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Book Reviews

A General Rhetoric by Group μ (J. Dubois, F. Edeline, J.-M. Klinkenberg, P. Minguet, F. Pire, H. Trininon), translated by Paul B. Burrell and Edgar M. Slotkin. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1981. Pp. xix + 254. \$18.95.

General Rhetoric, first published in 1970, is the product of a group of neo-rhetoricians from Liège. It is an attempt at a linguistically based synthetic theory of poetic figures, the part of rhetoric known as *elocutio*. The synthetic theory is the work's main claim to be "general"—"general" as in "general linguistic theory," i.e. formally articulated, systematic and inclusive. It also claims generality in that the theory gives a unified account of figures at all levels from sound, syntax, semantics, reference, to (sketchily) whole text. The authors are less confident about claiming generality in the sense of transhistorical or transcultural applicability; these extensions are only briefly touched on. As far as any *tendency to demonstrate* generalizability is concerned, it must be said that the range of literary exemplification is restricted largely to modern and modernist poetry and fiction in French and English. Frankly, this limitation is likely to be more than fortuitous, since linguistic deviationist theory (to which this is at least close kin) has strong affinities with modernist writing. But, anyway, we have no basis for deciding whether the theory could be generalized beyond French, or beyond modern literature, because Group μ never consider the criteria for valid generalizability in these senses. What they do tackle, at least to some extent, is the question of the validity of their theory for rhetorical phenomena in modes of discourse other than "poetry" or "literature": one of the benefits of a linguistics-based theory is that such a question is raised and considered quite naturally. Besides non-literary modes of language, such as newspaper headlines, some sections of the book make a semiotic extension to the non-linguistic genres of theatre and film.

As the translators say, this is likely to be a difficult book for anyone who has not the relevant background in French (and related) linguistic and semiotic theory: Saussure, Benveniste, Hjelmslev, Jakobson, Barthes, Todorov, Greimas, Genette. It is not that the linguistics itself is difficult, but that the distinctions and terminology are likely to be unfamiliar to Anglo-Saxon students, and they are handled allusively and metaphorically in this book. Clarity is not helped by a stilted and unreliable translation, a matter to which I shall return.

According to Group μ , literature is a radical transformation of language effected by the application of rhetorical figures or *metaboles*. Allegedly, this transformation "disqualifies poetry as language" (p. 9), presumably by disrupting referential communication. This extreme and fanciful notion is encouraged by Jakobson's driving a wedge between "poetic" and other uses of language, but fortunately Group μ do not leave hold of language entirely, for they are clear that a rhetorical figure only works if it is perceived in relation to a presupposed

normality—"a metaphor is perceived only if it acts simultaneously in the usual sense and in the figured sense. It is, therefore, the norm-deviation relationship, and not the deviation as such, that makes style" (p. 15). "Norm" or "degree zero" is very hazily characterized by the Group; their intuitive base-line is, judging by references, scientific prose or writing about the history of science, but they also admit that degree zero is an idealization, not a specific style: denotation without connotation, language discounting all but the essential units of signification (pp. 30-31).

The *metaboles* or figures which transform discourse are detected alterations of these essential units. They work like Riffaterre's "stylistic devices": they are local *écarts* which are unexpected, hold up the reader's linear progress through the text and require response and interpretation (p. 38). The enemy of this kind of deviation is convention: a deviation arrests the reader and requires response if it is a marked departure from a continuous norm; but if a particular type of deviation is repeated often, it will enter into the constitution of the norm and lose its force. The Group's psychological/aesthetic theory is extended by certain speculations about aesthetic effects (Ch. 6). A *metabole* or stylistic device is a stimulus to aesthetic response ("ethos"). But *metaboles* are aesthetically polyvalent: the exact response will depend on the relation of the *metabole* to its stylistic macrocontext in Riffaterre's sense, the patterned organization of the text as a whole.

This framework of assumptions about "poetic language" is, frankly, commonplace, solidly located within the context of ideas familiar through the work of Shklovsky, Jakobson, Mukarovsky, Riffaterre and others. Since the book does not offer itself as criticism—the texts cited being merely fragments exemplifying types of figure—wherein lies the work's originality or, what part of literary studies does it facilitate? The answer can only be the way in which it is suggested that a taxonomy of rhetorical figures be derived. The aim of Group μ is to present a unified explanation of figures as applications of a small number of consistent operations to specific structures of language. Thus, the basis of the rhetorical classification is an account of the levels of language, abstractly considered, from phonetics through morphology, syntax, semantics, to text structure and pragmatics; of the relationships between levels; and of the units found at each level (distinctive features, sentences, phrases, lexemes, etc.). The linguistic model used is attributed to Benveniste; it is a very traditional linguistic theory, and in this book it is articulated in very general terms: the linguistic basis is sound but very much lacking in details. For example, a "distinctive feature" approach to phonology and to semantics is implied, but there is no justification of a feature analysis, nor any detailed indication of what kinds of features are assumed to enter into phonetic or semantic decomposition. Such lack of detail about the status of specific units at the different levels is a serious shortcoming for anyone who wishes to use Group μ 's methods, since it is never exactly clear to what kinds of linguistic entities the *metabole*-producing operations apply. However, this vagueness does not invalidate the system, for the details could be supplied in a more precise linguistic model. It does mean, however, that much of the analysis in the book has to be taken on trust, intuitively.

The final piece of apparatus is the set of operations which are applied to linguistic units to produce rhetorical figures (pp. 40-44). These are loosely ana-

logous to transformations in transformational-generative grammar, but they have a different function: not to generate grammatical structures but to "break rules or invent new ones" (cf. p. 40). Four operations are proposed: *suppression* of some unit, whether a constituent such as a syllable or a word, or a feature; *addition* of a unit; *suppression-addition* which amounts to substitution; and *permutation* which governs figures such as syntactic inversion. These operations produce different classes of figure depending on the level of linguistic structure to which they are applied; here Group μ indulge in some fairly prickly neologisms: *metaplasm*s are transformations of phonological and morphological units, *metataxes* are figures acting on the syntactic structure of the sentence, *metasemes* are semantic alterations, and finally *metalogisms* alter the logical value of sentences, their relationship with the world outside language.

Combining the plan of linguistic levels with the various types of rhetorical operation produces a categorization of rhetorical figures which is tabulated on p. 45: e.g. *metataxes* involving suppression include *ellipsis*, *zeugma*, *asyndeton*, *parataxis*; *metalogisms* with addition include *hyperbole*, and so on. Chapters 2-5 discuss and extensively illustrate figures at each of the four levels; Chapter 6 is, as already indicated, a preliminary discussion of aesthetic effects associated with figures. The remaining two chapters, under the heading "Toward a General Rhetoric," discuss figures of narrative voice and narrative structure, organizing the account by reference to the same operations of suppression, addition, etc., with illustrations from theatre and film as well as prose fiction. I do not think that this extension of the system adds anything new to the insights of the more established structuralist writings on such topics as point of view, plot structure, etc., and it is less sophisticated than the work of such writers as Barthes and Genette.

Finally there is "Afterword: Rhetorical Mirrors: Seven Years of Reflection" in which the authors enter into debate with some criticisms of the first edition of the book. They concede some limitations; but *A General Rhetoric* remains an ingenious and linguistically provocative work which promises the basis of a universal, systematic rhetoric, and which deserves further discussion and development. It remains now to consider the usefulness of this new English translation.

I find the French structuralists and post-structuralists just as difficult in English translation as in French. The stylistic playfulness, the fanciful neologisms and the dependence on imprecise spatial metaphors are not simplified by renderings into one's own language—they are just more distracting. In fact, *Rbétorique générale* is not extravagantly stylized in these respects, and it is a good subject for translation. The forbidding difficulty might have been the reliance on examples drawn from modern French poetry. The translators have had to decide in each case whether a translation of the French illustrative citation would preserve the figure and make the point, or whether a new English example should be substituted. On the whole they have coped well with this part of their task, substituting well-chosen English examples where necessary (mainly in the areas of *metaplasm*s and *metasemes*) and translating prose, syntactic, examples where the point does not get lost. Granted, one could quibble with some examples: for instance, the discussion of "a tour unforgettable of Italy" and similar examples of adjective-placement, which is invalidated by the fact that the rules are quite different in English and French, or the trivialization of Corneille's reverberant

oxymoron *obscure clarté* by translating it, unidentified, as "cloudy clarity" (pp. 66 and 123). But on the whole the examples are effective; it is the translation of the text itself which is unsatisfactory.

One is alerted to the possibility of mechanical errors by mistakes in quoted French early in the book: "significant" for *significamt* (p. xvi), "haineus" for *haineuse* (p. 2). I am not an expert on translation from French, but it does seem to me that many words and phrases have been mis-rendered through failure to relate the text to the context of argument it presupposes. Why, for example, is *récit* translated as "short story" on p. 18? It surely has the very general meaning "narrative," as elsewhere in the book, and generally in French narratology. On p. 20 the phrase "these very things" translates *les choses mêmes* which in my judgment of the context means "things themselves"; certainly the "these" is wrong in its suggestion of reference to some co-textual antecedent. On p. 31 we have "the literary act" for *le fait littéraire*. *Fait* can mean "act," but not here: the Group is discussing lexicostatistical proposals for describing the "fact" or "essence" of literariness. The translators vacillate between "act" and "fact" in many similar contexts, but "act" gives the wrong impression because the Group are not concerned with a pragmatic, actional theory of literature as, for instance, Ohmann, Pratt and others have been. In the same sentence there appear to be a quite ludicrous error: *des listes de fréquence dites "normales"* is rendered "frequency lists called *normales*" instead of "frequency lists said to be normal" or in better English "lists of frequencies said to be normal." For a final example of mistranslation due to insensitivity to the context of argument, see p. 28: *une collection de traits distinctifs hiérarchisés* becomes "a collection of hierarchically *distinctive features*" (their italics). This misrepresents linguistic theory—distinctive features may be hierarchically ordered, but it is meaningless to say that they are hierarchically distinctive.

Apart from mechanical errors, there are three sources of difficulty with this translation. First, there is a literal and unidiomatic adherence to French syntax: "the impossibility of constructing sentences semantically contradictory" (p. 123) is not English; it is a slavish relexicalization of the well-formed French *l'interdiction de construire des phrases sémantiquement contradictoires*. English must prepose the adjective phrase ("semantically contradictory sentences") or mark it as a relative clause ("sentences which are semantically contradictory"). This is a very typical example of misplacement of adjectival and adverbial phrases, and failure to mark relative clauses, which makes the translation not only stylistically alien but also difficult to decode. A second difficulty is unreliability of cohesion between sentences and clauses, a lack of care to ensure that items such as noun phrases refer to clearly identifiable antecedents. I could not understand the following until I looked up the French:

A theory of linguistic levels has been developed by Benveniste. We shall apply it here in a somewhat more general aspect, which will better suit our remarks. Whether this application is on the plane of signifier (phonic or graphic element) or of the signified (meaning), the chain that is manifested can be considered a hierarchy of planes where discrete units are 'articulated' (p. 25).

On connaît la théorie des niveaux, développée par Benveniste: nous lui donnons ici un aspect un peu plus général, convenant mieux à notre

propos. Que ce soit sur le plan du significatif (phonique ou graphique) ou sur le plan du signifié (sens), la chaîne manifestée peut être considérée comme une hiérarchie de plans, ou s' "articulent" des unités discrètes.

The second sentence means simply "Whether on the plane of the signifier . . ."; the translators have unjustifiably introduced the phrase "this application," spuriously cohering with "apply" and diverting attention from the theme of the sentence, which is *la chaîne manifestée* and its hierarchy of levels. This sort of fault makes one suspect that the translators are tackling their job sentence by sentence with a precarious grasp of the drift of the ongoing argument.

Finally, compounding their own errors, the translators give the reader insufficient help by rendering the vague and half-metaphorical terms of structuralist French by equally vague English equivalents. Although I am familiar with structuralist theory, I still need help with this dense paragraph:

Nous n'oublions pas qu'on a pu réajuster la thèse saussurienne de l'arbitraire du signe, en montrant que, pour le sujet parlant, rien n'est plus nécessaire que la connexion du significatif et du signifié. Cependant, le signe lui-même, par-delà sa dualité constitutive, est distinct du référent: le sens dernier du discours commun est bien dans cette visée des choses, à la fois absentes (le mot n'est pas la chose) et présentes (le mot remplace la chose).

