

TEXTUAL

PRACTICE

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between optimism and despair

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Terminator 2½: or Messing with
canons

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ANNY BROOKSBANK JONES

*Julia Kristeva and her Old Man: between
optimism and despair*

In October 1991 Julia Kristeva's *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* appeared, to a mixed reception.¹ This paper considers the novel's reception in the light of two recent interviews with Kristeva, in order to say something about her view of the role of the writer in times of trouble.

In his 'review of reviews' for *Le Nouvel Observateur* Bernard-Henri Lévy notes 'a strange uneasiness, a perplexity' in critical responses to the novel.

Why these embarrassed silences on the subject of *The Old Man and the Wolves*, these attacks? Is it because of the form? The principle? Is it the idea of combining the philosophical novel with fantasy and the detective novel? Is it the change of genre? The author herself? The story?²

Unfortunately for Kristeva, *Le Monde*'s Michel Braudeau is not one of the silent critics.³ His own review begins with the assertion that Kristeva's first novel, *Les Samourais*, had 'fallen into certain—occasionally glaring—affectations of style... which the kindness and indulgence accorded to early efforts had discreetly overlooked'.⁴ In the light of what followed, he is quite clear that this indulgence was misconceived. *Les Samourais* was 'an intellectual love story, a contemporary one, her own, with characters who were real, recognizable, barely disguised'. With *Le Vieil Homme*, however, we move from 'embellished memoirs' to 'fiction'. The distinction is evidently more clear-cut for Braudeau than for some of his readers, but it hardly justifies the vehemence of what follows.

Before turning to Braudeau's version of *Le Vieil Homme*, however, it's worth quoting in full the summary from the novel's dust-jacket.

This fantasy narrative is also a detective story. The wolves invade Santa Barbara, killing animals and humans and changing the faces of men and women, who become arrogant, criminal and animal.

An anonymous woman is fished dead out of a lake. Alba and Vespasien dream of killing each other, while the Old Man—the only individual to remain vigilant and reject the surrounding barbarity—dies an inexplicable death. Who is the murderer?

Stéphanie Delacour is a journalist who turns detective in order to lead the hunt. What she sees is a civilization in metamorphosis. Santa Barbara has lost its values: the one-time people's democracy or extreme-liberal society has come to epitomize hate and banal crime.

This Goyaesque vision of the world emerges from the intense mourning at the heart of the detective's private journal. *The Old Man and the Wolves* is addressed to those who have lost someone dear to them and sicken with anguish before the unimaginable nature of death, as they try to articulate the violence of a solitude they cannot share.

In this novel, the detective story and the philosophical tale converge.

In the latest issue of *L'Infini* Kristeva discusses her new novel in relation to the earlier 'best-seller'.⁵ As her interviewer Bernard Sichère indicates, *Les Samourais* was more 'positive', less 'sombre' and less 'pessimistic' than its successor. Kristeva situates her new novel

at the meeting point of individual shock (that is, mourning the death of my father who was killed in a Sofia hospital by the incompetence and brutality of medicine and of the regime) and collective trouble, the fact...of general disorder in society, our society....

(L75)

Her response to Sichère's charge of pessimism is a familiar question: 'what's the good of novels in times of distress?' (L75).

The answer seems to bring together two phases of Kristeva's work: the more recent concern for (individual and generalized) distress, and the earlier interest in the potentially revolutionary effects of artistic practice.⁶ In a recent interview with Vassiliki Kolocotroni for *Textual Practice* Kristeva outlines some of the factors she sees as underlying contemporary distress.⁷ There is totalitarianism in all its forms, she observes, including 'restrictive aspects' of 'bourgeois society' such as the 'extremely permissive' media show with its 'pleasant and exciting' illusions that mask social crisis (T161). Each contributes to the creation of a 'harmonized' society, a 'levelling', 'the uniformization and elision of all differences' (T161). When asked by Kolocotroni whether artistic practice could do anything to alleviate this distress by transforming socio-political structures, Kristeva answers 'Yes and no' (T161).

