

2000

## Book Reviews

Criticism Editors

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### Recommended Citation

Editors, Criticism (2000) "Book Reviews," *Criticism*: Vol. 42: Iss. 4, Article 5.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol42/iss4/5>

*Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* by Christina Britzolakis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Pp. 250. \$60.00, cloth.

Sylvia Plath wrote intensely and died immensely. Her poems constructed stunning psychological landscapes and exhibited a verbal complexity rare in twentieth-century poetry. In death she achieved an iconic status usually reserved for celebrity suicides, political assassinations, and royal car crashes. Her texts and her death helped to shape private and public mourning in her time, and they continue to do so today. Now Christina Britzolakis has written an important new book that attempts to make sense of textual patterns in Plath's writing while steering clear of the sensational life story. That her book is nonetheless drawn toward that story reveals not simply the continuing power of Plath as a cultural figure but also a crisis in critical theory as it attempts to separate its operations from those of its suppressed double, biography.

Emphasizing the rhetoricity and self-reflexivity of Plath's writing, Britzolakis convincingly argues that the texts reflect a sophisticated awareness of audience, literary tradition, and the cultural authority of poetic discourse. These features, however, have not been as "neglected" as she suggests (5). Britzolakis does not actually blaze a trail here but proceeds down a path cut by numerous critics before her. Nevertheless, she does chart the territory in detailed and perceptive ways. She tells us at the outset that "the difficulty for Plath's critics is one of finding a critical language which does justice to her exploration of gender, subjectivity, and the unconscious, without reinscribing her within a poetics of unmediated expressivity" (6). That sentence vividly evokes the crisis in theory that animates this book. Old-fashioned expressivism could not admit the degree to which writing is artificial, whereas poststructuralism cannot find an adequate language in which to register the relations between writing and subject. How can the scholar inscribe a poetics of *mediated expressivity* without slighting either the mediation or the expressivity?

Britzolakis argues that Plath's "construction of the speaking subject displaces familiar distinctions between poet and persona" because the location of the textual "I" is "unstable and duplicitous" (6). She wishes to describe a Plath who, instead of expressing anguished authenticity, harnesses "the expressive conventions of the lyric cry for a language of elaborate inauthenticity" (135). Thus, she argues, Plath's poems enact a theatrical performance rather than a sincere expression of mourning. Plath's self-reflexivity "continually complicates and interferes with the possibility of a psychoanalytic reading" because she "interrogates psychoanalysis at the very moment when it purports to interrogate her" (7). Within its limits, this sort of analysis is very fine and helpful. The theatrical, allegorical, self-reflexive, and downright opaque

aspects of Plath's texts have long been acknowledged, but this book studies them in an admirably sustained and focused manner. Conceding that the power of the texts "can never be entirely disentangled from the narrative of her life and death," the book nevertheless maintains that this power "exceeds the personalizations of biography" (8).

*Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* continues this tense push-pull struggle with biography throughout its pages. It wants to slight the allurements of biography, and yet it cannot keep itself away from those allurements for very long. We witness here not simply the internal conflict of this particular book but that of most Plath critique over the last quarter century. Plath study, as a critical genre, brings to the surface a tension latent in critical theory: its trouble with human life, its almost theological desire to make discursivity a self-reflexive space, thereby rejecting John Dewey's position in *Art as Experience* that "art is . . . prefigured in the very processes of living." Perhaps we must return to Plath so obsessively because we need to see her throwing a monkey wrench into our critical machinery. Without her, the machinery persuasively hums the reassuring message that our project is different from—and more significant than—mere individuals and their feelings. Plath's writings warn us that this is not entirely so. We don't want to hear that message, and yet we do want to hear it too.