We are not forgetting that the Saussurian thesis of the arbitrariness of the sign can be adjusted by showing that for the speaker nothing is more necessary than the connection between the signifier and the signified. Beyond its constitutive reality [*sic*], however, the sign itself is distinct from the referent. The ultimate meaning of ordinary discourse is certainly in this design of things, at once absent (the word is not the thing) and present (the word replaces the thing). (pp. 21-22)

The mistranslation "reality" for *dualité* confuses, but this is not the whole problem. A more expansive and explanatory translation (perhaps footnoted more), particularly in explicating such hard-working non-technical terms as *visée*, would have been very welcome. As it is, the translation is accessible only if one pays continuous attention to the original for such clarification as can be derived from the French.

ROGER FOWLER

University of East Anglia

Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy by Geoffrey H. Hartman. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. Pp. vi + 184. \$12.95.

Ten years ago, an English translation of critical analyses of "modern" music first appeared in print, *Boulez on Music Today*, an unremittingly witty and polemical analysis of its subject. The work is formalist but also personal, and is a

precise though fragmentary autobiography of a disciplined musical rhapsode pursuing the task of analytic criticism. Several of these same strengths are present in Hartman's book of literary, psychological, and philosophical comment.

One of the first things to strike the reader's eye is Hartman's exempla of modern art by Adami, Magritte, Oldenburg, Lombardo, Boulée. The book's cover is a light blue chroma print of René Magritte's *Le domaine d'Arnheim*, a heightened and simultaneously bathetic parody of the genre of "mountain painting" and an expression of the "Olympian mind." In its serious aspects, the picture recalls Shelley's *Mont Blanc* as a destruction of the pallid analogy making of topographical verse preceding him. However, that determined stance is too difficult to sustain: in the picture, the mountainous head of an eagle is a profile against the horizon; the wings are the cascade of snow and ice falling to the valley below. A nest of three eggs rests on a plane surface, a balcony, sill, or wall in the foreground "before" the viewer. As with much of Magritte, this is an elaborate conceit of signifier-signified, such as a painting of a room like his witty *Personal Values*, or of a pipe which imitates commercial art in the realistic impression of a tobacconist's sign, a "painting" which is entitled, *This is Not a Pipe*. Of this celebration of illusion, Hartman writes:

Had Derrida begun his career with *Glas* or the essay on Adami, our perplexed judgment could hardly have avoided raising the issue of Man-nerism, or of the resurgence of wit . . . in philosophy. In modern art this resurgence has been an obvious feature for some time. Magritte . . . can create a new "domaine enchanté" by jokes that question the frame though not the force of art. (35)

Indeed, Derrida's texts and this explication are inescapable signals of the change of modern literary temperament. Several forms of older literary modernism did not much feature the play of ingenuity but did emphasize anxiety and collective guilt, and its artists are descendants of Georg Büchner and Dostoevski. It in some ways concludes with Sartre's novels and short stories, the characterization of assassins, bigots, voyeurs, bourgeoisie with limited consciousness, narrow perceptions, and "bad faith." Sartre's fiction celebrates the devious as antidote and antitype. Lesage's *Gil Blas* is ironically figured in *Nausea*, which is in part a polemic against the tailored appetites and stitched histories of the middle class.

Collections of some kinds of "modernism" often include heavy doses of guilt and anti-intellectualism, two crops assiduously cultivated before the academic troubles of a decade-and-a-half to a decade ago. An anthology introduction to Dostoevski's *Notes From the Underground* suggests that readers, after initial repulsion, then incredulity, then fascination, will perhaps identify with the anti-hero. Irving Howe provides a nine-point outline symptomatic of the year of publication, 1968. I quote the first three and the last points of summary:

Intelligence is a disease from which man cannot escape: it dooms him to self-pride and narcissism.

Man is hopelessly split between the side of himself that wishes to act and the side that wishes to observe.

It is often impossible to make a clear distinction between man's pride and his humility: one masks the other.

What redeems life and gives it meaning is human suffering, an experience which, in its fullness of consciousness, is possible only to mankind.

—*Classics of Modern Fiction*, pp. 9-10.

The other form of "modernism" now in question is the critical writing of the 1940's and 1950's which strained after the favorite terms of Cleanth Brooks, irony and paradox. This was a popular but insular movement, largely confined to America, partly evangelical, essentially didactic, often ahistorical and contentedly ignorant of contextuality. Those trained in the American PhD factory of the 1950's and 1960's have anecdotes about the process, often of an instructor with the "text alone" who would chart meanings for a semester without contextual rudder or compass. I recall one lecture about "swan-boats" as though they were from Wagner instead of Boston. David Daiches has his own example: an essay by the American poet Delmore Schwartz on Yeats's "Among School Children." Schwartz, ignoring context for the sake of ingenuity, misreads "taws" as a scrap of Aristoteleanism instead of simple leather: "The taws or marbles would be the concentric spheres which constitute the world for Aristotle and to which the Prime Mover gives impetus or movement." Daiches says that this "fancy speculation" is "unmitigated rubbish" as is Schwartz's misplay with "soldier" and "solider" (*English Literature*, pp. 16 *passim*).

Some of the resentment shown Derrida's "deconstruction" arises from such an academic boscage: part of the entanglement is from the highly elaborated fiction of an often pejorative "realism"; the other is from the stolid doctrine of the text itself, which was often celebrated with some intelligent discussion. Indeed, the reader of Hartman's analysis of Derrida may feel the subliminal tug of the textual memories of Brooks's *Well Wrought Urn*. So what are the differences? Schwartz's tagging and pulling of Yeats may appear to be a methodic predecessor to what some would call the antics of the new, *new* critical school. However, very few past critical essays approach the subtlety of the following, quite remarkable for what it avoids, the overt sexual references that are very nearly incessant in the pre-canonic Dean's poetry. Hartman writes:

Donne ends with two uses of the same image, as if a double coda, a double act of sealing, were required. The doubling increases our awareness that the image is only an image, the emblematic product of an imaginative faith. It is perishable and may need further shoring up. The ending, unabsolute, provides a simulacrum of faith, just as parting is a simulacrum of death. When we recall the initial stanza, which hangs the evidence of life on a word, on less than a word, on a vocal inflection or quantity, the difference between "now" and "no"—

As virtuous men passe mildly away,
And whisper to their soules, to goe,
Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,
The breath goes now, and some say, no:

—then this tandem image is a whisper finely extended, airy despite its solidity. It is only as affecting and perishable as all words that are breath.
(153-4)

Unlike the didactic evangelism of the "new" criticism, this passage takes its strength from several sources, Derrida, perhaps, certainly Freud, and unexpectedly, such works as Gerardus van der Leeuw's on the phenomenology of religion. In *Sacred and Profane Beauty*, the Dutch scholar writes: "A work of art strives for independent life. The object does not matter. Whether the dove of the Holy Ghost is painted, or the dove of the gutter, whether one paints a still life of

bread and a cup, or calls to mind the holy symbols of the Eucharist, the attempt to penetrate to the ultimate reality of what is represented will always lead to another reality, to a second form." As Hartman also sees, one of the essential constituents of Derrida is the elaboration of this perception through the media of extensive knowledge, awareness, and a re-reading of Freud which liberates the writer from mere formula.

Derrida's *Glas* is informed, stamped, penetrated with phallic ambiguities, the columns of text compared with erect memorials to the dead. Freud consistently celebrated the acts of detection (perhaps in part to qualify as the designee of "scientist"), noting the conscious and subconscious acts of analogy, the acts of partial recognition and comparison in puns and metonymy. One of the major differences between the now dated New Criticism and the Insistently Contemporaneous is the admission that the innate dynamism of language and thought is *not* an aberration, is indeed a process too complex for mere "irony" and "paradox." There is no fixed or eternal utterance except that in suspicious dogma, the pathetic masquerade of permanence. What unequivocally separates and identifies criticism of this present school is that Brooks and his colleagues of the New Criticism usually accepted secular evangelism as therapy, not as a symptom of complexity to be rigorously and scrupulously examined. Suggesting that there are meanings hidden from the writer or speaker is therefore a suspicious demon, extremely anti-hierarchical and heterodox. Most certainly, Freud is not "Christian." Patently, deconstruction celebrates Freud's perceptions in such works as the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, where puns and mishearings are clues to quintessential states of mind hidden from the interlocutors themselves. Indeed, if Schwartz had developed the idea of "soldier" Aristotle with his legions of critical absolutists, his comment would have risen above academic cut and paste categories. Aristotle may be "solder," but in the academy he is also "soldier," a fit model for naive legions. Forty years ago, such candid arabesques were punished with spankings, academic dunkings or burnings (metaphorical, of course), enough to make commentators mask their insights with temperate manners and polite utterances. However, in Derrida and Hartman, the main impulse is the celebration of difference, the analysis of levels of consciousness without resort to falsely unifying theories of language, psychology, or criticism. In *Glas*, the levels of consciousness are given graphic form, with two columns of text on two different subjects, Hegel and Genet, each with marginal commentary. So the "text itself" disappears as Derrida refutes that particular fiction with a critical manifest exemplifying its own irresolution.

The dimensions of this critical act alarm some academicians to an hysterical level. One commentator, twice published in recent issues of *The American Scholar*, has repeatedly asked that the critical text deal with "reality," by which he means a graphing of univocal statement. Nonetheless, any utterance changes with the variation of context. Even the scholarly article plays with several stages of meaning. The notes are themselves counter-texts, addenda to a body of argument which itself is a comment relative to previous notation. The disingenuous appearance of stability is seductively simple, but only in a monogamous sense. With critical commentary that pretends to be absolute, it is best not to ask about the relation of what critics intend to write, what they do write, or what they conceal through accident or conscious intention. It is also best not to

think of the levels of contextuality, the other works, the environments of the subjects themselves, all of which affect interpretation.

For the dogmatic critic, it is also best not to observe the innately metonymic aura of language, its inability to be controlled by one grammatical, critical, or philosophical system. For not only are words as unstable as the complex of breath, brain, tongue and mouth uttering them, they are each miniature histories of often irrational association, unintentional metaphors of partial understandings and misrepresentations. Such terms as "leaves" of a book, or anthology—"flower-gathering"—should remind a reader of this rich instability: its generosity and unpredictability are in every term of the language. Part of the spirited deviousness of Derrida's "La pharmacie de Platon," as Hartman observes, is its grotesque ambivalence: Derrida "argues that Plato looked on writing as a drug whose effects could not be controlled: words are potentially good medicine . . . but when written down they become poison for the mind" (119). This is no mere demonic conceit: the Greek *pharmakon* means either *drug*, *poison*, or *po-tion*. Throughout *Glas*, the titular term is used in its manifold sense of *death toll*, *glass*, *ice*. The last two are of course reflective, as are in a different sense the derivations from the homophones *ghel*,^{a,b} each of which split into meanings as various as *celandine*, *nightingale* (from *gelge*, *to yell*, *to sing*),^a as well as meanings such as gold, gleam, gloss, glissade, or appropriately for the "eagle-Hegel" pun in *Glas*, *glida* or *kite*,^b a gliding, hovering bird. Essential to understanding this form of *esprit* and *geist* is the recognition that etymology is itself composed of metonyms, those imaginative germs of other tropes.

Hartman's commentary shows an ingenuity merited by the multi-lingual erudition of Derrida, a peripatetic Jewish, Algerian, French theorist well-versed in Freud and German and French philosophy. His learning is used not as a scholastic buttress but as potential for intellectual flight, conception, and reproduction. In *Glas*, German and French, Hegel (archphilosopher, system builder, punster) and Genet (fundamental lover and outcast, victim, criminal, artist) are the two textual columns of sacred and profane. The virtuosity of Hartman's own commentary far transcends older examples of explicative wit, such as Ian Watt's commentary on the opening of *The Ambassadors* which was once held up as an unassailable example of critical ingenuity. In this instance, the gnomon of Hartman's commentary is a witty elaboration, though in formal narrative, of an intricately elusive dial-text:

Moreover, in the same marginal comment where the *Sa* makes its appearance, Derrida "invents" another acronym, IC, for the Immaculate Conception [A]gain, as with *Sa*, another near homophone is involved, so that language seems to motivate itself, as in the paragrams of Saussure. IC is close to the *ici* of "ici, maintenant" . . . gliding via its sound-shape into a concept and so echo-deconstructing it. The doctrine of the IC is simply an *ici* writ large, the exemplary instance for Western tradition of a metaphysics of presence. (61)

Perhaps more than a few readers, even "trained" or "sophisticated" ones, flee in panic before Derrida's and Hartman's pyrotechnics. Two assurances may aid the fearful: one, again, is the elusive nature of etymological generation, words associated with categorical associations, sounds misheard, mispronounced. Walker Percy in an essay published over twenty years ago noticed an amusing and in-

nocent mishearing in the American South, where rural blacks referred to juke boxes, manufactured by Seeburg, as "Sea Birds." As Percy realized, this is the radical essence of imaginative language. Because I write this shortly after American taxtime, the reminder that *tax* and *tangere, touch*, are near relatives is painful, particularly when *touch* is a slang term for borrowing so casual that the lender has scant hope of repayment. Reference to any adequate etymological listing confirms such irrational-rational relationships, floating half-determinately in consciousness and record.