The *Textual Practice* interview took place shortly before *Le Vieil Homme* was completed; the *L'Infini* interview took place a couple of months after its publication. Although the second interview focuses, like *Le Vieil Homme* itself, chiefly on Eastern Europe, Kristeva does not exclude the West when she alludes to a 'national depression' that is excluded from the 'media show', to increasing evidence of 'aggression', 'banalization', 'melancholy', 'barbarism', 'violence', 'criminality', 'hatred', 'a destruction of language' and 'a general destruction of culture' (L83, L78, L76). Having talked to her at length on the role of the

intellectual in such circumstances, Sichère ends with its ‘political dimension’, asking Kristeva whether she is ‘on the left’, and whether this isn’t one way of resisting the ‘scramble which takes the crumbling of the communist world as a pretext for expressing its hatred of popular liberation and instituting...a witch-hunt’ (L85/6). Kristeva responds by noting that ‘new modes of political life’ need to be created, ‘beginning with a genealogy of current political life’, but maintains that the job of the writer is ‘to circumscribe this political space in order to reinvent it endlessly, to trace it.... To think, speak and write about the free, unwonted, and strange links between irreconcilable individuals’ (L86). In her view party politics, ‘this alternation between two political and ideological poles’, is unable to speak to individual polymorphism or to compete with the speed and effectiveness of media representations (L85).

Kristeva is drawn by Sichère into a discussion of politics, but makes it clear that she is interested less in ‘the *political* man or woman’, than in his or her ‘*being*’ (L86). The two are less easily extricated in Kristeva than in some writers, particularly where the revolutionary role of the artist is concerned. In her exchange on this point with Kolocotroni, Kristeva begins with a reference to the ‘micro revolution’ achieved by the artist’s ‘calling into question of language and of the individual’, and moves on to the dramatic political changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe (T161). In her view, revolutionary art implies revolutionary form, a political practice which has its effects, not at the level of ideology, but in the production of subjectivity. Great works of art, she affirms, are in effect ‘masterful sublimations...of psychotic crises’.⁸ Since this involves the spontaneous ‘semiotization of the symbolic [and] the flow of *jouissance* into language’, it necessarily excludes metalanguage, the representation of progressive ideology at the level of content and self-conscious experimentation.⁹ Instead, this process of semiotization is achieved through poeticized language or text (writing in its materiality and its music—alliterations, rhythms, repetitions, etc.) which signals the pre-signifying impulses and energies at work within language and throughout the symbolic order. By releasing forces that the symbolic normally represses, revolutionary art questions the bases of that repression and the system of representation and identity it underpins. In this way it can come to stimulate and reveal ‘deep ideological changes’ within the symbolic which are ‘searching for their own accurate political framework’.¹⁰

Since the intelligibility of *jouissance* depends on its mediation through language, *avant-garde* or modernist art cannot abolish the limits of the symbolic, but only push them back transgressively and provisionally. In her discussion with Kolocotroni, however, Kristeva recognizes the dramatic changes brought about in their societies by radical Eastern European writers such as Václav Havel. Her statement involves an interesting distinction between revolutionary and radical art, revolving around the assumption that radicals are ‘within the lineage’ of the *avant-garde*, but by implication somehow different (T161). At first sight that difference looks quantitative rather than qualitative: for Kristeva, all art can liberate semiotic energies, but only the anarchic excesses of revolutionary—*avant-*

garde, modernist—art can fundamentally undermine the bases of representation and the symbolic. There is, however, a more obvious sense in which *avant-garde* artists may be revolutionary, but not all revolutionaries are *avant-garde* artists. While the ‘micro-revolution’ of *avant-garde* artists was achieved primarily at the level of anarchic form, the revolt of radical artists might be said to be articulated chiefly at the level of content. Concerned as he was with the status of language under totalitarianism, Havel, for example, nevertheless articulated his concerns (for example in *The Garden Party* and *The Memorandum*, both written in the 1960s) primarily through radical content rather than revolutionary form.

