughout this chapter Rubin demonstrates, in her discussions of the various “types” involved, how realistic narrative structures are achieved by recourse to the mundane and familiar. That is, the desecration accusations became plausible through their invocation of clichés and the “logic of the action within the tale was embedded in the unexceptional, in routines of local knowledge and common sense” (70). Rubin examines the various roles assigned to male Jews (the perpetrators), women (the means by which Jews procured the host), children (as witness or transformed host), priests (erring), thieves and converts, as a way of understanding how stereotypes in these narratives work to make them effective. Yet it is important to ask if the enactment and repetition of familiar materials is a sufficiently persuasive affirmation of host desecration accusations and Rubin concludes the chapter with just that question.

Before she turns to an analysis of the politics involved in making these narratives work, and the ways in which “interest and predisposition” (92) aid or impede their powers of persuasion, Rubin pauses in an “Interjection” to ask and answer the question “What Did Jews Think of the Eucharist?” Rhetorically and substantively, this is an evocative interlude in which a Jewish voice enters the discussion about the eucharist as sacrament and the accusations brought against Jews. In another book this “Interjection” may have been appended to the body of the text, but Rubin astutely places it in a central position, thus momentarily privileging Jewish response and interrupting the book’s trajectory of accusation, violence, narrative. There is a long tradition of Jewish polemical writings about Christianity (although much of it is not extant), but before the mid-thirteenth century “polemical energy was usually directed to the issues of Virgin birth, the Incarnation and the Trinity” (93). Even in the thirteenth century, there are only a few references to the eucharist. A century later, there is a heightened engagement with

eucharistic claims and “perhaps in response to the growing visibility and centrality of the eucharist in Christian public rituals, or to the ability of host desecration accusations to wreak disaster, these later references to the eucharist appear in two contexts: rebuttals of accusations and attempts to find their misguided roots, and philosophical discussion of the theology of the eucharist” (95). Rubín highlights the kinds of objections to the eucharist found in rabbinical writings, including Rabbi Yomtov Lippmann's early fifteenth-century *Book of Contention*, which argues against the Christian belief that Christ descends “every day once in all the thousands of thousands of breads and in each of them he is whole. And how very unacceptable this is both to reason and to nature” (95). In his attempts to refute host desecration accusations, according to Rubín, Rabbi Yomtov “associates Christian accusations with a misinterpretation of two Jewish practices, that of setting aside a portion of all dough to symbolise the tithe once offered to Temple priests, and that of burning the remains of leavened bread in preparation for Passover” (96). The difference in perspective is instructive: Christian belief in host desecration accusations entails a degree of belief in Jewish faith in the eucharist, whereas “from the Jewish perspective . . . there is a total rejection of the possibility of divine presence in the eucharist, and the host is treated more as a perplexing joke” (99). Tragically, Jewish response to the accusations is more often inscribed in poems of lamentation, and Rubín provides the full text of one, Rabbi Avigdor Kara's *All the Afflictions*, in an appendix.

With chapter 5 (“Making the Narrative Work”), *Gentile Tales* becomes more than an excellent and compelling account of the origins and forms of the desecration narrative and the patterns of accusation and violence. In this chapter Rubín examines the contingent nature of the narrative and those who doubted and resisted its powers of persuasion. It is difficult, as Rubín acknowledges, “to gauge the degree of resistance and doubt involved, as chronicles celebrated only the cases in which the narrative swept all before it, and ended in spectacular and noteworthy violence” (104). Nonetheless, Rubín offers persuasive evidence that neither belief in the desecration narratives, nor the violence that resulted from them, were inevitable and unquestioned responses. The narratives possessed “the power in *potential*, which could be activated and animated, but which might also be made to seem inappropriate, unfitting or ill-judged” (106). This is a nuanced chapter of historical reconstruction as Rubín directs us to watch, in a manner of speaking, desecration narratives in action. In one of her most compelling examples, Rubín demonstrates how dynastic tensions and familial relations between King Peter III of Catalonia-Aragon and his son John (the Infant) frame two host desecration accusations (Barcelona 1367, Huesca 1377). Rubín suggests that John's “attempt to assert autonomy in areas under his rule was tested in the host desecration accusations brought by him against his father's Jews” (109). Following the trajectory of events and correspondence that Rubín lays out,

readers cannot help but be convinced that there were serious royal doubts concerning the Infant's actions and investigations in both the Barcelona and Huesca cases. Indeed, the King writes that the Barcelona case was "ill founded" and demands that "all accusations in the Huesca case be dropped since they had been made out of 'hatred and ill will'" (113). At the King's request, his son's investigations are examined by the royal council and the extent to which the King contests the accusations clearly demonstrates the fallibility of these narratives' powers of persuasion. In chapter 3 Rubin had discussed Ambrose of Heiligenkreuz's skepticism and frustration concerning the accusation at Korneuburg in 1305 for which he was the lead investigator; in chapter 5 Rubin provides a sustained inquiry into numerous desecration accusations (Barcelona, Huesca, Lérida, Crete, Austria, Wrocław, Passau, and Regensburg) and details how making the narrative work depended upon empowering frames of political, economic, religious, and cultural motivation. Yet she also demonstrates that within these particular frames there was resistance (albeit not always successful) to these narratives of abuse.