Hartman is one of the small band of critics who realizes the power, joy, and pain of these tangential and dynamic relations of language, consciousness, and accident—all necessary constituents of contemporary literary criticism if it avoids a past of narrowly overdetermined literalism. Such an achievement, without the guilt and anxiety of the older "modernism," is alone worth the interdisciplines of critical literacy. The almost final words of this essay should be those of the expositor himself:

From the start of *Glas*, then, we are presented with two illusory moments of ecstatic identification some eighteen hundred years apart: absolute knowledge, or Hegel's vision of an end to dialectic and alienation in the thought process of the philosopher who has internalized history; and the phantasm of the Immaculate Conception. (104)

Part of this explanation has already been briefly quoted, and it observes that language is not immaculate, any more than the phallic columns and their analogy of literary tumescence the critic describes or helps inform. Derrida, however, has given a description of language that reaches into simple and directly observable acts of speech and writing. Like the use of the body, the acts of language may assume degrees of guilt. But it can no longer be said that the disciplines of language and of criticism lead but inevitably to forms of anxiety that are beyond analysis and description. Rather, criticism of Hartman's perception celebrates the generation of meanings and physical variety itself in their high and low, spiritual and physical acts. In his commentary, Hartman neatly demonstrates the limits of the guilt of Oedipus: oddly, ludicrously, imaginatively, paronomasia is as potent a literary figure as parricide.

ROBERT MOYNIHAN

*State University College of
New York, Oneonta*

Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse by Jonathan Goldberg.

Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. Pp. xv + 177. \$14.50.

One purpose of this study of *The Faerie Queene* is to examine in detail Book Four as paradigmatic of the concerns of the poem as a whole. Given the lack of allegorical material in this book, it is not unexpected that the author should eschew allegorical interpretation and take as his subject its narrative dimension. A second purpose is to fire an opening barrage along the Spenser front, in the

spreading war over what critical dispensation is to inherit Renaissance studies. This is a "deconstructive reading of *The Faerie Queene*," a label I put in quotation marks because they reflect the self-consciousness of the study's challenge to Spenser studies, and to the Spenserians eminent and otherwise who have made their reputations and part of their living elucidating Spenserian allegory through traditional historicist methods. The Spenserians Goldberg does not cite are many, and they are surely intended to notice these absences. The one scholar who is consistently mentioned with approbation is Harry Berger, Jr., although even here Goldberg must qualify indebtedness, which is more to occasional interpretive details than to Berger's governing archaeological schema. Central to Goldberg's rejection of traditional readings of F. Q. is his conviction of "the impossibility of reducing Spenser's text to one-to-one allegorical meanings, or to new-critical coherent patterns of image, or to a thematics that makes the poem a set of commonplaces of Renaissance or Christian thought" p. (xiv). Since these constitute collectively the major enterprise pursued by Spenser scholars, Goldberg's polemical intention could not be clearer.

Displacing the commonplaces of Renaissance and Christian thought are what one is tempted to call the commonplaces of deconstructive thought. Goldberg's authorities are Roland Barthes (of *S/Z*), Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida. To the first he owes his notion of the readerly versus the writerly text; to the second the concept of the self as radically and irretrievably displaced by the text of the Other; and he is indebted to the third's development of the concepts of deferral, of supplementation, and of dissemination. To all three taken collectively Goldberg owes the collapsing of writer and reader into the text that they make and that (un)makes them, a text that constitutes and reflects back to both the frustration of desire for closure, for meaning, and for self-identity.

Goldberg attempts to describe "the narrative principles that induce frustration, that deny closure, but that also produce the disturbed and disturbing narrative procedures of Spenser's text" (xii). What frustrates the reader of F. Q. are the following: (1) no story proceeds to closure; (2) stories are interrupted by stories, and characters fade into and are displaced by other characters; (3) like the reader's frustrated desire for closure, the desires of the various lovers and questers are frustrated as well; (4) finally, the writer's desire for patronage at court is frustrated by a coy sovereign—figured in Belpheobe—who desires all to desire her but frustrates the desires of all and disables (i.e., castrates) those who woo elsewhere. The purpose of the poem is to teach the frustration of desire and the desire for frustration.

Illustrative of one or more of these topics are the various episodes the author examines: the reopening of the closure to the Scudamour-Amoret tale at the beginning of Book Four; the shifting identities of writer, muse, and addressee in the stanzas that preface Book One; the failure to reach the intended conclusion of Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* in the story of Cambell and Canacee; Timias' reduction to speechlessness by Belpheobe; the wounds of unsatiated desire inflicted on Britomart and other women; the destructiveness of desire that Scudamour discovers in the Temple of Venus.

I am in sympathy with both purposes of this study, for I agree with Goldberg that F. Q. has been concealed too long under the layers of allegorizing that the naive historicism of traditional Spenserians has imposed on it. And I agree also

that a deconstructive approach to the poem can yield impressive results. My doubts about the success of Goldberg's own deconstructive strategies derive from some radical equivocations in these strategies that Goldberg neither resolves nor, had he recognized and used them for their heuristic value, exploits.

I can best begin by questioning a programmatic statement that occurs early in the book: "criticism has, in trying to make the task of reading [F. Q.] easier, often forgotten to account for what made it difficult in the first place" (xiv). And yet, not one of the disruptions and frustrations that Goldberg uncovers are things that the traditional reader finds "difficult in the first place." Goldberg's is clearly a "second reading," one that has already gone beyond the apparently "easy" hermeneutic closures and allegorical recuperations one derives in a "first reading," and has discovered the disruptions and frustrations of the text. For Goldberg, most Spenserians presumably do nothing but repeat their first readings, treating F. Q. as a readerly text available to just such closures and recuperations. The deconstructive reader on the other hand reads it as a writerly text, the text that Goldberg gives us in his commentary, relishing his own frustration and thereby exhibiting his interpretive cunning. And yet, the projected reader of F. Q. that Goldberg assumes is and must be continually surprised by the disruptions and frustrations of the text: he is a reader whose frustrations depend upon his reading's always being a "first reading." There is something fishy and inauthentic about a reader who is continually surprised but is never surprised at being continually surprised, a reader full at once of guilelessness, cunning, and therefore of bad faith. He tries to read F. Q. as if it were a readerly text, only to discover his own failures. As a consequence, he must also read F. Q. as if it were a writerly text, registering an awareness that the text is frustrative by design. But if this is the case then—lacking careful theoretical adjustments—Goldberg's reader and his reading both become inherently impossible: if one sees F. Q. as frustrative by design, then one is no longer frustrated (nor surprised at being so); one can in fact write a book called *Endlesse Worke*, in which the failure of narrative and hermeneutic closure becomes itself meaningful.

Lying behind these equivocations is Goldberg's indecision about the kind of text F. Q. is. On the one hand, he treats the poem as a writerly text, one deliberately intended by Spenser to "deconstruct itself," and in this case Goldberg's own text only makes explicit a type of reading intended by Spenser himself. On the other hand, if as he says, F. Q. offers the reader the twin lures of characters that appear mimetic and allegory that appears recuperable, then F. Q. is a readerly text, on which a deconstructive reading must operate at a level more radical than the poet's intention, to disclose fissures in the poem's structures that these lures are presumably intended to mask. This indecision is based, I suspect, on Goldberg's apparent assumption that if F. Q. is a writerly text it cannot also be a readerly text. On the contrary, for him F. Q. appears as the latter only to those traditional Spenserians who succumb to "first reading" temptations of allegorical interpretation, whereas it is the "second reading" of the deconstructionist which discovers that these temptations are false and frustrated, leading him to conclude that such temptations ought to be refused because—they are not there!

Which brings me to Goldberg's radical misplacing of the poem's allegory. Allegory is not, as he says it is, imposed by historicist readers as "an abstrac-

tion" which substitutes "for the name of a character, thereby leaving behind the narration and its actors for the sake of meaning" (76). That is, allegory is not primarily a transaction between figured text and literalizing reader, but a transaction that occurs within the poem itself, particularly in Books One and Two where Redcrosse and Guyon exhibit radical problems in interpreting the allegorical characters and places they encounter. In other words, allegory and its interpretation are one of Spenser's subjects, something that he problematizes for his characters even as he problematizes them for the reader. And it is the former who are first frustrated by evanescence of meaning, even as they tempt the reader to draw meanings out of their own actions and interpretations. Although Goldberg is correct in saying that allegorical interpretation is only substituting one figure for another (*ibid.*), he misses the full implication of this statement, just as he misses the contradiction internal to his rejection of the "lure" of allegorical interpretation as appropriate to reading F. Q. in general. If "the text invites us, lures us, to these activities [i.e., interpretation and the desire for hermeneutic closure] and then obliterates the possibility of interpretation" (*ibid.*), one may well wonder what these lures are doing there in the first place. Why, in other words, should F. Q. present itself so temptingly to centuries of readers as something inviting and rewarding hermeneutic closure, if the nature of this closure were not something at issue in the poem?

Part of an answer to this question is that Spenser traps the reader into believing that there is no problem of interpretation at all. Goldberg, I suggest, misses the all-pervading interplay in F. Q. between readerly and writerly, between temptation to allegorical recuperation and its denial, between the projection of narrative teleology and its frustration. Certainly some of this is present in Goldberg's discussion, but he has not earned the right to assert it to the exact degree that he has not explored the equivocation—possibly fecund, possibly sterile, depending on one's analytical acumen—implicit in his model of the text and the model of reader response corresponding to it. F. Q. is not just difficult instead of being easy. Rather, its difficulty lies precisely in its apparent ease, an ease that masks and discloses the kinds of difficulties Goldberg discusses, and which demand the kind of reader that Goldberg, borrowing from Stanley Fish, never succeeds in rationalizing: a reader at once guileless and cunning, to read a text at once readerly and writerly.

Part of Goldberg's problem in attempting to short-circuit allegorical reading is that his notion of allegory seems to be no more sophisticated than that of the contributors to the Spenser Variorum. That is, both seem to agree that allegorizing F. Q. means turning it into a *roman à clef*, a set of allusions to other texts, which allusions when run to ground would give us the poem's "meaning." Had he pursued Variorum-style allegorizing with the same intense insight he pursues its rejection, Goldberg might have found that the remarkable thing about the Variorum is that it represents such unerringly right responses to F. Q. as a readerly text, that is, F. Q. as a set of allegorical traps, of allegorical lures holding out to the reader the hope of recuperation. And in the interminable quarrels about "right" meanings that are printed in its appendices, the Variorum unwittingly produces our first deconstructive analysis of F. Q., an analysis in which frustration of the desire for meaning and closure is paramount. As it is, *Endlesse Worke* in rejecting allegorical moralizing, in refusing "to homilize the text, to

find it voicing the commonplaces of Renaissance culture," only succeeds in doing the same thing itself: homilizing the text, this time by drawing on the commonplace of deconstruction, and turning it into a sermon on the evils of desire. As I suggested above, to rationalize the frustrations of the text is no longer to be frustrated.