No doubt the odds against Václav Havel becoming President of Czechoslovakia would have been longer had his claim been based exclusively on micro-revolutionary achievements. This is not incompatible with Kristeva’s point, of course. It is arguably not the job of revolutionaries to achieve high political office, and while the *revolutionary* artist may stimulate and reveal ideological changes searching for their own ‘political framework’, there seems no reason why *radical* artists shouldn’t be characterized as agents for such change, actively pursuing the development and realization of appropriate political frameworks.

If radical art engages directly with collective crisis, the *avant-garde* artist is concerned primarily with subjective crisis: the work and play of signs produces ‘a certain harmony of the most violent drives’ which can bring about ‘a sense of stability within (and with) the crisis’ (T159). However this ‘harmonization can be very fragile’ and needs a ‘favourable transference’, acceptance and ‘understanding’ from the other, if it is not to be ‘swept away and with it the individual him/herself’ (T159/60). At the same time, any positive ‘harmonization’ that resulted would risk conspiring with the negative harmonization attributed to media society. For all these reasons revolutionary artists of the late twentieth century are faced with problems of intelligibility, accessibility and recuperation radically different from those of their predecessors.

In times of collective and subjective crisis it could be argued that we need both micro- and macro-revolution. On the other hand, it could be argued that we don’t. Kristeva’s own response to contemporary trouble is to turn from metalinguistic statements of semiotic potential to dramatizations of the recuperative powers of the symbolic. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she underlines the socio-cultural and historical specificity of revolutionary processes and their effects.¹¹ Implicit in her current concern with radical writers and media recuperation is the possibility that *avant-garde* revolutionary art may not be possible, recognizable, or even desirable right now. Given the link posited by Kristeva between the liberation of repressed energies and the risk of fascist or totalitarian resurgence, to unleash semiotic forces in Santa Barbara would be reckless or worse. Yet Kristeva insists it is precisely in these times of trouble that we most need the novel’s ‘truth effects’ and its ability to ‘take over the death drive and its manifestations’ (L82).

The risks need not be as great as they seem, however. Kristeva's own attempt to supply this need in *Le Vieil Homme* does not imply any revolutionary claims in her own terms: a woman writer simply couldn't express such claims in the symbolic *as a woman*. As a radical artist, however, Kristeva could give symbolic expression to the semiotic, without inducing the more fundamentally subversive effects of revolutionary art.

As recent interviews indicate, however, the socio-cultural and political factors which make revolutionary art a high-risk activity at present, will also prejudice radical art. *Le Vieil Homme* is a black novel—even down to its dust-jacket—and if the tone of the *L'Infini* interview is blacker than the earlier one it may be because some of the novel's assumptions seem to be borne out by its reviews. Given the risks and difficulty of arousing readers from their neuroleptic slumbers in order to achieve 'favourable transference', it may be that Kristeva herself feels in imminent danger of being swept away—or travestied by media-led recuperations. The wolves of her title recall not only 'the invasion of the red armies, the installation of totalitarianism...[but] more artfully the barbarism, the criminality of each individual...the invasion of banality' (L76). The prospects for contemporary aesthetic revolution without media support seem clear enough: '[y]ou can have your own little revolt but it doesn't sell, [it] will not be a "success"' (T161). There is no longer any possibility of posterity for artists who don't make their name immediately in consumer society. And they can only make it as media personalities, whose insights are recuperated in terms of their 'most consensual, flat and general elements' (T162). This is a psychoanalyst's response to commodification and media massification. Between the publication of her novel and the Sichère interview, however, it becomes clear that any attempt to circumvent the media and appeal directly to the reader in his or her intimacy needs the publicity that only the mass media can provide.

A profound sense of national depression and alienation, and the personal shock of losing her father, underlie Kristeva's personal investment in the socio-cultural and psychic conditions she describes. It is compounded by an intense consciousness of her status as a Bulgarian immigrant in Paris. One key assumption of *Le Vieil Homme*—and one that is developed in an earlier study, *Strangers to Ourselves*—is that we cannot live with others until we learn to live with the otherness within ourselves.¹² The novel's many quotations in Latin—a language strongly associated with her father—are part of an attempt to 'graft onto the body of the French language and syntax a sense of pain and evil from elsewhere' (L81). At the same time they offer readers an insight into the dislocatory effects of engaging with an alien language. The aphorism we wait for, however, never comes: *lupus est homo homini, quom qualis sit non novit*—Plautus' observation that man is a wolf rather than a man to another man, until he has found out what he's like.