Next, in "Violence and the Trails of Memory" Rubin looks at the "commemorative tokens" (132) of the violence following host desecration narratives. It is important to understand that the violence which followed from accusations often produced a sense of community; indeed, the formation of Christian communal identity was often dependent upon the inscribed "otherness" of Jews. This sense of communal identity could be preserved in buildings, texts, rituals, and images which sometimes enshrined a cultic object (the desecrated host) or told the tale of the accusation and violence. Yet the motivation for commemorative gestures is complex, as Rubin suggests: "memory-bearing artefacts were products of an attempt to make sense of and give sense to extraordinary events," yet "does the making of memory not involve the act of self-exculpation, the action of justification, and in so doing is it not also an admission of guilt?" (134). The problem which Rubin faces in this chapter is twofold: the memories of the victims and survivors are, for the most part, lost, with the exception of necrologies and poetic laments, thus the memories of the perpetrators are seemingly more accessible. However, as Rubin notes, "it is no simple thing to discern the meanings captured in the chapels, altarpieces, verses and rituals into which memories were poured and through which they were represented. Every act of memory is also an act of forgetting" (133). Even within the constraints she acknowledges, Rubin offers an informative analytical review of the various forms of commemoration including texts of increasing complexity in their narrative structures and images which "not only retained memory but also bred the expectation of veracity by their very existence" (145). Importantly,

Rubin once again addresses the doubts which sometimes impugned the veracity of commemorative spaces, texts, and objects. And she concludes the chapter with a brief discussion of memory's requirements which resonates with her discussion of desecration accusations themselves: "memories require spurs, advocates . . . they cannot stand alone. The conservation of memory thus emerges as a highly active option, one which reveals its potency only through engaged application in the present" (188).

In her "Conclusion" Rubin traces the sixteenth-century decline of the host desecration accusation, which "lost much of its potency in decades which saw . . . the refiguring of claims made in sacramental language around the traditional symbols of medieval Christianity" (191). The reform movements, the expulsions of Jews from many of the regions where the desecration accusations flourished, the new repugnance for eucharistic excess, all contributed to the virtual disappearance of the accusation. For two centuries the host desecration accusation had led to violence against Jews throughout Europe, but it had also, as Rubin emphasizes, invited doubt and resistance. Rubin's ability to reveal these moments of contestation, however elusive and oblique, is central to this history which seeks to understand the desecration accusations. In looking at those discursive moments where belief in the narrative and violence against Jews were not inevitable and culturally determined reactions, Rubin speaks not only about the medieval period: "in the Middle Ages, just as in this century, it was possible for some persons to resist, to have examined the alternatives to and consequences of widely endorsed courses of knowledge; above all, participation was an act of choice and knowledge, not the following of an irresistible urge" (194). The strength of Rubin's argument is that she is honest in her assessment of the limitations of demonstrable proofs and never over-argues her position. *Gentile Tales* is a fascinating and important study of the deep structures and political/cultural contexts of host desecration narratives. The book is essential reading for scholars of Jewish history, medieval religious studies, and for all who desire to understand the contingent nature of persecution narratives. Rubin has given us a highly readable and compelling account of desecration narratives in which nuances of time and place, culture and politics, gender and religion, historically situate these tales in an effort to understand them. This is a work of uncommon excellence.

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*Envisioning Africa: Racism and Imperialism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* by Peter Edgerly Firchow. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999. Pp. xvi + 258. \$34.95.

*Envisioning Africa: Racism and Imperialism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* is one of the most impressive events in Conrad scholarship of the past half decade. As balanced as it is comprehensive, Firchow's contribution to what has become the most hotly contested area of Conrad studies tempts one to use the word "definitive." Its numerous close readings are both sensitive and creative, and the study's grounding in the many relevant contexts for an understanding of Conrad's African fiction is admirably deep and broad. Firchow's goal for the study is simple: "to place *Heart of Darkness* in a context that allows the controversial charges of its alleged racist and, to a lesser extent, imperialist bias to be examined in as objective a manner as possible" (ix). Although steeped in the many political, sociological, and anthropological debates of the period, Firchow's study cautions against reading Conrad's novella, as so many have done, as a "sociological treatise, for it is only in relation to its aesthetic significance that we can establish what its real social and intellectual-historical meaning is" (x). Put another way, for Firchow, it is "not primarily because of its concern with racism and imperialism but because of its great aesthetic power that [Conrad's novella] remains, a century after it was first published in 1899, one of the chief focal points of critical controversy and debate in the fields of literary theory and literary criticism" (x). For this reason, Firchow seeks "to do justice to the political and social significance of *Heart of Darkness* while at the same time doing justice to its aesthetic power" (xi). His choice of method is "imagology" or "image studies," the study of the ways in which "national, ethnic, or racial images (stereotypes) are presented, transmitted, and perceived in literary contexts" (xi).