Britzolakis tells us that "the autobiographical trope . . . posits the fantasy of a recognizable face mirrored and authenticated by the text" (11). She works diligently to dispel that fantasy. But our current disciplines of reading actually have no hesitancy in bracketing, problematizing, or dispensing with that fantasy. The more serious problem for our critical practice is precisely the opposite: the fantasy that there is *no* recognizable face in the textual mirror. It is this critical fantasy that Plath's texts disrupt. Britzolakis writes that "Plath reinvents the lyric as the vehicle for a crisis of subjectivity which cannot be confined to a biographical narrative" (110). The problem that her book both evades and highlights is that the subjectivity in Plath's texts cannot be confined *from* biographical narrative either. Biography explicitly haunts Plath criticism, including this synecdochic example, just as it implicitly haunts the entire critical enterprise as a specter of positivism. We want to believe that the subject's proper name is unreadable so as to liberate our reading strategies. Our difficulty occurs when, despite our wishes, we *do* begin to read that name, that signature in the corner.

Britzolakis rightly observes that Plath's varying self-representations are "repeatedly confronting the reader with the rifts and discontinuities upon which narratives of selfhood are constructed" (13). Plath's writings "collectively root writing in a lack, estrangement, or disintegration of selfhood" (40). Thus does Britzolakis herself get drawn into the problematics integral to Plath studies and to textual critique generally: the vexed relations between the

world of bodies, motives, objects, and events and the world of words. The latter world is indubitably other, and yet, as Melville wrote in *The Confidence Man*, it is one to which we feel the tie. One can neither “identify the speaker with the biographical Sylvia Plath” (123), as Britzolakis is quick to recognize, nor can one easily disidentify the speaker from the biographical Sylvia Plath, a point Britzolakis is uncomfortable with but too honest or driven to deny for long. Here we find ourselves at the heart of the current crisis: there is surely no way of going back to the old and simple ways of conceiving the relations of text and author, and there is no clear way of going forward with our present conceptions.

In a chapter on “Legacies and Dispossessions,” Britzolakis suggests that “the figure of autobiography in the Plath canon may be seen as an aspect of her self-conscious rewriting of the cultural, familial, and sexual narratives available to her” (41). She thinks that Plath’s poetry does not so much mythologize autobiographical details as put into question the notion of an autobiographical origin, “as itself a ‘myth’ which must be endlessly reconstructed” (65). In a chapter entitled “Tending the Oracle,” she argues that the many encounters with an oracle in Plath’s texts indicate a quest for poetic authority. The poet’s struggle for voice is enacted through eroticized scenes of instruction. And in a chapter on “Gothic Subjectivity,” Britzolakis studies the methods by which Plath reinvents “a psychic landscape” (not “her psychic landscape”) as a “theatre of mourning” (101). In such poems as “Elm” and “The Moon and the Yew Tree,” Plath deploys gothicism, irony, theatricalization, impersonation, and mimicry as ways of disabling readings that try to discover empirical correlatives for textual phenomena. Every aspect of every poem, that is, reveals itself as rhetorical.

In perhaps the most important chapter of all, entitled “The Spectacle of Femininity,” Britzolakis exposes the rhetoricity and the performativity of the feminine position in Plath’s work. The poems cross “Orphic myths of the inspired poet with an ironic deployment of stereotypes of alienated or objectified femininity” (135). Their ironic self-reflexivity is, at least in part, an effect of “a culture of consumption in which images of women circulate as commodities” (135). Britzolakis relates Plath’s ironic and hyperbolic feminine imagery to intellectual arguments about popular culture raging in the 1950s and to images in popular films and magazines themselves. In this view, “Lady Lazarus” primarily becomes a theatrical parody of feminine archetypes.

In the last two chapters, Britzolakis emphasizes the historicity and oppositionality of Plath’s poems. Again these ideas are not new, but the critic elaborates them interestingly. Plath’s celebrated later poems acknowledge the blow struck by World War II against Enlightenment ideals of rationality, and they express a revulsion against the extremes of Cold War ideology. They refract “a collective history through rituals of private mourning” (193). Such poems as

“Ariel” complicitly and ambiguously critique racism, sexism, and violence. They point to a “madness within reason itself” (201).