Strangers to Ourselves begins with a lengthy meditation on the treatment strangers receive at the hands of host societies—the aggression, the lionizing, the hatred, the indifference, the patronage, and the incomprehension. This is

inflected in *Le Vieil Homme* when Alba Ram, a newcomer to Santa Barbara, discovers her cat has been killed and attributes it to the fact that '[p]eople don't like strange men, and they like strange women even less, so they take their revenge on whatever the stranger holds dear' (LV16). Foreignness, and the importance of recognizing and valuing the polyvalency of the other are key elements in Kristeva's recent work; in addressing them she is also trying to recover herself and her own body in an act of transference, so as to put an end to depression (T165). Within Kristeva's own system, as noted, a woman writer with revolutionary aims can't express them as a woman, because the order of language is only accessible to the masculine subject. It is not in writing itself, therefore, but in the act of transference it can produce that she places her faith. One thinks of Luce Irigaray's recent work on women's use of pronouns, in which she notes that '[w]omen's discourse designates men as subjects—except in psychoanalytic transfer' where the support is woman.¹³

As noted, *Le Vieil Homme* registers a sense of generalized social 'disorder' and the 'personal shock' of the death of Kristeva's father. Implied in this disorder are other deaths, among them the much-debated death of psychoanalysis.¹⁴ Kristeva acknowledges the self-destructive tendencies of certain Freudian dogmatists and sectarian followers of Lacan, two more dead fathers (L84). She nevertheless affirms her continuing faith in a 'rich and living analytic discourse', whilst recognizing its tension with the current trend towards the 'chemical bombardment' of depressed individuals (L84). By '[snatching] away their individual responsibility' neuroscience conspires with media spectacle 'with all that implies for psychic laziness, fleeting narcissistic mirages carefully displacing the reality of suffering' (L84).

This confiscation of suffering renders it unnameable. One reason Kristeva gives for writing novels is the importance of metaphor, 'insofar as it gives form to the infantile psychic inscriptions situated at the borders of the unnameable' (L75). Modern writing has repressed metaphor in the name of 'good taste', but Kristeva uses metaphor in her allegory of hatred and mourning 'to signify pain without fixing it, but by radiating it, making it vibrate oneirically, according to the personal resources of each reader, in the time and space of his or her own afflictions and choices' (L76).

Setting aside the problems of 'radiating' what can't be said, sophisticated readers will rarely find allegory satisfying. Returning to its reviews, one is nevertheless struck by the vehemence of Michel Braudeau's response to *Le Vieil Homme*, and in particular the protestation of indifference:

Wolves have invaded Santa Barbara, but not the Californian city. It snows, too. Clearly we're in the East. An old man keeps watch. He's called Septicius Clarus, his pupils are called Alba, Chrysippe, Stéphanie. Then there's Vespasien, a military doctor, a surgeon. And barbarism. And death. And mourning. There's certainly a big plain symbol [*un bon gros symbole*] prowling this fable, prowling around in search of a way out, a way round,

trying to tell us something. But it can't, the poor thing, it's tied up, caged in lifeless, graceless, prose, where weighty metaphors gradually block the circulation of meaning in the sentences: *The strength of these anthracite visions remains, before agony overturns the last pot of carbonised gouache, paralyses the last brush of the visible, and leaves the white screen of wordless cells without colour or support or surface.* Yes indeed! And what about the brush of indifference, what does that paint?¹⁵