It is finally questionable that Goldberg serves his thesis well by taking Book Four as paradigmatic for the whole of *F. Q.* Considering his blindness to the full range of significance which Spenser gives to interpretation, allegorical and otherwise, in the opening book, it is not surprising that Goldberg should miss the most important paradigm of deferred closure that Spenser offers us: the postponement of the eschatological closure of world history otherwise "predicted" continually in Book One's references to the Book of Revelations, but finally denied Redcrosse and only anagogically foreshadowed in his victory over the dragon. In other words, Book One gives us the central biblical paradigm of allegorical interpretation itself—the projection of historical types into the eschatological antitypes of history's end—as the model of all other deferrals. Featuring as he does the syntagmatic, metonymical, and narrative dimension at the expense of the paradigmatic, metaphorical, and allegorical dimension, Goldberg misses the central conflict Spenser sets up between these from the very beginning: we see the putative "allegorical meanings" of Redcrosse's successive battles repeatedly undercut by unfolding events. Far from being that which the reader must eschew if he is to engage the poem's denials of closure, the temptations of allegorical closure—the temptation ultimately to idolatrous reduction of meaning to a single text, the temptation of the Christian and the Spenserian alike—lie at the heart of the deconstructive enterprise that Spenser conceals within his text.

MICHAEL McCANLES

Marquette University

Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries, English Literature and its Background 1760-1830 by Marilyn Butler. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982. Pp. 213. \$17.95.

Those familiar with Marilyn Butler's other books on Edgeworth (1972), Austen (1975), and Peacock (1979) will find her new work equally exciting and innovative, as she has now become one of the most distinguished historical critics of the Romantic period. Those, however, expecting a literary history which synthesizes consensual views, with absolute demarcations between the non-literary "background" and the foregrounded literature, will be startled because this is a ground-breaking study. Although the word "background" is in Butler's title, it is a little misleading because the metaphor, as it has been employed by literary historians, suggests two separate realms which are mostly autonomous and which connect at only a few points. Rather, Butler's literary history portrays as body of literature from 1760 to 1830 that passes through four distinct periods, each of which is socially determined, ideologically charged, intellectually polemical, and historically specific. The decisive turning-points are not caused by in-

dividual thinkers (Rousseau, Kant, Burke), poets (Blake, Wordsworth), or critics (Coleridge, Hazlitt) because, according to Butler, the social group, not isolated individuals, generates a culture *within which* individuals can work creatively (see pp. 9-10; 15). The book's inscription from Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry* indicates her dialectical sense of cultural production: "Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations of their age. From this subjection, the loftiest do not escape."

Periodizing English Romanticism has been a hazardous enterprise, vulnerable to numerous inconsistencies and anomalies, one of which is that the "thoroughgoing dogma of the mysterious, subconscious origin of art"—the distinctively Romantic notion of imagination's autonomy from the external world—"has to wait for the 1830s, for the work of J. S. Mill, Thomas Carlyle and John Keble. The doctrine is complete and widely accepted only for the generation *after* 'the English Romantics'" (p. 8). Posthumous theories of English Romanticism have revealed as much about the aesthetic predilections of the theorists as the literature they were theorizing. Using an historical rigor infrequently found among scholars of Romantic writing, so many of whom have derived their own aesthetic values from portions of Romanticism, Butler reconstructs a literary evolution from the perspective of the culture that produced and consumed the literature. Although she qualifies her periodization with some skepticism over the *precise* dates, the four periods are nevertheless distinct and coherent, even if they sometimes overlap.

The first period, from 1760 to 1790, Butler identifies in the first chapter with an Enlightenment culture marked by an innovative, liberal Neoclassicism, which is in part a reaction against the narrower Augustan Neoclassicism, with its sense of hierarchy, luxury, and rococo detail. Enlightenment Neoclassicism "initiates the rejection of previous values, the intellectual and artistic aggression, that for one and a half centuries has been attributed to Romanticism" (p. 6). Influenced by some recent art historians of Neoclassicism, Butler revalues the English Enlightenment in a refreshing way, especially because Romantic studies have so frequently accepted Coleridge's and Carlyle's view of eighteenth-century culture as inhumanly rational and abstract, perversely individualistic, and aesthetically impoverished. The aristocracy, which dominates politics and rules the society during the entire 1760-1830 period, decisively shapes Neoclassicism, according to Butler. Directly in Parliament and more indirectly as "culture's paymaster" (p. 179), the confident landowners resisted any encroachments upon their power by the monarchy in a libertarian rhetoric whose democratic implications far exceeded their aristocratic intentions, expanded their wealth with the agricultural revolution and new investments in trade and industry, and cleared away political, economic, and ideological barriers that might restrain the aggressive pursuit of their self-interest (pp. 11-16). Coexisting with this aristocratic insurgence are social changes—rising population, the marketing of the arts, urbanization, class consciousness—that ultimately run counter to the gentry's interests, but at least in this period, the ideology of Neoclassicism seems universal, to speak for humanity. The sentimental and Gothic novels reflect the Enlightenment movement toward essentialism, representing the primary emotions and "man's" true nature; all of this is discernible as well in social criticism and poetry that looked back

to more primitive societies for durable values. Empiricism in science and philosophy, and the cult of sensibility in novels and poetry, both preoccupied with studying how the mind worked, engendered a particular individualism that assumed a common human nature capable of engaging the world without the need for authoritarian social codes. Moreover, the Enlightenment's subjectivism and emphasis on feeling were eminently social, designed to criticize the corrupt status quo and move society toward a more "natural" state. Reformist sentiment, strongest among the disenfranchised Dissenters, was widespread, explicit in novels and poems expressing sympathy for a host of social victims, from war veterans to prisoners. However optimistic the culture was in many of its modes, it also possessed a "darker" current, which gave a voice to the anxiety caused by rapid social change. The "nightmare" of the Gothic, and the historical perspective of Adam Smith and Edward Gibbon, who portrayed social forces as far more powerful than individuals, are congruent with the period's brooding obsession with death and mutability; these, however, are different, more pessimistic responses to the same social phenomena that are dealt with optimistically elsewhere.

In the second chapter she analyzes the cultural effects of the French Revolution, which alienated the English aristocracy from Neoclassicism and generated the conditions for a new cultural period. From about 1790 to about 1818, the dominant cultural tendency was consciously conservative and explicitly anti-revolutionary. Many of the features traditionally associated with romanticism emerge as reactionary counters to Enlightenment Neoclassicism. The cult of sensibility becomes ideologically suspect, since the priorities of feeling and individual response suggest an individualism at odds with the new priorities of hierarchy, hearth and home, and deference to social custom. Neoclassical essentialism, which evoked a universal human nature and an international focus, gives way to a xenophobic particularism, a nationalist sense of England's specialness and superiority, an organic notion of the society's irrational but nevertheless legitimate uniqueness. By the late 1790s, the Gothic falls out of fashion since its concentration on the individual's response to extreme situations is too morally relative during the anti-French panic when traditional institutions need defending. Gillray's popularity in the later 1790s reflects not simply the aristocracy's wishes but a general revulsion against Enlightenment culture, now identified with revolutionary France. Butler depicts the revolutionary decade as creatively contradictory, with an unequal war of ideas between radicals and reactionaries. Her portrait of Blake, for example, is of a Neoclassical artist inspired by the Dissent tradition of reformism, the revolutionary hopes of the early 1790s, and the artisan radicalism of London. Though unaffected by Enlightenment rationalism, Blake nevertheless shared Neoclassicism's view of the human figure's centrality (represented in his famous design, "Glad Day" [p. 41]), its international concept of politics (his prophetic poems on the French Revolution, America, Europe, and Asia), its individualism and its sexual libertariansm. Although Blake's myth-making owes much to the native tradition of Bible-reading, it also reflects Enlightenment mythology, Neoclassical essentialism and abstractness. He turned away from revolution when the English reaction had destroyed the radical movement, which forked into an atheist rationalism he could not support and a retreating Dissent, which never again was at the forefront of reformist agitation.

Like his artisan friend Sharp, Blake sought consolation in millenarian religion that promised what politics could no longer deliver (pp. 49-50). Although his post-1797 writings express defiant protest, it is depoliticized, with the new emphasis on mystical perception, a merciful Christ, and private system-building. Similarly, Wordsworth went through a revolutionary phase, Neoclassical in almost every feature, then gradually abandoned Enlightenment ideas once he rejected revolution. Burkean notions of family, organic society, the evils of intellectualism, the sacredness of English ground, and the superiority of rural paternalism coexisted with strikingly Neoclassical remnants in a work like *Lyrical Ballads*, and even *The Excursion*, both of which were condemned by influential critics for ideological reasons. Written by the no longer revolutionary Wordsworth, who was adopting conservative ideas, the *Lyrical Ballads* is ironically the most rigorous expression of Neoclassical poetics. "Wordsworth's experiments with subjects from among the lower orders of society, in metres appropriately taken from popular poetry, follow thirty years of public interest in this matter and manner, and are thus characteristic of the culture of the Enlightenment" (p. 58). His originality rests with "the thoroughgoingness and consistency with which he tries to apply Neoclassical precepts, and above all in his concentration on what for him are the ultimate principles, simplicity of language and truth to personal experience" (p. 60). There is nothing in the *Lyrical Ballads* "that could not have been written in 1788" (p. 61).

The diverse careers of Gillray, Blake, and Wordsworth illustrate a characteristic of Butler's literary history: although ideological pressures and social determinants never cease to exert their power, they do so differently in different writers, unevenly, unpredictably, and in contradictory ways. While the earlier *Borderers* by Wordsworth is a typical counter-revolutionary play, illustrating the venality of the revolutionary intellectual, the later *Lyrical Ballads* is an ideological offense to conservative opinion, not so much for aesthetic reasons (Jeffrey actually liked the poetry), but for political reasons, since the social order had to be defended from democratic tendencies while the war against revolutionary France was not yet won.

I do not have the space to discuss the book's treatment of other authors and periods. Even my reproducing, in a condensed form, the first two chapters suffers from oversimplification. Indeed, the great virtue of Butler's history, no matter how prominent the social determinants, is the subtle discriminations and qualifications she employs to make each period, writer and text distinctive. I will give a brief sketch of the other chapters. The chapter on Coleridge depicts a talented writer subject to new social pressures that affected literary production and made possible a new notion of the literary intellectual. The chapter on Scott and Austen, novelists of the gentry, restores the intellectual "war of ideas" and ideological pointedness of their writing, but does so in a way that defines their uniqueness and accounts for their development. The two chapters on the Neoclassical revival and the intellectual war between conservative Romantics and liberal Neoclassicals derive from her Peacock book but include a lot of new material. The Neoclassical revival, from 1812 to 1822, initiated by Byron, Shelley, Keats, Hunt, Peacock and Hazlitt, is unified by a polemical and ideological counter-attack against a reactionary romanticism practiced by the older Wordsworth and Southey, but especially by the most coherent spokesman for Chris-

tian conservatism and Germanic Romanticism, Coleridge. The revival, differing in many ways from what it revived, is marked by considerable diversity among its exponents, unevenness of ideological coherence in each writer, and important shifts in emphasis at various moments. Despite the revival's politics, it did not produce merely partisan propaganda, as Butler illustrates the writers' sensitivity to the disturbing effects of historical change. The chapter on the Romantic novel and prose distinguishes English Romanticism from its German counterpart and discusses the final period, the 1820s, which is characterized by the religious revival, increasing privatism, retreat from political concerns after the successful post-Peterloo repression, and new notions of the writer as a special kind of producer and personality. In the concluding chapter she settles accounts with some major romanticists (Wellek, Bloom) and criticizes some dominant notions of English Romanticism that her study challenges.

Although Butler is not the first to write historical criticism of the Romantic writers, no one has composed a literary history of the period like this one, which weaves together such a diversity of authors and genres, which so thoroughly restores the broad political intentions of such an extensive body of literature. One leaves her history not with a smug sense that each text can now be pigeon-holed into a social category, but with a new sense of wonder, since the literature is now mediated primarily not by our own contemporary notions of what constitutes "Romanticism" but by the remarkable culture created by men and women who lived in a different era, with their own urgent concerns. Butler shifts the center of interpretive gravity from a dominant subjectivism, which has derived authority from portions of Romanticism, to an historicism, which acknowledges the specific, unrepeatable nature of that particular, ever-changing culture. A history which opens up the literature and makes it seem new is quite remarkable. Moreover, Butler has illustrated by example that an historicist methodology need not be reductive or moralistic (she likes the reactionaries as well as the rebels and those in between), and that one can employ Marxian concepts of ideology and social determination without so privileging structural determinants that social consciousness is a mere reflection and social intentions epiphenomenal. She also writes elegant English prose, not arcane jargon. Her book should spark controversy as well as new readings and interpretations of the literature.