This densely compacted book at times resembles a machine of signifiers. It provides hard and, frankly, impersonal reading. Britzolakis does not so much write theoretical discourse as allow it to write her, making herself, as an author, little more than an effect of high theory. She has produced a rather chilly book, in the same sense that Plath wrote chilly poetry: chilly not as the opposite of hot but of warm. Moreover, Britzolakis seems to present every one of her ideas as novel, though many of them are expanded versions of ideas present in previous studies. Reading this book one senses a struggle, perhaps unconscious, with belatedness as well as with voice.

*Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* is, despite its limitations, a very concentrated, intelligent, and knowledgeable book. And it is a highly useful one. It reveals a variety of writing strategies by which Plath achieved her distinctive poetic power, and it models some reading strategies one can use to gauge that power. It exposes the paradox that Plath’s texts cannot be read through biography and cannot be read apart from it. The book thus suggests something of the cultural, emotional, and linguistic vitality and the conceptual tensions that have made Plath such a central writer for the last half century. Taken all in all, this is probably the most penetrating analysis of Plath since Jacqueline Rose’s *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (1991) and Susan Van Dyne’s *Revising Life* (1993). It belongs on the expanding shelf of essential Plath commentary. All Plath scholars will want to know it and to grapple with its insights and its contradictions.

Steven Gould Axelrod  
University of California, Riverside



*Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* by Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000. Pp. xii + 358. \$45.00, cloth.

Sidra Ezrahi’s attentiveness to metaphors of exile and homecoming in the Jewish imagination guides the reader through a delectable epic voyage that traces its roots to the world of the Bible and abuts in contemporary Jewish life. Ezrahi shows how Diasporic literary creativity replaced Jerusalem during two thousand years of Jewish homelessness, giving way in modern times to a political drama of Zionist homecoming. Prior to the dispersion and destruction of European Jewry, traditional centers of Diasporic culture had already begun to shift westward towards America, and eastward towards the burgeoning State

of Israel. The irrevocable destruction of Europe's Jewry during the Holocaust then engendered a necromantic poetics caught between a recently available modern Zion and an invisible European graveyard that became a new mythical anchor for the Jewish ethos.

*Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* is divided into two panoramic sections. The first part, *Jewish Journeys*, explores explicit and unstated axioms informing the "subterranean pathways through which Jewish culture travels in our time" from the perspective of travel narratives conceived prior to our general experience of trauma and forced relocation (8). *Jewish Journeys* opens with an historical symbol of hybrid Diasporic creativity engendering lyrical nostalgia for the spiritual center, a nostalgia nonetheless resting upon ambivalent attitudes towards both Zion and Diasporic life. Yehuda Halevi's twelfth-century trip to Palestine, where the Sephardic poet planned to settle, represents an unsuccessful attempt to escape Diasporic existence. Halevi died on the verge of reaching Palestine, partially consummating his goal of return.

The image of this poet's truncated pilgrimage serves as a stepping stone for *Booking Passage's* focus on the vicissitudes of place during the modern era, ushered in by the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Yiddish and Hebrew travel tales of S. Y. Abramovitsh (commonly known under his pen name Mendele Mokher Sforim), Sholem Aleichem, and Nobel laureate S. Y. Agnon. These three giants of modern Jewish literature wrote during an intensely mobile period in Jewish history. Credited with the creation of a national Jewish narrative independent from Scripture, they depicted a vivid image of *shtetl* (European Jewish village) life on its spiritual, social, and pragmatic levels. Due to the subsequent destruction of *shtetl* life, their stories have become a vital treasure.