In an introductory chapter Firchow attempts to "clear the terminological ground" before evaluating *Heart of Darkness's* degree of support for or criticism of racist and imperialist practices (4). Firchow does a consummate job of outlining the meanings of the terms racism, imperialism, and colonialism, both in Conrad's time and in our own, and of stressing the subtle yet significant differences between these meanings. His conclusion:

As far as [Conrad] was concerned, *race* included *ethnicity* and *nationality*; it was an inclusive word, with none or only a very few of the ominous connotations it was later to assume for a generation living after the Holocaust. And we should bear in mind as well that *imperialism* was not a universal bogeyman but could be both good and bad, depending on what nation was practicing it. (17)

Firchow next turns to a consideration of Conrad's experience of Africa and of the ways in which Africa was "imaged" in the Western literature of the period. Firchow reminds us that Conrad's actual experience of Africa, while it might have seemed interminable to him given all he saw there, lasted only about six months, in the second half of 1890 (18). Clearly, Conrad brought baggage from his Western frame of reference to his "envisioning" of Africa, which led to his committing a series of "misconceptions and misrepresentations of Africa and Africans" (20). For Conrad, moreover, as for other Western authors, "envisioning Africa in fiction" also "became an analogue for the exploration of the hidden, dark regions of their inner selves" (20).

Although Firchow's study is comprehensive in its treatment of Conrad's best-known narrative, it is above all a response to Achebe's now famous attack on Conrad and *Heart of Darkness*—indeed, Firchow's entire book may be said to exist in dialogue with Achebe—as well as an examination of the enigmatic Kurtz: his sources, ideas, and significances. These are by now familiar topics, but Firchow proceeds independently—he confidently treads his own path—and arrives at original, sometimes even startling, conclusions.

For example, after an extended analysis of Conrad's experience in Africa and of his "envisioning" of Africa in his works, Firchow concludes that "*Heart of Darkness* is not *really* about Africa at all; it is *really* about the deepest psychic fears in Conrad's and his readers' psyches" (23); that "With the obvious exception of Kurtz, not a single one of the Congo Belgians in Conrad's novel is anything more than a stereotype" (109); and that, "if Conrad is a racist," it is the case only in the most superficial sense, in that *Heart of Darkness* affirms the "common humanity" of Europeans and Africans, however much "their languages may be different and even mutually incomprehensible" (61). Quite obviously, Firchow's determinations are aimed squarely in Achebe's direction; and while many others have answered to the Nigerian novelist's criticisms, none has explored the nuances or addressed the evidence—pro and contra—of Achebe's argument as extensively or as convincingly.

In his concluding chapter Firchow returns to his earlier etymological approach, and explores the meaning, then and now, of the term genocide. This is a word with which Kurtz is charged by countless critics due to his postscript, "Exterminate all the brutes," which appears at the end of his report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. Arguing that, "Like *racism* and *imperialism*, *genocide*" is a word "whose definition is flexible and various, one that easily lends itself to serious misuse and misunderstanding" (149), Firchow points out that, despite his genocidal remark, Kurtz "never actually engages in genocide," however "violent, irresponsible, and immoral" his behavior otherwise is (153). This gap between what critics say about Kurtz and what he actually does is merely one of many examples, for Firchow, of the present critical need, *pace* Achebe, to condemn

*Heart of Darkness* for its racist and imperialist agenda. Firchow concludes:

Unlike Marlow, these critics do not possess the courage to acknowledge their lie for what it is, namely a kind of half-truth . . . that has been forcefully inflated into a whole truth. . . . Paradoxically, in this way those who object to the stereotyping of Africa on the part of a hypothesized monolithic West have succeeded in stereotyping what was in fact a highly variegated European response to Africa, Africans, and European imperial activity in Africa. . . . Like the Intended, their essentially Romantic need for a morally cleansed version of reality has superseded the need for a more complex and more realistic truth that might be difficult to “live with” in the short term but that would in the end produce a deeper understanding, not only of Conrad and Conrad’s book, but of life itself. (165)

*Envisioning Africa: Racism and Imperialism in Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness”* does flag in spots, particularly when Firchow addresses certain documentary and source issues pertaining to Kurtz that Norman Sherry and Conrad’s biographers have already explored in detail. Nevertheless, at its best, Firchow’s study is reminiscent of Ian Watt’s pioneering *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (1979) for its adept handling of textual, contextual, and intellectual-historical material. Well-written, thoughtfully argued, and including a comprehensive bibliography and index, and an original translation of an important scholarly resource, Oscar Baumann’s “The Stanley Falls Station: Description of the Topography and Inhabitants at the Seventh Cataract of the Stanley Falls of the Congo River,” Firchow’s study, I feel confident, will prove to be an authoritative, even indispensable, work for scholars of Conrad’s controversial novella for years to come.

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