MICHAEL SCRIVENER

Wayne State University

The Trans-parent: Sexual Politics in the Language of Emerson by Eric Cheyfitz.
Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. Pp. xv +
188. \$13.50.

In a memoir simply entitled "Mr. Emerson" Henry James Sr. recalls his exasperation in trying to fathom the "awful and adorable" secret of his friend's inscrutable genius. "How I used to lock myself up with him in his bedroom," James recounts, "swearing that before the door was opened I would arrive at

the secret of his immense superiority to the common herd of literary men." Needless to say, that "secret" was not forthcoming, and James, playing the part of balked suitor with evident relish, goes on to lament that Emerson was more of a tease than a Transcendentalist. As impenetrable as "a vestal virgin" and "as plucky as a woman," Emerson's "immense superiority came to him . . . like a woman's beauty or charm of manners." His genius strikes James as "somehow divinely begotten" or "virgin born"; indeed "Emerson himself was an unsexed woman, a veritable fruit of almighty power in the sphere of our *nature*." Not many today will be likely to subscribe to this freakish opinion, but it suggests a way of reading Emerson that Eric Cheyfitz is not only prepared to endorse but make central to the argument of his book on *The Trans-parent*. Though he never refers to James's memoir, Cheyfitz has set out to demonstrate in more extensive fashion what James's metaphors playfully hint at: Emerson's ambivalent sexuality. In a wholly original and re-orienting approach to his subject, Cheyfitz sees "Emerson as at once a priest and psychologist of the combined power of language and sex, a worshipper of this power who is also bent on analyzing the forms that this worship takes and that it gives to its 'object'" (xi). To the extent that this premise is a genuinely viable one, Cheyfitz's own analysis unlocks for us many doors to Emerson (and not merely of the bedroom variety), though in doing so it should be added that Cheyfitz locks some doors of his own.

Although it ranges throughout Emerson's works, *The Trans-parent* focuses primarily on *Nature*, which is seen as dramatizing a "scene of sexual conflict" or "power play" between masculine and feminine figures of authority. These figures, "two hypothetical representatives of Emerson," appear in *Nature* as "the FATHER" and as "my beautiful mother" or the "Me" and the "Not Me"; the former denoting the ideal or divine life of the manly power Emerson struggles to attain, while the latter signifies the material, bodily realm of what Emerson calls "the actual life" through which "the FATHER" is suggested and revealed. Between each figure Cheyfitz posits a "child-hero" whose task, Cheyfitz claims, is "to convert the suggestiveness of the mother into the satisfactions of the father" (4), to make, in other words, the "Not me" of the mother transparent to the "Me" of the father. Following Emerson, Cheyfitz identifies this desired conversion as a marriage that joins "Matter and Mind," the sensual and intellectual, or the motherly and fatherly—"in the ideal form of this marriage in *Nature*, the mother . . . becomes transparent, or effaces herself to reveal the FATHER to the child" (70). To consummate this marriage Cheyfitz's "child-hero" seeks a language which is transparent in the sense that it discloses the father or meaning of the text of nature (and *Nature*) and which is transparent in the sense that this disclosure appears as "a perfect absorption of the mother by the FATHER" (58). But Cheyfitz is more than skeptical about the harmony of such a marriage, which is vouchsafed not only by "a perfect absorption of the mother" but through, as he shows, a violent excision or banishing of the feminine that insures the domination of the father. Emerson's marriage, Cheyfitz asserts, "appears to envision a transcendent idealism, and yet this idealism only appears to be a rhetoric of fear, a fear of that foreigner called 'feminine,' a xenophobia that parodies the masculine patriotism it tries to project" (67).

This compressed summary, however, does little justice to the ambitious range and complexity of the book. Cheyfitz's interests extend beyond a simple case study of Emerson's "ambivalent sexuality" and his style is blessedly uncluttered by psychoanalytic jargon. Instead, Cheyfitz stays as close as possible to the intricate contours (and detours) of Emerson's metaphoric drama, though this can at times result in a rather bumpy ride, particularly in the first two chapters where Cheyfitz, in the manner of Emerson, jumps from topic to topic without providing a coherent overview. Much of this is a necessary hazard, for Cheyfitz is intent on demonstrating how the conflict between the masculine and the feminine corresponds to larger political tensions between Emerson's conception of democracy and aristocracy, the mob and the hero, or the "fearful extent and multitude of objects" in nature and the unequivocal, transparent language of the FATHER. Many have noticed Emerson's uncomfortable relation to "the reign of King Mob" in the era of Jacksonian Democracy, but Cheyfitz's novel perspective yields a number of refreshing insights. His reflections on "the uncommonly common" or "extraordinarily ordinary hero" of an essay like "Heroism" stand as the most provocative account we have on this difficult issue since Perry Miller's pioneering study of "Emersonian Genius and American Democracy." If Emerson's writings outwardly raise a revolutionary call for the democratization of genius—a vision of greatness in which all can share—they also betray "a nostalgic yearning" for "aristocratic repose." The hero simultaneously represents the commonwealth of genius (what Cheyfitz archly calls "the United States of the Self") and is in flight from the anarchic, chaotic impulses which threaten to degrade that commonwealth into a despotic mob. Noting Emerson's propensity to associate the volatile, capricious, and instable with the feminine, Cheyfitz places in opposition to this "motherly mob" the figure of the eloquent orator, who epitomizes manliness for Emerson. The duty of the orator, according to Cheyfitz, is to domesticate the mob (and the fearful willfulness of femininity it projects) by ordering its passions and directing its will. And "just as Emerson's orator must charm the mob in order to reveal its identity with 'The Over-soul,' so the child-hero of *Nature* must charm 'the fearful extent and multitude of objects,' the veiling language of nature, or mother, in order to unveil, or reveal, the identity of the father behind it" (121). But his enterprise is at best precarious; seeking to charm the mother, the child-hero "risks seduction at the hands of the seduced," risks, in other words, being usurped by the "motherly mob" he purports to command. Cheyfitz usefully relates this reversal to a more generalized anxiety on the part of male writers like Emerson, Tocqueville, and Hawthorne that American literature was becoming alarmingly feminized by, in Hawthorne's memorable phrase, a "damned mob of scribbling women." Drawing upon and extending insights by Ann Douglas and others, Cheyfitz is particularly good in showing us how these writers alternately view women as guardians of domestic harmony and potential harbingers of its dissolution. The fourth chapter, which is entitled "The Decline of the Father," perhaps the strongest section of the book, offers an exciting reading of the blurring of sexual identities (as well as the "democratic language" that struggles to articulate them) in a way that wholly revitalizes that tired shibboleth, "sexual politics."

As the sequence of its chapters suggests, *The Trans-parent* tells a story; one

which begins with "The Hero of Metaphor," proceeds to "The Marriage of Eloquent and Stammering Eyes" (Chapter 3), chronicles "The Decline of the Father," and ends with "The Heroine of Metaphor." And yet, if Cheyfitz is illuminating and on occasion brilliant in teasing out the political ramifications of Emerson's domestic drama, he can be less rewarding when dealing with its specifically sexual conflicts. The drama of *The Trans-parent*, for example, comes to a climax of sorts at the end of the third chapter, where we are presented with a reading of *Nature's* "primal scene." The "scene" or "spectacle" unfolds as the child "watch[es] the intercourse of the mother and FATHER; as the mother dies, 'fades and shrivels up,' the child appears privileged to have intercourse with the FATHER; for the object of the spectacle, from the perspective of the hero of metaphor, is the marriage, or union, of the FATHER and child" (110). Precisely how or where the child witnesses this coupling and so "appears privileged" to unite with the FATHER Cheyfitz does not specify. Readers will no doubt be further surprised to learn that Emerson's resolution "not to fling stones at my beautiful mother, nor soil my gentle nest" represents "a moment of excitement" in which the child-hero "has forgotten the discipline of toilet training" (112). From this it somehow follows that "at the moment of the revelation of the child's manly identity, the mother appears as the faeces of this male form. She is excreted, cast out of a purified body that seems no longer to need her nourishment, having digested her completely and put her to good use" (113). Aside from the fact that Cheyfitz reconstructs this "spectacle" by gathering stray phrases which can appear as much as twenty pages apart in *Nature*, the problem with this reading is that it abruptly forecloses the "shifting imbalance of power" or tensed ambivalence between the masculine and feminine that Cheyfitz is elsewhere so dextrous at highlighting. If this "primal scene" represents the "casting-out" or "death of the mother," why does she continue to pose such a menace to Emerson, a menace that Cheyfitz goes on to develop at length in his final chapter? What should be the centerpiece of the book is pushed to an unnecessary and tendentious extreme. Seizing upon random epithets out of context like "utter impotence," "erect organ," or "barren pipes" does not really substantiate his argument but only trivializes it.

Which is unfortunate, since readers wary of Cheyfitz's methods will only be further alienated by this momentary lapse at the expense of overlooking the book's solid merits. This is of course a risk any adventurous thesis must run, but then Cheyfitz expends little effort in attempting to anticipate objections or answer counter arguments with regard to the larger assumptions of his analysis. For all the scrupulous and painstaking discriminations accorded a particular passage, one must also wonder about the final image of Emerson that emerges. More than once Cheyfitz suggests in his final chapter that Emerson's ideal of the manly, commanding orator may be nothing more than a "dream" or defensive "compensation" designed to mask what Emerson perceived to be his own negligible impact on his times. And yet, while we may agree with Cheyfitz's observation that "at no point in his life can Emerson be said to have commanded the mob" to the extent he envisions for his eloquent orator, it seems a rather self-serving argument to conclude that Emerson's professional identity as lecturer "precluded the manly command with which he seems so fascinated in his works" (101). If Emerson never fully realized his dream of writing an eloquent-

ly "popular" book which would be a "Sceptre of irresistible command," it was nonetheless a dream that continued to compel some of his best and most memorable writing for the better part of thirty years.

Readers will find many other points of disagreement with Cheyfitz's understanding of Emerson's "sexual politics." But, even for the most skeptical audience, his book should be welcomed for treating Emerson with the complexity and sensitivity his works so badly need and have so rarely received. The readings of Tocqueville which accompany the analysis of Emerson are, incidentally some of the finest on this author, whose *Democracy in America* has too often been reduced by literary critics to a handbook of vapid generalizations. Whatever the local pitfalls of its argument or the reductive temptations which it invites, *The Trans-parent* represents a substantial advance in our understanding of *Nature* which future students of Emerson will not want to ignore.

KERRY CHARLES LARSON

University of Michigan

Joyce's Cities: Archaeologies of the Soul by Jackson I. Cope. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. Pp. xii + 144. \$12.95.

In his Preface to *Joyce's Cities: Archaeologies of the Soul*, Jackson Cope describes his book as "an imaginary coursing of stages in James Joyce's imagination." Attempting to place Joyce's work in its historical context, he maps out the intellectual milieu of the turn of the century and charts connections between Joyce and some of the dominant intellectual currents and historical discoveries of his time. It is the period's fascination with mysticism, however, which most interests Cope and leads him to interpret Joyce's works in light of such figures as the Italian poet and playwright D'Annunzio and such works as the Kabbalah and the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

Cope's admittedly speculative method allows him to write sentences such as the following: "A first coincidence at this time *might have shaken* Joyce the mystic, had either he or its author-subject [Marinetti] been aware of it" (p. 106); "If he [Joyce] had also read the *Maia* poems, he *would have found* yet another view of the modern waste land . . ." (p. 30); "It was just here . . . that D'Annunzio *would have found* a fact that he *could translate* into a mythic irony that Joyce *perhaps* echoed and clearly bettered in 'A Little Cloud'" (p. 34) [Italics are mine]. One of the primary defects of this book, which, to my mind, ultimately overshadows the wealth of fascinating material it offers, is its lack of convincing evidence to support the connections drawn between Joyce's work and other texts. The "imaginary coursing" begins to resemble the documentation of possible or even non-events and connections in the "Ithaca" chapter of *Ulysses*, where the catechism shifts from indicative to subjunctive: "For what personal purpose could Bloom have applied the water so boiled?" "If he had smiled why would he have smiled?" In his discussion of Joyce's mysticism, Cope requires of his reader an overwhelming belief in the unseen.