The post-apocalyptic experience of Holocaust survivors organizes the second part of Ezrahi's book, pondering the literary consequences of an irreversible restructuring of *Jewish Geographies*. Here Ezrahi examines Paul Celan's elegiac German poetry and redefinition of the wandering Jew at a time when the Jewish State already exists and beckons. In Paris, however, Celan remains condemned to a living death of unfathomable memories and harrowing survivor's guilt. In contrast to Celan, poet Dan Pagis and prose writer Aharon Appelfeld, both of whom experienced the Holocaust as young children, chose a new language (Hebrew) and an old/new land (Israel) as a safe haven from which to revisit the shattered world they narrowly escaped. Ezrahi argues that Pagis's and Appelfeld's shift of language (from German to Hebrew) and their shuttling between two exilic referents of equally mythical proportions (Zion and the ruins of Jewish Europe) block the possibility of establishing an authentic conversation with the lost world. At the same time, the change of registers generates an entirely new imaginative space for Jewish literature.

The last stations of Ezrahi's pilgrimage reach America, where the troubled relationship between Zion, modern Israel, shattered Europe, and the New World become subjected to yet another imaginative reworking of allegiances. Written in the United States and addressing a post-Holocaust American audience, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Philip Roth's widely disparate narratives share an "enshrinement" of Kafka as the remote progenitor of a tragic script, and of Sholom Aleichem as the immediate progenitor of a comic spirit that insists on celebrating Jewish imagination even if it must hark back to the "ruins of Eastern Europe." In *Operation Shylock* (1993) Philip Roth stages a struggle between Zionism and Diasporism through the *doppelgänger* and self-reflexive devices used in his earlier novels *The Counterlife* and the "Zuckerman" trilogy. In *Operation Shylock* two Philip Roths embroiled with a cast of Diasporic Arabic, and Jewish Israeli characters suggest divergent spiritual/historical/geographical positions formulated in terms of alternative fictional worlds, so that the post-Holocaust Jewish universe becomes again a "ludic" region "where experiments and games are still possible" (230). Ezrahi reads *Operation Shylock* as a healthy decentralization of Jewish and Israeli consciousness away from narrow ideological Zionism or a traumatized dependence on European ruins.

For American and Israeli Jews, the responsibility of final arrival coupled with the very recent experience of annihilation in Europe and the recurring threat of geographical extinction in the Middle East weighs heavily on any desire to entertain imaginative literary and political options. Ezrahi poses a series of questions that seek to transcend the centralizing and teleological myth of return that initially propelled the Zionist enterprise:

How do closure and containment compete with open-endedness to provide narrative possibilities in a culture newly obsessed with boundaries, magnetized by the soil and by the sheer pull of gravity? How does the appropriation of geographies of the mind, of sacred spaces, as sites of civic negotiations affect the long, rich life of the Jewish imagination in fictional landscapes? What are the minimal conditions for fiction in paradise reclaimed, so to speak, where all stories . . . are meant to end? (235)

Departing from a foundational Zionist agenda, Ezrahi's map of loss and return in the modern Jewish imagination identifies shattered Europe more than the State of Israel as a source of contemporary Jewish creativity. Destroyed Diasporic enclaves of two thousand years replace both traditional and actual Zion as the locus of Jewish imagination. Nevertheless *Booking Passage* does not ignore metaphorical efforts through which modern Zionism depicts Israel as a "recovered" and reconcretized site of cultural allegiance. The Dead Sea scrolls, for instance, acquire the status of ethnocentric emblem for the Jewish

people's teleological narrative of return when Yigal Yadin declares that the scrolls had "wait[ed] in caves for two thousand years, ever since the destruction of Israel's independence" to reappear as "the people of Israel had returned to their home and regained their freedom" (6). Agnon's vision of difficult journey and comforting arrival contrasts with Yehuda Halevi's truncated journey (and Agnon's own "nightmarish tales"), where settlement is endlessly deferred. It also contrasts with Dan Pagis's and Paul Celan's articulation of a final reductive dislocation of Jewish geographies to graves in the air or clouds of smoke. In the words of an A. B. Yehoshua character who in the eighteenth century chose Auschwitz over Jerusalem, the Wailing Wall ("ground zero") represents "the last stop of history . . . the ultimate dam, built to hold back the Jews in their restless proclivity to return to the past." This immured conception threatens to become another awful final solution, for if the contemporary Jewish nation neutralizes the spiritual hold of this age-old symbolic site of Jewish memory, where, asks Ezrahi, "is the *restless* Jewish spirit to go?" (20, emphasis mine).