This is too calculated to be indifference. In a couple of hundred words he has managed to damn Kristeva's current and future fiction, and retrospectively withdraw the approval granted (in an access of leniency) to her past attempt. But if his words resist the point of *Le Vieil Homme*, his tone and methods affirm it. The multiple names and doubling of characters, the implied polyvocality, have all vanished. It's as if the entire symbolic dimension had been bracketed, if not caged, in (his) prose. Braudeau's discomfiture is understandable: speaking on behalf of a group under attack he responds with the weapons available to him. In the process he confirms Kristeva's view that what media society will not acknowledge is its own refusal or inability to deal with certain issues, including attacks on itself in forms which it cannot re-represent. If Kristeva is looking for ways of articulating suffering, he is certainly doing his bit to encourage her—not least by refusing to acknowledge as much. Her response is clear: '[t]he perverse [*les pervers*] can't understand any more, a "plain symbol" [*gros symbole*] prevents them from thinking' (L81).

For Kristeva, writing is anarchic, recuperable and intransigent. It's an incitement to rise up against the 'domestication' and 'communal illusion' purveyed by media society (L82). This is no time for more fairy stories, not even *Little Red Riding Hood*. Lévy's review offers a story, or nightmare, of a rather different kind. Braudeau uses an oddly atypical passage to justify his assertion of indifference. Lévy's reading is doubly partial, in the sense that it purports to admire Kristeva's second novel even more than her first, but on the basis of a reading of only half of it. The following lines are fairly typical of the full-page review:

In the East as in the West. Always hate. The hate that is proper to man [*sic*]. Definitive hate. Defining hate. Hate your neighbour as yourself. One day you'll die of hate. For the moment, you live by it.

Kristeva is quite clear that *Le Vieil Homme* is 'a novel which is about hatred, the sort of hatred that kills people'; it is also about foreignness, violence and death seen from 'within' (T164/166). The novel form also suggested itself, she states, as a vehicle for the presentation of an intrigue which 'enacts the dramatic essence of passion', that is, the 'double possibility' that eludes theory, the indissoluble coupling of hate and love (L75). It may be that what Braudeau the media critic cannot understand also eludes Lévy the theorist. It is, significantly, 'subjective experience ...[Stéphanie Delacour's] sensibility as a woman, a child,

a lover' that constitutes the 'counterweight to death and hate' (L77). This insistence on the double possibility of the text is not simply another critic's preference for fairy-story over nightmare. *Le Vieil Homme* involves a doubling and dissemination of elements in order to say something about contemporary metamorphic culture. It 'implies the fragmentation of the narrative ...[and a] multiplicity of codes and levels of enunciation..., [since] the story cannot unfold in a naïvely univocal fashion, nor the characters embody stable identities' (L76). The reader is thus struck (though perhaps not surprised) by Lévy's passionately univocal reading of the end result, not least because his celebration of hate sits so oddly alongside Kristeva's starkly non-euphoric vision of national depression. Her alternative to the illusory consolations of 'the media show' and 'the vain discourses of hope' is not pessimism, but a 'demystifying critique' that is not afraid to disappoint its audience 'if that's the way to knowledge and truth' (L83). It has little in common with the exultation that rings in Lévy's phrases.

In such a cheerless scenario the idea that there is a 'way to knowledge and truth' itself seems optimistic. It would after all require a degree of sophistication to square the fragmentation, the instability, and the rejection of a 'naïvely univocal' reading, with the detective format, its orientation towards the exposure of a truth that 'one can know' (L77). Kristeva's provisional solution lies in an 'interior space', apparently shielded from the play of polyvocality and dissemination, which is hollowed out by a combination of 'erotic upheavals' and Stéphanie's mourning for her father (L77). Truth is worked out in the eroticized space of the father's loss.

But if the novel can keep a space open for truth or the possibility of truth in this way, and (at least some) of its readers can recognize it, who will be able to 'accept that truth without feeling unmasked, betrayed, exposed?' (L83). The answer is not only exposed but finally enacted, when Stéphanie discovers that the wolves are everywhere, and that the death of the Old Man is one small element in 'a hyperbolic but disseminated barbarity, the worst feature of which is that everyone is complicitous with it' (LV265). The Old Man was killed, not by a crime that Stéphanie could solve, but by his final vision of the unconscious 'overturning the policed spectacles of *being*, and revealing us in all our barbarity, a prey to death' (L86). Her will collapses:

[n]o sooner does the thought occur to me than I experience that feeble lassitude that comes with the end of a course of antibiotics.... Let them do as they wish. I shan't stir any more. Crime can't touch me. I'm part of it. A she-wolf. Who understands logic and speaks it. That is the only difference. What difference?