In order to be specific about the leaps of faith I think are demanded by Cope's

critical method, I want to focus on the fourth chapter of the book, "*Ulysses: Joyce's Kabbalah*." But before proceeding, it might be useful to sketch out the significance of the titular term "archaeologies" and its relevance to the exploration of Joyce's work. First, the word refers literally to the historic excavations of Troy, Mycenae, Crete, and Tutankhamen's tomb. Tracing the impact of these discoveries on the imagination of Joyce's contemporaries, Cope shows how they offered the twentieth-century artist a wonderfully rich source of myth. He argues, for example, that Evans's Cretan excavations affected D'Annunzio's treatment of myth, which, in turn, affected Joyce's. But as well as referring to actual excavations of the time, the term "archaeologies" refers metaphorically to the process of uncovering the complex layering of history, myth, and image that makes up the cultural psyche of an age. Cope attempts to "unearth" or uncover the various layers of the turn-of-the-century psyche. (As a mapping of certain dominant structures which inform a culture, this archaeological investigation loosely resembles and is probably meant to evoke Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*.)

So, for example, Cope advances the notion that the turn of the century was more "mystical than mythical" and proceeds to map out the field of myth and mysticism in D'Annunzio, Yeats, the theosophists, the Kabbalah, and the Egyptian Book of the Dead. He argues that D'Annunzio's "largely forgotten play" *La città morta* influenced Joyce's treatments of "A Little Cloud" and *Exiles*, and served as the catalyst for Joyce's reworking of *Stephen Hero* into *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Cope also claims that contemporary interest in the Kabbalah influenced Joyce's narrative technique and symbolism in *Ulysses* and that the Egyptian Book of the Dead, as well as the historic discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb, led Joyce to create his own Book of the Dead in *Finnegans Wake*.

In presenting the general cultural matrix of the time, Cope is often quite provocative—his treatments of the necropolis as recurrent image in early modern literature, for example, and the particular combination of creativity and fraud that allowed turn of the century intellectuals to "invent" their own cultural inheritance are particularly fine. In fact, the decision to freely map a cultural field rather than slavishly trace a narrow line of historical influence in the old sense is commendable. One applauds the potential liberation from constricting positivist assumptions about "influence" that an "imaginary coursing" might offer—for example, the freedom to trust in one's intuitive sense of the congruences between two texts or artistic sensibilities without the necessity of appealing to an author's explicit statements about influence.

But Cope is not content to map congruences or common structures. Instead, he draws very specific causal connections between texts and insists on claiming significant interpretive consequences for the discovery of these links. He attempts, in fact, not only to show that these texts *influenced* Joyce's aesthetic, but that they were *models* for some major elements of Joyce's work. Because Cope establishes such high expectations, we need to be convinced that Joyce was at least familiar with the works that supposedly influenced him and that *they* and not some other equally plausible texts provided the model or source. Since Cope makes such large claims for specific textual connections, the reader does require some biographical evidence of Joyce's exposure to these texts (How do we know,

for example, that Joyce had more than a passing knowledge of the Kabbalah?). And, finally, a study of this sort must rest on both the appropriateness and usefulness of its intuitions—do the connections seem right to us and do they illuminate the text?

At its best, this book does draw some convincing connections, for example, the relationship between D'Annunzio and *A Portrait*, and the relationship between the Egyptian Book of the Dead and *Finnegans Wake*. But methodological weaknesses underlie much of the study and are most apparent in the chapter "Ulysses: Joyce's Kabbalah," to which I now would like to turn. After presenting useful information about the importance of such late Victorian and turn of the century translations and interpretations of the Kabbalah as Mathers' *The Kabbalah Unveiled* and Waite's *The Doctrine and Literature of the Kabbalah* and *The Secret Doctrine in Israel*, Cope proceeds by a series of assumptions to claim that Joyce's method and narrative style, as well as certain specific symbols, are rooted in the Kabbalah. But nowhere are we ever actually shown why he believes that Joyce had extensive knowledge of the Kabbalah. (In an earlier article on this theme, Cope disagrees with J. S. Atherton's assertion that Joyce knew the Kabbalah only through the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, but does not explain the grounds of disagreement, and in the present study not even this reference is given.) Because this is never firmly established in Cope's argument, his use of specific passages or teachings of the Kabbalah to elucidate themes and gloss passages in *Ulysses* seems quite presumptuous. In the interest of brevity I cite only one example: Cope's explanation of Rudy's death and the subsequent "sinful barrenness" of the Blooms. Appealing to the teachings of the Zohar (the Kabbalistic Bible), Cope argues that Bloom and Molly have defied Kabbalistic law by having intercourse during the day and, even worse, by engaging in sex which was precipitated by Molly's view of two dogs copulating. Cope links this sacrilegious incident to the blasphemous inversion of God and dog found elsewhere in *Ulysses* and says, "The inversion by Molly and Bloom becomes a link in this tradition, if one pursues the kabbalistic teachings on the mystery of sex" (p. 84). These strained connections lead us to question why we should pursue kabbalistic teachings, that is, why we should believe they are relevant to the judgment of Molly and Leopold Bloom.

However, not only does Cope claim that the Kabbalah influenced Joyce, but also that it indeed provided the impetus for the creation of a "new fictional form" in *Ulysses*: he says that "Joyce was so drawn into the world of kabbalism as a structure that could be transmuted into a new fictional form . . . that he followed the curve of the kabbalistic psyche" (p. 81). This assertion too seems unconvincing on a number of counts, for Cope fails to show why the Kabbalah, rather than other possible models, is particularly appropriate. For example, his statement that both the Zohar and *Ulysses* are "systems at once abstract and concrete" (p. 80) may be true, but this dual aspect of *Ulysses* can be accounted for in other ways as well. In an article entitled "Homer's Sticks and Stones" (*The James Joyce Quarterly*, 6 [1969], 285-98), Hugh Kenner argues that the model of the Homeric myth itself provided both abstract analogy and concrete particulars for Joyce. Kenner maintains that the archaeological excavation of Troy imparted a sense of physical reality to Homer's story, which attracted Joyce when he came to write *Ulysses*.

Similarly, the argument that magic and mystical literature provide the sources for Joyce's narrative techniques seem to me to be equally questionable. It is Cope's idea that the kind of cosmic consciousness that is part of Yeatsian "doctrine" and mysticism in general provides the background for Joyce's "narratorless narrative." One may believe, however, along with others like Michael Groden in *Ulysses in Progress*, that the background for this technical choice is more aesthetic than spiritual, that Joyce became skeptical of the possibility of a narrator, in part at least in response to the limitation of certain kinds of narrative strategies. Perhaps, also, the breakdown of the psychological boundaries of individual characters so that they share images and thoughts, another aspect of the cosmic consciousness cited by Cope, has linguistic and cultural roots. Continuing in the tradition of Flaubert, Joyce demonstrates that thought and language run in grooves, that we all inherit *idées reçues*.

And, finally, Cope's general comparison between the highly schematized correspondences in *Ulysses* and the Kabbalah may hold true, but he fails to acknowledge Joyce's often skeptical attitude toward and treatment of mysticism, correspondence, and system. Cope dismisses too lightly Stephen's disparaging attitude toward theosophy in "Scylla and Charybdis," and the parody of correspondence, relationship, and exhaustive system in the "Ithaca" chapter of the book.

The application of scriptural models to literary hermeneutics seems to me to be an admirable enterprise, one which Frank Kermode in *The Genesis of Secrecy* and Harold Bloom in *Kabbalah and Criticism* have attempted with interesting results. But to argue as Cope does that the Kabbalah provides a specific model for Joyce in *Ulysses* seems both unconvincing and, finally, unilluminating. The literary payoff of such an investigation does not live up to its advanced billing. Our understanding of style and narrative technique does not seem to be much increased by this comparison.

At the end of *Joyce's Cities*, Cope refers to a "sympathetic encounter with Joyce's mind experienced through his written corpus," a phrase that I think is meant to describe the critical enterprise of this book. Indeed, Jackson Cope does offer a sympathetic and often highly intriguing encounter with Joyce. But in drawing such unsubstantiated connections and claiming for them such importance, he seems almost to ask us to accept his powers of telepathy as well as sympathy. *Joyce's Cities* could have been a breakthrough in the methodology of influence studies, but, instead, it turns out to be an often fascinating jaunt through myth and mysticism that fails to lead to a true archaeological find.

KAREN LAWRENCE

University of Utah

Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism by Harold Bloom. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982. Pp. xiv + 336. \$19.95.

Agon and its companion volume *The Breaking of the Vessels* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) complete Harold Bloom's more than decade-long brooding on the sorrows of revisionism that began with *Yeats* (1970) and

The Anxiety of Influence (1973), reached a peak of theoretical elaboration with *A Map of Misreading* (1975), *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975) and *Poetry and Repression* (1976), and bore practical interpretive fruit in his massive study of Wallace Stevens, *The Poems of Our Climate* (1977). But these new volumes are more than just refinements of the "system," for they are also acts of self-revision that look forward to what promises to be a definite literary analysis of Freud, *Transference and Authority*. In this respect, *Agon* is of particular interest, as two of its longer and better chapters treat the work of Bloom's master in self-revision. And even though nearly every chapter here has appeared previously as a separate essay in the five years since the Stevens book, *Agon* nonetheless makes a unified impression, one not solely dependent on the obtrusive strength of the critic's personality.

The reason for the extraordinary coherence of these apparently very different pieces lies in Bloom's obsessively pursued topic: the revisionary will of the post-enlightenment writer, whether poet or critic. Bloom repeatedly traces the manner in which this will to revision appears in the major texts of our modern literary culture. Bloom is fascinated by the many ways an author, brought to the brink of blank desertion by the sudden memory of a precursor's long-repressed words, can rise to the occasion and seize the opportunity such a radically disjunctive moment makes in a text. Into the semantic and rhetorical "gulf" of such a disjunction, the strong creator projects a sublime representation of himself as an inspiring heroic master of influence, a new image of the prophetic voice to be reckoned with. Of course, this sublime self-image is necessarily a measure of the differences between oneself and all those distorted or "misread" recollections of literary ancestors that constitute the touchstones of the creative mind.

For Bloom, a Jewish devotee of the Gnostic alien god, that primal forefather who is also an all-devouring abyss (or foremother), the revisionary moment is a repetition of the original creation-fall that plunged the Gnostic pneuma or divine spark into the prison of time, historical cycles, and the decaying human body. Yet this repetition, as an inventive lie against its own belated status, also defines the aim of the writer's quest for sublimity, which is to identify oneself with and then to transfer authority to oneself from all those fabulous images of his precursors—from Yeats and Blake, say, back to Jehovah and the Demiurge—with which the would-be creator has lovingly terrorized himself. The critic's task, therefore, is to ask over and over again what Bloom wickedly terms "the triple question: more? less? equal?" (193). That is, the critic must interrogate and measure the competing sublimities of precursor and ephebe, in an attempt to settle the issue of who really deserves canonical status among the other grand cultural monuments. Given such a prodigiously tendentious vision and such a delightfully malicious (if reductive) critical approach, it is no wonder that *Agon*, for all its apparent heterogeneity, produces a singular effect in the reader's mind.

The essays in *Agon* range from a theoretical discussion of how one makes oneself an influence ("Agon: Revisionism and Critical Personality") and a close reading of an ancient Gnostic text ("Lying Against Time: Gnosis, Poetry, Criticism") to energetic encounters with Freud ("Freud and the Sublime" and "Freud's Concepts of Defense and the Poetic Will") and a series of essays on nineteenth and twentieth century American literary figures, the most important

of which are the discussions of Emerson ("Emerson: The American Religion") and of Whitman ("Whitman's Image of Voice: To the Tally of My Soul"). These fifteen essays, considered in groups of five, serve to illustrate the three antithetical models of poetic invention that Bloom now proposes. He analogizes poetic invention with a catastrophe theory of creation derived from Gnosticism, with a psychoanalytic perspective on the family romance, and with a rhetorical, transumptive procedure of reversing images of earliness and belatedness found in critical and poetic texts alike. In addition, *Agon* stands as a marker of what Bloom calls "the American difference," a difference that evades by its willful extravagance both traditional, Arnoldian forms of humanism and all recent deconstructive forms of antihumanism imported from the continent. That is, Bloom asserts that only a truly strong, totally antithetical kind of stance can serve the American critic as he faces an American canon of great writers in this time of America's obvious decline.