*Booking Passage's* elegant and creative responses to such piquing questions offer an inspiring challenge to literary scholars of any discipline, as well as laypersons familiar with Jewish history and Jewish literature. The impressive depth and breath of this study is enhanced by the rich texture of its language and network of allusions, emphasizing the beauty and awe of modern experience at its lowest and sublime points.

Yael Halevi-Wise  
Brandeis University



*The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy: Sadomasochistic Sentiments from Clarissa to Rescue 911* by Laura Hinton. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999. Pp. xiii + 279. \$57.50, cloth; \$18.95, paper.

Sentimentalism, long neglected because of its association with femininity, has in the past decade become an important subject of historical and literary study. This work has proven useful to scholars in many fields—from Romanticists to modernists—and with quite varied interests. Laura Hinton's new book, *The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy: Sadomasochistic Sentiments from Clarissa to Rescue 911* should also be of use to a wide range of readers, for by approaching the issue in psychoanalytic terms it changes our understanding of the dynamic structure of sympathy itself.

Hinton's central claim is that "sadomasochistic desire underlies the experience of sympathy, through the perverse narrative spectator who creates and

reflects sentimental image-making" (3). Taking as her starting point the reliance of sympathy on visuality, Hinton makes use of feminist film theory to develop a critical psychoanalytic account of sympathy. Hinton argues against the long-standing association of sympathy with femininity, applying the notion of the male gaze to the broader domain of sympathetic response; insofar as sympathy is a voyeuristic enterprise, Hinton claims, it has "symbolically masculine features" (2). The sympathetic spectator masochistically suffers at the sight of the object of sympathy, but the spectator also enjoys a feeling of separation from, and even control over, that object. For Hinton, this distancing posture could variously be termed either sadistic or masculine. Thus Hinton challenges one of our most basic assumptions about sentimentality: "we might consider that the propensity in feminist literary and often film criticism to emphasize sentiment's relation to women reproduces the very fetishistic codes of sexual difference these theories critique" (3).

In her individual chapters Hinton treats a wide variety of texts, from Hume's philosophical discourse on sympathy to the television show *Sally Jessy Raphael*. This wide chronological range would be a problem were this a historical study, but given Hinton's psychoanalytic interests, these various texts suit her very well, and their range serves to make an important political point: even now paradigms of sympathy and sentiment—in all their perversity—inflect our interpersonal lives and their representation in art. Indeed, Hinton argues that eighteenth-century sentiment and nineteenth-century realism are not opposed but linked: "'realism' . . . is another sentimental illusion related to the antirealism of melodrama and its mass-culture narratives, like those of classic cinema and U.S. commercial television" (4). From the eighteenth century to the present, then, the "sentimental pervert" (5) has been a foundational subject position in the domain of representation.

Chapter 1, "Clarissa through the Epistolary Key-Hole," explores the role of sentimentalism in Enlightenment social theory. Hinton argues that Clarissa's critically celebrated individualism tends to efface the problematic contradictions inherent in Enlightenment social philosophy: "Natural law is a theory of the individual, but it is also a theory of the civil state. In the state, autonomous subjects maintain natural rights, but often at the expense of the rights of others. . . . natural law creates the social conditions for Clarissa that psychoanalytic theories attribute to sadomasochism, through natural law's hidden authoritarian propensities" (37). Meanwhile, Lovelace "fulfills that quality of voyeuristic mobility and perverse, conflicted vision Hume described for the spectator of sympathy" (54). Hinton argues that epistolarity itself serves as a mask for authorial, even authoritarian, control; Richardson, like the sympathetic reader, disclaims control while enjoying the spectacle of suffering.