(L264/9)

The intellectual recognition of suffering simply confirms its ubiquity, but in the process makes what was unnameable (almost) nameable. The recognition is

difficult, but is made 'more realistic, almost bearable... a game' by virtue of its detective format, '[a] way of continuing analysis' (L83).

Stéphanie Delacour's recollection of the primal scene and the white wolves in the tree suggest one form of analysis, but it's not the only one available. We are, after all, talking about a novel in which old men are dying along with their teachings. Kristeva's Old Man

is by no means a master, and even less of a hero; but he remains an enigma at the very heart of a sea of insignificance or brutality...a figure of the law... [but] not a severe or abstract law...not a superego [but] an 'embodied' man who is present in all the density of his psychology, his emotions, his fears... a revolutionary...and at the same time a man of grief, a Christ figure.... It's a question of making space for the possibility of law and passion and, to the extent that I personally have no need of a God hypothesis, [it's] a question of finding new atheistic figures, which respond to the situation we live in, at the end of a world.

(L81)

There is another character in the novel who is, in his way, equally suggestive, not least because he is lost (presumably to the wolves) before the novel begins. His name, Chrysippe, recalls a parallel moment of physical, economic, political and moral uncertainty, in which the Stoic philosophy emerged. Its view that everyone has the power to achieve happiness through knowledge, even in a depraved world, has something about it of 'atheistic Christianity' while its sages recall the Old Man. Clearly Kristeva is missing her fathers and would-be fathers, and we should respect her grieving. There may after all be some truth in the suggestion that only a figure of the law could restore psychic and social order to a depressed society. Her Old Man certainly doesn't look like a Hitler or a Stalin—but perhaps in the beginning they never do. Her interview with Kolocotroni throws some light on this ambiguously attractive scenario when Kristeva observes that novels give 'more pleasure' to writer and reader alike than theory (T164). But the psychic pleasures may be as potentially treacherous as the political ones. In *Strangers to Ourselves* Kristeva notes Freud's comment that the pleasures of text, especially a text that is attempting to articulate the unnameable, should be taken in moderation.¹⁶ His view of literature—that it risks denaturing the strange or uncanny by making it too obvious or not dangerous enough to be psychically useful—recalls her view of the media.

It's an important point, especially for literary critics. At the same time one can't help observing that, pleasures of writing apart, the uncompromising tone of the novel suggests little danger of facile pleasures. In Camus's *The Plague* another sage, Dr Rieux, is slightly more comforting when he reflects that the plague of rats may have been defeated, but the plague bacillus never dies. In *Le Vieil Homme* where Camus's human will might have been, there is the 'psychic space' that is kept open for the work of truth, 'the safeguarding and creativity of

which lie at the heart of Freudian thought', enabling psychoanalysis to play its part 'in resisting and awakening and guaranteeing culture, or what remains of it' (L84/5).

This interior space, central to both Stéphanie Delacour and Freudian thought, indicates the extent to which Kristeva's profound sense of cultural disorder is bound up with the decline of psychoanalysis. Her view of the media's complicity in both characterizes and compounds her tendency to homogenize media response, rather as she accuses the media of homogenization effects. Lévy's review for *Le Nouvel Observateur* attributes critical apathy and irritation with *Le Vieil Homme* to the fact that Kristeva has 'said too much' about society's dependence on hate. He may be right: her aim was, after all, to bring the hate that is for both Freud and Lacan 'the truth of love' to consciousness, in the face of a 'consensual ideology' that makes discourse on 'the economy of negativity' almost impossible (L83). Braudeau's acceptance of her earlier 'love story' and rejection of her hate story seems to bear out this concern. Kristeva's response to the media's perverse 'recuperation of analytic discourse' is understandable enough: in her terms the decline of psychoanalysis presages 'the end of a world', including her personal micro-engagement, its revolutionary possibilities and pleasures (L81).