The most significant feature of these essays is their revision of Bloom's dialectic of revisionism first formulated in *A Map of Misreading* and most fully worked out in *Poetry and Repression*. In these works, Bloom argues that the pattern of revisionary interpretation discernible in all post-enlightenment texts worth the effort of reading could be reduced to an endlessly recurring cycle of three phases or acts: an initial moment of *limitation* or ironic self-reduction; a second moment of *substitution* in which the writer develops his sense of identity by re-inventing the beloved masks of his precursors; and a final moment in which the writer produces a sublime *representation* of himself as the only begetter of his fathers and so of himself as well. (The ultimate source of this pattern, as Bloom contends in *Kabbalah and Criticism*, is Issac Luria's revision of the Kabbalah). In *Agon* this dialectic of limitation, substitution, and representation (or restitution) becomes the antithetical triad of negation (or cancellation), evasion (or self-preservation), and extravagance (or exaltation) (see "Lying Against Time," pp. 59-60). The significance of this self-revision is really twofold; the triad of negation, evasion, and extravagance is more in line with Bloom's three models of poetic invention discussed previously, and, as now formulated, his revisionary triad would seemingly be harder to assimilate to more conventional notions of the dialectic as drawn from Hegel or Marx. In this fashion, Bloom gives more coherence to his baroque theoretical meditations and defends them against possible critiques from deconstructive sources. For deconstructors delight in nothing more than exploding the progress of the dialectic wherever it is operative by exposing its specious logic. (Actually, of course, Bloom's self-revision here makes his position even more open to such a critique than before, but space prohibits going into this matter at this time; for the best work on Bloom of this deconstructive kind, see the first chapter of Paul Bové's *Destructive Poetics: Heidegger and Modern American Poetry*, [New York: Columbia University Press, 1980]).

For me, the highlights of the volume are Bloom's readings of Freud. (The essays on Emerson and Whitman, the one a hymn in praise of self-alienation, the other a celebration of the poetic power of masturbation, while certainly extravagant, are too flashy even for my contemporary tastes). Bloom is at his best when he is reading texts closely, with a reverence for the author that inspires in him a concern for the more traditionally moral aspects of critical analysis. No-

where does this humanistic side of Bloom appear more poignantly than in the climax of his reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in "Freud's Concepts of Defense and The Poetic Will":

Freud concluded "that the death drives are by their nature mute and that the clamour of life proceeds for the most part from Eros." Can we interpret this as meaning that wounded narcissism becomes physical aggression because the loss of self-esteem is also a loss in the language of Eros? Wounded narcissism is at the origins of poetry also, but in poetry the blow to self-esteem strengthens the language of Eros, which defends the poetic will through all the resources of troping. Lacking poetry, the sado-masochist yields to the literalism of the death-drive precisely out of a rage against literal meaning. When figuration and sado-masochism are identified, as in Swinburne or Robinson Jeffers, then we find always the obsession with poetic *belatedness* risen to a terrible intensity that plays out the poetic will's revenge against time by the unhappy substitution of the body, another's body or one's own, *for* time. Raging against time, forgetting that only Eros or figuration is a true revenge against time, the sado-masochist over-literalizes his revenge and so yields to the death-drive Against the literalism and repetition of the death-drive, Freud sets, so early on, the high figuration of his poetic will to an immortality. Perhaps that may seem some day the truest definition of the Freudian Eros: the will's revenge against time's "it was" is to be carried out by the mind's drive to surpass all earlier achievements. Only the strongest of the poets, and Sigmund Freud, are capable of so luminous a vision of Eros. (pp. 142 and 144)

Listening to this quiet but strongly vital love for Freud and his wisdom of truly inventive sublimation, one begins to hope that the promised book, *Transference and Authority*, may deliver our most representative critic from his literal bondage to the Primal Abyss of the Gnostics.

DANIEL O'HARA

Temple University

Donald Barthelme: The Ironist Saved From Drowning by Charles Molesworth
Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982. Pp. 89. \$8.00, paper.

Here, in Charles Molesworth's version of it, is Barthelme-as-parodist, the builder of collage-pieces, saving himself from drowning "in a world of fragments by his ironic manipulation of them. And he is saved from drowning in his own irony by a commitment to those fragments as the saving reality." This is a clear, coherent argument, wise to all of the conceptual dangers. Or at least most of them: notice how, in the sentence I have just quoted, "irony" and "commitment" keep slipping up against one another and finally produce "saving reality" as their offspring. In this particular game, the critical-fictional stakes are very high; "saving reality," after all, is a form of redemption. It is to Molesworth's credit that he raises all the right questions and does so in a beautifully written and intelligent way, but it is no surprise that he does a bit of drowning himself before his short book is over.

The customary question about Barthelme is how important he is, given his microminiaturization of materials and styles. Molesworth addresses this question but wisely connects Barthelme to issues in visual art, post-structural criticism, and social thought. Barthelme's importance thus has to do with his canny strategic choices, in being careful not to commit himself to subjects or styles that cannot carry the weight of critical thought. Performance carries the weight of critical thought, Barthelme's performance. So the feeling in Barthelme's work is, like the subject, condensed and concentrated, and Molesworth's term for this condensation is "affective overloading." To my knowledge, he is the first to observe that Barthelme's work has so much feeling that the feeling itself tends to disrupt the style.

Without giving readings of the stories or novels, Molesworth outlines four main types of Barthelme's fiction, eloquently discusses one story, "Daumier," and, in a witty and eloquent aside, repositions Robert Frost as a radically ambiguous poet, comparable to Wallace Stevens or John Ashbery. All the central aesthetic issues are here. Molesworth's tone is both sophisticated and straightforward.

But the book feels as though it is in some sort of strait-jacket, in part because of the size of the issues Barthelme (and Molesworth) can raise. Start with irony. Molesworth is more optimistic about it than Barthelme is. For Molesworth, the stories themselves create in symbolic form a saving reality. But there is no saving reality in the stories, and in "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel," the voice—ironic though it is—says that irony gives only a poor and unsatisfactory pleasure. Compared to someone like Ashbery, Barthelme seems more grim and more human because he will not transform the materials of his art into something imaginatively transcendent. Unlike Ashbery, he does not become a crypto-aesthete. His position remains more radical because he refuses to take a leap toward transcendent form. In all his work, Barthelme has wished to preserve the forms of his failure. This is a truly radical choice, an unromantic one, and it has made him completely aware of the commodification of outrage and irony in modern society. While Barthelme is packaged as a "successful" writer, his irony disallows any success within the stories; he will not even privilege interiority, as Beckett does. What the irony does, finally, is to act as a dreck detector. In Barthelme's world (see *Snow White*) there is only dreck, and so one's only strategy is to protect oneself from it. Is this a saving reality? It is safe, but nothing else. As a poet and critic, Molesworth knows exactly how crucial these questions are, but his book has the appearance of an outline, and the more radical of his observations glide by too swiftly. It is as if Molesworth himself had become the victim of packaging, in the telegraphic format of the Missouri "literary frontiers" editions.

CHARLES BAXTER

Wayne State University

Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage by Stanley Cavell, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England; Harvard University Press, 1981. Pp. xvi + 304. \$19.95.

Seven of the nine chapters of this book are devoted to readings of individual examples of a new genre Stanley Cavell calls the Comedy of Remarriage. These include Howard Hawks' *Bringing Up Baby* and *His Girl Friday*, George Cukor's *The Philadelphia Story* and *Adam's Rib*, Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*, Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth* and Preston Sturges' *The Lady Eve*. Cavell has unearthed these films from their usual generic resting places—the "Screwball" and "Romantic" comedies—and mounted them in a new relationship to one another after reading Northrop Frye on Shakespearian romance. Following a tradition from Elizabethan romantic comedy, these films "show a young pair overcoming individual and social obstacles to their happiness, figured as a concluding marriage that achieves individual and social reconciliations." As Cavell understands him, Frye distinguishes between Old Comedy and New, according to whether the drama emphasizes the struggle of a young man against an older one or whether the emphasis is primarily upon the heroine. Because they feature the woman's conflict rather than the man's, Cavell's movies are "more intimately related to Old Comedy than to New, but [they are] significantly different from either [because they] seem to transgress an important feature of both, in casting as the heroine a married woman." Thus, Cavell argues, the Hollywood version marks a new stage in the history of the romantic comedy because the central problem in these films is not so much to get the pair together as it is to get them "together again." And the marriage which provided resolution in the Shakespearian comedy must here be understood conditionally, as "it is subjected to the fear or the threat of divorce."

It might be objected that *It Happened One Night*, *Bringing Up Baby* and *The Lady Eve* do not qualify for membership in "Comedy of Remarriage," since in each of them the couple is newly met. It could similarly be pointed out that *Adam's Rib* lacks the problem of divorce. But Cavell deflects such possible criticism by defining genre in a special way:

It will be natural in what follows, even irresistible, to speak of individual characteristics of a genre as "features" of it; but the picture of an object with its features is a bad one. An alternative idea . . . is that a narrative or dramatic genre might be thought of as a medium in the visual arts might be thought of, or a form in music . . . the members of a genre share in the inheritance of certain conditions, procedures and subjects and goals of composition, and . . . each member of such represents a study of these conditions. . . . There is, on this picture, nothing one is tempted to call *the* features of a genre which all its members have in common.

In privileging "conditions and procedures" over features, Cavell gains a certain freedom as he moves between discussions of individual works and descriptions of the larger generic text. For example, in reading those films which do not explicitly treat the subject of remarriage Cavell has discovered that the divorce-reconciliation conflict is only one possible employment of a larger narrative,

which could be called the myth of estrangement: "Let us think of the common inheritance of the members of a genre as a story, call it a myth. The members of a genre will be interpretations of it, or to use Thoreau's word for it, revisions of it, which will also make them interpretations of one another."

The myth common to all the films in this book can be loosely constructed in this way.

A running quarrel is forcing apart a pair who recognize themselves as having known one another forever, that is from the beginning, not just in the past but in a period before there was a past, before history. This naturally presents itself as their having shared childhood together, suggesting that they are brother and sister. They have discovered their sexuality together and find themselves required to enter this realm at roughly the same time they are required to enter the social realm, as if the sexual and the social are to legitimize one another. This is the beginning of a history, of an unending quarrel. The joining of the sexual and the social is called marriage. Something essentially internal to the task of marriage causes trouble in paradise—as if marriage, which was to be a ratification, is itself in need of ratification.

Cavell argues that in this "new" old comedy the central characters are not so much struggling against external obstacles as they are pitted against one another and their recognition in each other of their failure to endure intimacy. Resolution of the problem occurs when the couple achieve a new perspective on their situation, usually from the vantage point achieved in a flight to an isolated and enchanted place. (Oddly, Cavell notes, in several of these Hollywood comedies the Forest of Arden turns out to be in Connecticut.) The removal to Eden is also movement out of time, enabling the lovers to "forgo and forget their past state and its impasse of vengefulness . . ." and to reenter the sphere of sexuality free from the memory of crippled desire. Thus understood, any film about lovers who exhibit a natural antagonism to one another can be included in the genre. For Cavell, the rich versus poor opposition between the Gable and Lombard characters in *It Happened One Night* or the conflict between the repressed intellectual and the madcap society girl in *Bringing Up Baby* are both enactments of a drive toward union held in check by the memory of frustrated intimacy. This is true because it is not the static features of divorce or marriage—presences in the films similar to such generic icons as fancy cars and stately mansions—which define the genre, but the fact that the several texts are animated by a common goal of composition, in this case the elaboration of the problematic of contradictory attraction and repulsion.

Cavell's understanding of genre as dynamic enables him to make interesting connections as he accounts for the many variances in these texts. For example, he argues that the previous marriage ostensibly missing from *It Happened One Night* is actually acted out in the famous "Walls of Jericho" sequence in the cabin of the motor court. In that scene the couple live through an enforced intimacy without sex which replicates the false start toward sexual union the reunited divorcees in the other films have attempted. Thus, later in the film the pair can look back to a period in their relationship which was apparently a marriage—they have pretended to be husband and wife to avert their pursuers—and this experience of a common past without sex makes possible their second "truer" union.