This turn to the role of the author is continued in the next chapter, on Flaubert's *LEducation sentimentale*. Hinton sets out to show that Flaubert's free

indirect style, while founded on the disappearance of the narrative persona, nevertheless grants that persona “spectacular control” (76). Like the sympathetic spectator, the Flaubertian narrator sees but remains himself unseen. Characters within the novel become fictive substitutes for the absent narrator; looking through their eyes, the reader perceives those characters and him- or herself as both “empty” of subjectivity and “free” (101). Hinton links these characters’ visual orientation to the popular visual technologies of nineteenth-century Paris such as the panorama and diorama. Ultimately, she argues that with Flaubert “suture in the novel is born. . . . As in the classic film text, suture in *L’Education sentimentale* binds an unwitting spectator into the illusions of the fiction” (76). Nor are the authors of these fictions always unaware of this sleight-of-hand and its ramifications. In Chapter 3, Hinton argues that twenty-seven years after writing *Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James wrote a preface to the novel that serves as a critique of the realist method. In this late preface, Hinton claims, James represents himself as both “Master of vision and sadomasochistic pervert” (124).

In her fourth chapter, on Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and William Wyler’s film adaptation of the novel, Hinton returns to the issue of natural law and the naturalness of sympathy. According to Hinton, Brontë’s novel constitutes a critique of natural law precisely by refusing to represent nature, in its Romantic signification, at all. In the novel, nature is nothing more than a set of allegorical signs; it is far too unstable to serve as the ground for any comforting notion of human nature. The novel’s principal characters are all sadomasochists, but at least they do not attempt to mask this fact as the reader-substitutes within the narrative—Nelly and Lockwood—do. We learn through the perverse sadistic tendencies of these two characters not to trust the motives of the sentimental spectator. Hinton goes on to show that Wyler’s film version of the novel undoes the critique implicit within the novel, restoring to the narrative both images of nature and a faith in the naturalness of sentiment.

In her two final chapters Hinton turns to classic Hollywood film and contemporary television to explore women’s relation to sentimental spectacle. Hinton focuses on narratives of what she calls “maternal-melodrama fetishism”: an excess of sympathy between mother and daughter produces sadomasochistic dependency and conflict. For Hinton, the vicissitudes of this conflict mimic the vicissitudes of fetishism: “mothers and daughters fight and embrace, reject one another and tearfully reunite, reproducing the alternating terms between present and absent, full and empty, that define fetishism” (190). These conflicts are played out among the women within the dramas and between those women and the female spectators who watch them, but Hinton claims that this dynamic nevertheless has masculine origins. For these shows perpetuate “the fetish and the gaze as women are asked to control and regulate their own excessive image” (208).

This book should be read by anyone with an interest in the history of narrative forms or the politics of sympathy. It offers a fresh and compelling account of both sympathy and the narrative forms it generates. Hinton's attention to the role of the spectator, moreover, opens new avenues for thinking about the history of the novel and other popular art forms. The book's only weakness arises out of one of its strengths—its chronological range. The book does not purport to be a historical study, but one does sometimes wish for more in the way of historical detail. It would seem, for instance, that Hinton views all modern (post-Enlightenment) art, insofar as it seeks to engage spectatorial sympathy, as sadomasochistic. Is it to be assumed then that sadomasochistic sympathy was not often at work in art before the eighteenth century? Are there ways of engaging sympathy without engaging sadomasochism? Hinton does not mention any of the numerous recent historical and literary-historical works on sympathy, sentimentality, and sensibility in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such work might have helped at least in the definition of terms: Hinton speaks of such things as masculinity as if they were well-defined, stable categories, but books such as Claudia Johnson's *Equivocal Beings*—a study of the way men of the 1790s used their own sentimentality as a means of wielding power—show just how complicated such matters can be. Nevertheless, Hinton's study is, in its own right richly suggestive, and its separate chapters don't merely rehearse a single idea but reveal some of the nuances of the workings of sympathy in particular texts and at particular moments. Hinton's general claim, moreover, her argument that sympathy often reproduces unequal power relations even as it claims to soften them, is one with important ramifications even for our contemporary culture.