Le Vieil Homme's focus on Eastern Europe reminds us that the elements of our contemporary distress are manifold, and that the loss of revolutionary possibilities applies to more than just writers. In her interview with Bernard Sichère, Kristeva unambiguously rejects the 'reassuring discourses which are seeking to take over from that "positive" discourse we knew as Marxism' (L83). Instead she advocates 'taking more seriously than ever, in the face of moralizing and euphoric discourses, the theoretical work carried out previously in *Tel Quel*.... It's really a question of a discourse that is critical rather than nihilist' (L83). As *Le Vieil Homme* closes, Stéphanie Delacour asks '[I]s there always crime if there are no more frontiers? (LV269). In the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall Fredric Jameson asks a similar question, and follows it up with another: '[c]an the prospect of political and economic autonomy be held out for the new Europe when...cultural autonomy proves there also to be so dismal a failure'.¹⁷ In the face of what he sees as an inevitable negative, he advocates 'the deepest pessimism' as a 'genuine source of strength' and notes that 'only for those who have nothing against being used and manipulated is optimism, of even the weakest variety, recommended'.¹⁸

In the aftermath of the British general election it's not difficult to empathize with Kristeva's view and Jameson's, that alternatives are crumbling away. The wolves are not yet in the city, however. We do have options, but as Jameson indicates they do not include facile optimism. Instead an active, critical pessimism seems in order, one that is not nihilistic, and that resists the temptation to eject babies with bathwater, or withdraw into despair, resentment—'the antipodes of thought'—or political paralysis while we re-examine our first principles (L86). In this context Kristeva is right to insist on the need 'to invent

new modes of political life', and writers will continue to play a part in this process. If we want these new forms to last, however, we need to ensure that any changes will—among other things—facilitate the replacement of some dead fathers by vital mothers. Constitutional and legal reforms are essential to this process, but psychoanalysis in some form has its own micro-revolutionary role to play. Without all three, 'single party' rule will persist, and we'll have lost another opportunity to secure the possibility of authentic, productive and lasting dialogue in the future.

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NOTES

- 1 J.Kristeva, *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* (Paris: Fayard, 1991). Henceforward page references are shown in brackets in the text, and prefaced 'LV'. In order to avoid confusion with the character of the same name, the title is left in French throughout, in the abbreviated form of *Le Vieil Homme*: where it occurs in a quotation the title is translated in full. All translations of French material are my own, unless indicated otherwise.
- 2 B-H.Lévy, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 1415 (26 December 1991 to 1 January 1992), p. 66.
- 3 M.Braudeau, 'Le Sexe des métaphores', *Le Monde* (11 October 1991), p. 18.
- 4 J.Kristeva, *Les Samourais* (Paris: Fayard, 1990).
- 5 'Roman noir et temps présent', J.Kristeva interviewed by B.Sichère in *L'Infini*, 37 (Spring 1992), pp. 75–86. Henceforward page references are shown in brackets in the text, and prefaced 'L'.
- 6 See J.Kristeva, *Strangers to nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988). Translated by L.Roudiez as *Strangers to Ourselves* (London: Harvester, 1991). (All references are to this translation.) Also J.Kristeva, *Soleil noir, dépression et mélancholie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987). Translated by L.Roudiez as *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
- 7 V.Kolocotroni, 'Interview with Julia Kristeva', *Textual Practice*, 5, 2 (Summer 1991), pp. 157–70. Henceforward page references are shown in brackets in the text, and prefaced 'T'.
- 8 E.H.Baruch, P.Meisel, *et al.*, 'Two interviews with Julia Kristeva', *Partisan Review*, 51, 1 (1984), pp. 131–2, cited in Kolocotroni, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
- 9 J.Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique. L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle. Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (Paris: Seuil, 1974). This translation from *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. M.Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) p. 80.
- 10 J.Kristeva, *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977). This translation from 'How does one speak to Literature?', in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. L.S.Roudiez, trans. T.Gora, A. Jardine and L.S.Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), p. 92.
- 11 See Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* and J.Lechte's *Julia Kristeva* (Routledge: London, 1990), p. 142.
- 12 Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*. See particularly chapters 1 and 8.