The critic does not limit his creative reading to the search for simple substitutes for the missing features of the genre. Through the use of an operation he calls "compensation" Cavell occasionally discovers new elements in places where he had been looking for old ones. For example, he observes that in *It Happened One Night* the lovers never manage an escape to Eden. Instead they spend all their time together travelling from Florida to New York, a fact which has encouraged most critics to make the more obvious judgment that this is a "road film." Cavell includes *It Happened One Night* in his genre by arguing that in this instance the remarriage comedy compensates for the absence of the new perspective achieved in an escape to Eden by providing the central pair with a common "commitment to adventurousness, say to a future together no matter what." Within Cavell's understanding of the way genres function, this conflation of a memory of the past with a faith in the future proves useful beyond the text of the film in which he first encounters it. Moving from text to system he discovers "that adventurousness in turn plays a role in each of the other films of remarriage and (that) one may come to think that a state of perspective does not require representation by a place but may also be understood as a matter of directedness, of being on the road, on the way." This rule of compensation is so important that it has a prescriptive power as well as a descriptive function; in a subsequent operation Cavell eliminates Sidney Franklin's *Private Lives* and Mervyn Leroy's *Random Harvest*, both films about the reunion and prospective remarriage of divorced couples, because these movies lack the definitive characteristic of adventurousness in the play between the two lovers.

Cavell's discussion of genre merits so detailed an explanation because it is the most valuable section of this otherwise truly vexing book. Presumably, this way of understanding genre has facilitated his discovery of the Comedy of Remarriage, a class of films hitherto undiscussed by film scholars and one which Cavell has not invented. But the discovery of a new set of films with thematic similarities and the occasional provocative insight do not compensate for the many shortcomings of *Pursuits of Happiness*. For several reviewers the problem has been Cavell's overburdening of these frail Hollywood vessels with the weight of heavy ideas—his discussion of *The Philadelphia Story* in terms of Milton's "Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce," his reading of *His Girl Friday* in the context of Locke's "Second Treatise of Government," and his examination of *The Awful Truth* in the light of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, to name a few examples. But this is not really the problem. Films deserve to be discussed with as much seriousness as anything else. The problem is that Cavell fails to make any of these linkages telling, moving as he does so breezily from philosophical treatise to Hollywood text that both the written words and the filmed images become secondary to the author's performance in bringing them together. The final result is that the reader begins to suspect, as Michael Wood has phrased it, that "the object of Cavell's focussed interest" is not the text he purports to be reading but "whatever floats into . . . consciousness."

Related to this failure to focus steadily upon the text is Cavell's failure to connect his argument to any work on film not written by Stanley Cavell. In the first chapter, ingeniously titled "Words for a Conversation," all six references to other discussions of movies refer to Cavell's previous writings. In the 263 pages which make up the bulk of the volume he cites other film scholars only six times,

almost always simply to acknowledge a point of information received. By contrast the book is dense with long digressions in the text and lengthy footnotes in which the author rehearses some point he has made elsewhere. Occasionally these directives read like advertisements, as when Cavell drops a note to explain that his applied criticism in the new volume is meant to illustrate theoretical issues raised in *The World Viewed* (which J. Dudley Andrew once described as "written in isolation") and to explain further that he has already made this connection in an essay called "What Becomes of Things on Film." "Because not everyone will have ready access to the journal in which it appears (*Philosophy and Literature*) I should like to reproduce its final paragraph here . . ." Were he to do this sort of thing only once or twice, it would not be so annoying. But Cavell indulges in it constantly.

By his own admission Cavell's disregard for other film scholarship has been damaging. For example, in the appendix to this book he tries to connect his criticism to that of Robert Warshaw, but expresses regret that he wrote *The World Viewed* "not having known in time of Walter Benjamin and his essays." This critical innocence is particularly problematic because it appears in a book in which the author is at such pains to justify the seriousness of the study of the movies. After an introduction in which he announces that he "is not unaware of an avenue of outrageousness in considering Hollywood films in the light of major works of thought," he brings Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein et al. to his analysis of the texts. Obviously, he means to show that films are serious; but equally obvious from the tone of his introduction and the evidence of his scholarship is the fact that film scholarship is not worthy of that same seriousness. Thus Cavell's conversation is not directed at anyone who may talk back, i.e. those scholars who have already thought about film and who would hardly be outraged by his "indecorous juxtaposition" of films and ideas. This is especially unfortunate because his methodology—discovery of a new element in a particular work, return to the other texts to discover some version of this element functioning in the various settings, redefinition of the entire "myth" to account for the new feature and so on until the model reaches a "expensive saturation"—is quite similar to that of those film scholars who have been influenced by Lévi-Strauss. But Cavell never refers to Lévi-Strauss in his remarks on methodology, mentioning the anthropologist simply to make specific points about individual films and using the term "structuralist" only in several offhand and disparaging remarks. This is a serious omission because Lévi-Strauss has been widely employed by experts in film genre and is in fact routinely discussed in such undergraduate textbooks as Thomas Schatz' *Hollywood Genres*.

It seems likely that Cavell ignores conventional film genre criticism because most of it takes an explicitly social and historical slant. His scholarly insularity thus serves his philosophical position, which is to turn one's experience of the film in upon the self rather than out upon the world. He argues that "one must let the object or the work of your interest teach you how to consider it." This premise implies another, which is "that to take an interest in an object is to take an interest in one's experience of the object, so that to examine and defend my interest in these films is to examine and defend my interest in my own experience and in the moments and passages in my life I may have spent with them." The movement from object to subject begun in these first two proposi-

tions is completed in still another self-referential passage: "These remarks . . . I retain here if for no other reason than that they say things not said elsewhere in this book about who I am, I mean who I is, who the I in this book is, how that figure thinks things over and why such a one takes film as something to think over."

Even if one were to accept the dubious proposition that this exquisite self-consciousness provides a fruitful method with which to engage a literary genre, it hardly follows that such an approach is very useful in a discussion of genre movies. Types of films become genres, that is, they multiply, in proportion to their success at the box-office. In that way they are extraordinarily dependent for their continued existence upon their favorable reception by a large group of people, and in that way they can be considered to be "authored" by their audiences as much as they are by the teams of individuals who make them. For this reason film genre critics have insisted upon the connection between their chosen texts and society. Consider, for example, two of the many articles which deal with the same era as Cavell, Charles Eckert's piece on *Marked Woman* and Mark Roth's essay on the Warner Brothers musical, both of which examine thirties genre films in the context of the social conditions which produced them. Roth's linkage of the studio and Franklin D. Roosevelt illustrates the ways in which the Warners entertainment of this era successfully enlisted its audience's support for the New Deal. Eckert's work, in which he examines the convergence of several genres in a single film, might have been especially useful to Cavell because he uses a notion of structure not unlike that employed in *Pursuits of Happiness*. By uncovering a series of layered oppositions in the text, Eckert tries to reveal the specific ways in which the content of a genre film "mediates" the ideological contradictions in the cultural situation which generates it. Despite his promises to "account for" his genre, this is an operation which interests Cavell not at all. He much prefers to employ the long lens provided by Northrop Frye, and to telescope several centuries with a critical zoom-in from the age of Jonson and Shakespeare to that of Capra and Hawks. In the same way that the telephoto lens collapses the physical space between the viewer and the subject of the composition, Cavell's literary history seeks to erase the temporal gaps between the ages which produce the various comedies of remarriage.

Not surprisingly, this erasure of history leaves a few gaps in the argument. At one extraordinary juncture, seemingly aware that his criticism fails to explain the Godzilla-like emergence of his genre out from under the ice of several epochs, Cavell decides to search for "a comedic precedent for the remarriage form more specific than the Shakespearian." He finds that missing link "in Ibsen, and more particularly, in 'A Doll House'" (sic). At another point, perhaps recognizing how extraordinary a formal genealogy he has laid out, Cavell turns away from literary history to a more specific explanation of the sudden flowering of his genre. Briefly sketching in the advances effected by women in the decades prior to the emergence of the Comedy of Remarriage, Cavell suggests that these films were made possible by the existence of a small set of women—Claudette Colbert, Irene Dunn, Katherine Hepburn, Rosalind Russell, Barbara Stanwyck—particularly adept at playing the strong heroine the scripts demanded. In so doing Cavell moves from the collapsing temporal schema of Frye to a kind of "great woman" theory of history.

These improbable explanations of the genre disappoint because they follow an opening promise the author has made "to provide terms for understanding" why his films emerge and disappear in the years between 1934 and 1941. They irritate because they are offered as part of a conscious refusal to engage the texts as social artifacts:

The explanation I have heard for this historical phenomenon—and it seems to have become something of a piece of folk wisdom—is that thirties comedies were fairy tales for the Depression. . . . If luxurious settings and fantastic sums of money were confined to the Hollywood films of this period, and if Hollywood films of luxury and expenditure were confined to works that fit the genre of remarriage, then I would be more drawn to an economic interpretation of the films I have interested myself in, or to an explanation of genre by economic causation. Since the facts are otherwise it matters to me that that explanation does not specifically account for the form in question.

This refutation of an "argument he has heard" is not very illuminating. Since no scholar is named, no real engagement need take place. In addition, although he discusses it briefly, Cavell fails to consider the real history of the cinema in the decade of the thirties. The perfection of sound films in Hollywood at the end of the twenties, which immediately made the national origin of a film its most important commercial asset, guaranteed the worldwide preeminence of the Hollywood movie since the greatest number of motion picture houses were in English-speaking countries. Unlike that of any other national cinema, the American product paid for itself at home and turned a profit in dubbed versions overseas. This era of Hollywood's greatest expansion, which saw the natural development of sound-dependent genres like the musical and the sophisticated comedy coincided with the era of the Great Depression. At the same moment that the novelty of the sound film attracted large audiences those audiences were concerned with economic issues in a newly intensified way. This information, of course, no more accounts for the genre than does Cavell's invocation of Ibsen, but a serious and sensitive reading of the Remarriage Comedy could conceivably try to deal with the way in which certain Hollywood texts used, or plotted, or engaged, that specific desire in their audiences. For Cavell to shirk this task because other eras have also produced films about the monied is disappointing on several levels. For one, such a decision controverts his own argument; if the formal history of a genre is as important as he argues, then it seems natural that genres from Hollywood's most prolific period will continue to be imitated and placed in new settings. More important is the logical error in Cavell's suggestion that the appearance of settings of wealth and luxury in subsequent Hollywood movies precludes any discussion of "economic causation." Obviously, the establishment of a simple cause and effect between the Depression and movies about wealth is reductive. But that hardly means that the critic should ignore these issues and go off in search of the phenomenal self in the text. It isn't as if, as Cavell's citation of the continued appearance of movies about money implies, the public's persistent interest in characters untouched by hunger and poverty invalidates all connection between the real suffering of the Depression and the Remarriage Comedy's essential disinterest in that suffering. And it certainly does not follow that, because the poor are always with us, the denial of their significance by the Remarriage Comedy bears no analysis.

Because he is an extraordinarily insightful critic, Cavell anticipates such an objection. In fact, it is one of the failures of this book that he is so concerned to anticipate all criticism that he frequently leaves the text to tilt with some interlocutor of his own imagining. In the particular instance at hand, however, he has conjured up an antagonist whose position anticipates my own. It occurs in a discussion of the "Depression vignette" in *It Happened One Night*, when a woman faints from hunger on a bus. Cavell's argument is that this is a film about "hungering, where hungering is a metaphor for imagining," and that Capra is "taking the occasion of the Depression to ask what it is we as a people are truly depressed by, what hunger it is from which we are all faint?" Cavell reasonably asks if such an intention on Capra's part is morally irresponsible, like "aestheticizing or transcendentalizing human suffering." His answer is no, since this is a criticism all serious art which tries to portray suffering must risk. He buttresses his point with a quotation, and his gloss of it, from Emerson: "Do not tell me, as a good man did today, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor? That is, it is not I who make them and who keep them poor; and so far as I can better the situation of whoever is poor I can only do it by answering my genius when it calls. But to give this sort of answer one must have a healthy respect for the value of one's work, let us say for its powers of instruction and redemption." However appropriate such a response may be for Emerson, and however relevant it is to Frank Capra, it is difficult not to read this passage, given Cavell's scholarly self-reliance, as a defense of his own work. It is equally difficult, given the relative infrequency of *Pursuits of Happiness's* instructive and redemptive passages, to accord Cavell's book that respect he seems to be asking for. Not only does this book refuse to engage some of the most important questions raised by these films, it poses several questions of its own. What drives the critic to perform these disabling operations upon the texts? What is the institutional context which encourages the scholar to detach these movies—created by hundreds of people, consumed by thousands—so completely from their social functioning? What force in the academic situation demands that they be contemplated at so great a remove?

DENNIS TURNER

Wayne State University