Andrea Henderson  
University of Michigan



*The Life of Henry Fielding* by Ronald Paulson. Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000. Pp. xiii + 400. \$54.95, cloth.

It is surely a welcome moment when a new book on Fielding appears from one of the most prominent and productive of all living scholars of the eighteenth century, especially given the dearth of new studies of the novelist in the last decade or so. Ronald Paulson admits that, when invited to contribute this volume to the Blackwell Critical Biographies series, he realized that he had “inadvertently” been at work on the book for forty years, years in which he worked on “satire, popular culture, religion, and aesthetics” and “Fielding kept cropping up” (xii-iii). He could have added to his list of inter-

ests the artist, William Hogarth, Fielding's contemporary and friend, and a figure who repeatedly appears as a touchstone in this book, as in so much of Paulson's work.

The result is not, he modestly asserts, a full-fledged "biographical narrative," but an "extended character." What that means in practical terms is a biographical study in which most of the attention is given to Fielding's writing, and very thorough attention it is. The more straightforward biographical material appears most prominently in a chronological summary which prefaces each chapter; these are quite detailed time lines of the period covered in that chapter, and they are an extremely useful compendium of the facts about Fielding as we know them. Perhaps because these are so detailed, however, Paulson does not always discuss this information in the chapters themselves. The great strength of this biography is its devotion to interpretations of Fielding's work that reflect Paulson's conviction that the novelist was "invariably engrossed [in] his writings with the personal problems that he was at the time trying to work out for himself" (x). The result is a very stimulating and generally convincing sense of the continuity of Fielding the man with Fielding the writer.

Paulson's new biography cannot be discussed without reference to its large predecessor, Martin Battestin's *Henry Fielding, A Life*, which appeared in 1989 and is now unfortunately out of print. Paulson calls this earlier book "encyclopedic" and so it is. Battestin, the dominant Fielding scholar of the last half century, was able to supplant earlier biographers by his tireless efforts in the archives. He added considerably to our surprisingly scanty knowledge of Fielding, and turned up many new facts, some new letters, and even (he asserts in a controversial claim) new essays. The biography that resulted is as detailed a life of Fielding as we are likely to have, and it is couched in Battestin's always readable prose. Such are its considerable virtues.

Its defects center, not on Battestin's scholarship, but on his interpretation of the man and his works. Ever since his first book, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art* (1959), Battestin has been intent on giving us a Fielding who is a prime representative of late Christian humanism; the writer's religion is for his time conventional, and the doctrines embodied in his novels are sober and socially wholesome. Battestin's *The Providence of Wit*, his 1974 study of the Augustan age (including two long chapters on Fielding) was dedicated to D. W. Robertson and it is a telling expression of kinship: just as Robertson took the intellectual subtlety and sheer fun of Chaucer and made it all as orthodox and dull as "The Parson's Tale," so much of Battestin tends to transform the complex irony and unpredictability of Fielding into another nice Latitudinarian sermon. That critical perspective also informs his biography. While he does advance one sensational hypothesis (that Fielding committed incest with his sister, a theory that has won virtually no adherents), much of

the book seems to be illustrating the maxim that a reformed rake makes the best magistrate.

Paulson is impatient with most of Battestin's interpretations, be they critical or biographical. Indeed, at times, this new biography seems almost like a critical commentary on its predecessor. Paulson unfortunately does not include the name of any critic in his otherwise detailed and useful index, and so it is impossible easily to add up the appearance of Battestin's name or ideas, but my suspicion is that if the index had included Battestin, he might well be the second longest entry after Fielding himself. The effect is rather triangular: we watch Paulson read Fielding against Battestin. This is not, let me hasten to add, a bad thing. The decline in critical interest in Fielding since the 1960s may very well be traceable, at least in part, to the influential image of the prudential novelist that Battestin has spent his career working out. While Paulson's opposition to this position is hardly unique (the name of Claude Rawson, the general editor of the series in which this volume appears, comes quickly to mind), it is also true that the kind of rehabilitation that Fielding still needs and deserves will necessarily involve further demolition work. The triangulation involved does mean, however, that Paulson's volume sometimes reads less like a biography and more like an argument between two critics.

Arguments with Battestin, of course, are pointless unless the new interpretations are better, and for the most part they are much better. Paulson is excellent at charting Fielding's manifold reinventions—from playwright to partisan polemicist to lawyer to novelist to magistrate—and at illuminating how his continual struggle to figure out a way to make a living (a real problem, giving his insistence on always living beyond his means) finds expression not only in new careers but in artistic choices. It is fascinating to watch Paulson demonstrate the way that Fielding's initial master-metaphor—life as theater—transmutes after he has been driven off the stage by the Licensing Act into a new central trope—life as journey—in the wake of his time riding the Western judicial circuit. This biographer's understanding of the role of religion in Fielding's thinking is much more nuanced than we are accustomed to; Paulson grasps the subtleties of deist thinking in its various forms and allows us to position Fielding among the different positions. We also see how persistent are the threads of skepticism, even in his later work. Everyone knows about the Fielding-Richardson rivalry, but we have rarely had such a good discussion of the intellectual consequences of the conflict for Fielding as an artist.

Most illuminating of all is Paulson's analysis of the idea of the mixed character—that is, Fielding's reliance upon heroes who mingle bad behavior with good hearts. Tom Jones, of course, is the signal instance of this pattern, and it is to this kind of character that Johnson so famously objected in *Rambler 4*. Paulson is able convincingly to demonstrate just how central the notion of mixed character was, not only to Fielding's art, but to his sense of himself. The

novelist was a very mixed character indeed, a devoted husband who had once been a rake, a sober magistrate who was also a lifelong spendthrift and profligate abuser of drink and snuff, a great artist who never hesitated to attach his name to most any kind of writing for which he could be paid. A hero like Tom Jones, then, or Billy Booth is not only a certain kind of novelistic character, they are also opportunities for Fielding to explore and possibly to vindicate himself.

*The Life of Henry Fielding* does have its problems. Paulson draws a dangerous analogy in his Preface: "In retrospect, I see that I have written as Tristram Shandy wrote his *Life and Opinions*, by a process of infinite regress, which I have now forcibly brought to closure" (xiii). He is literally speaking of his lifelong interest in Fielding and the way, as noted above, the novelist kept cropping up in other projects—hence, its "inadvertent" composition. That inadvertent quality has not always been smoothed over. Paulson has incorporated in the text chunks of his earlier work on Fielding, sometimes almost verbatim. He does acknowledge most of these repetitions in the notes and there is certainly a virtue in having all of this critic's thinking about Fielding gathered in one place. At the same time, the new material and the old are not always assimilated to each other as completely as one might like. The consequence is a roughness in the transitions between sections and at times a sense of a rather tangled or non-existent continuity. This is not a very well-shaped book, even though it has the natural vessel of a life to pour itself into.

Sterne's point, of course, was that our efforts to create shapely narratives are as hopeless as our attempts to live shapely lives. I am not sure, however, that Paulson was deliberately striving to recapitulate that Shandean vision in his own representation of Fielding's life and work. The awkwardness of form we see here does not seem mimetic, or an implicit comment on the biographer's art; it just seems awkward. Battestin's life of Fielding is the more graceful and well-formed artifact, if often tone-deaf; Paulson's understanding of Fielding is the better, but it arrives, it must be said, in a rather rough-hewn package.

John Stevenson  
*University of Colorado, Bolder*