- 13 L.Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), p. 42.
- 14 *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 1404 (3–9 October 1991), pp. 4–9.
- 15 Braudeau, op. cit.
- 16 Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 187.
- 17 F.Jameson, 'Conversations on the New World Order', in R.Blackburn (ed.), *After the Fall: The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 255–68.
- 18 *ibid.*

JAY GROSSMAN

‘A’ is for Abolition?: Race, authorship, The
Scarlet Letter

I

The pre-eminent reputation of *The Scarlet Letter* has obscured the fact that Hawthorne’s three other novels all deal with contemporary material. It is important to correct the prevailing conception of him as the re-creator of a dim past, primarily because such a view usually carries with it the belief that he thus failed to fulfil the major obligation of the artist, the obligation to confront actual life...

(F.O.Matthiessen)¹

It has become standard operating procedure to begin a historical revaluation of some element of classic American literature by smirking while quoting from the Oedipal father F.O.Matthiessen and the Oedipal text, *American Renaissance*, and I have followed at least half of that procedure here. But I want to take Matthiessen’s situation as a cautionary tale about our interpretations of literature and our historicist praxis. As Eric Cheyfitz has recently reminded us, the problem in *American Renaissance* is not so much that Matthiessen does not engage history, as what happens when he does. ‘[T]he unconscious rhetorical strategy of *American Renaissance*’, Cheyfitz writes, no sooner ‘approaches a subject like slavery or class conflict [than it] sublimates the political issue in a “larger” or more “complex” aesthetic or metaphysical issue.’² That is why Matthiessen, in my epigraph, links artistic achievement to an engagement with ‘actual life’, but later, in a chapter interestingly entitled ‘A dark necessity’, puts the equation in these terms:

The importance of that sense [of the past] for an artist is that by it alone can he *escape* from *mere* contemporaneity, from the superficial and journalistic *aberrations* of the moment, and come into possession of the primary attributes of man, ...what is essentially human.

(p. 320; my emphases)

In this essay, I am most interested in what we can learn from the uneasy tension these two passages register—the artist's and his or her art's oscillation between engagement and escape—especially as the critic and the critical text may register a similar oscillation. I suppose I do not smirk, then, because I wish to unsettle the notion that we at the present moment have successfully thrown off our Oedipal father.³

Instead, I want in this paper to reconsider the Author as the privileged category for organizing our interpretations of American Literature by attempting to account for a specific recurring image in *The Scarlet Letter*: that of the black man. Despite Matthiessen's view that Hawthorne's 'three *other* novels all deal with contemporary material', I contend that *The Scarlet Letter* is itself profoundly implicated in 'contemporary material'—specifically, antebellum discourses of miscegenation. The representation (or lack of re-presentation) of adulterous sexual relations at the novel's centre draws specifically upon antebellum fears about miscegenational sexual union by figuring sexual misconduct in distinctly racial terms. But the black man as a marker of the novel's participation in these discourses has largely remained invisible, and I want in this essay to speculate upon the reasons why that invisibility has been the case. After demonstrating the black man's presence in Hawthorne's novel, then, I offer an extended review of some recent criticism of the novel that has overlooked the black man, sometimes in essays that seem to set out precisely in search of such a figure. I conclude by exploring the ramifications of this figure of the black man for a theory of literary production and the role of the author in the American Renaissance.⁴

II

[I]t is...plain that a very different-looking class of people are springing up at the south, and are now held in slavery, from those originally brought to this country from Africa; and if their increase will do no other good, it will do away the force of the argument, that God cursed Ham, and therefore American slavery is right. If the lineal descendants of Ham are alone to be scripturally enslaved, it is certain that slavery at the south must soon become unscriptural...

(Frederick Douglass)⁵

The Scarlet Letter is a novel obsessed with origins, and not only because it opens with 'The Custom-House', a fictionalized account of the 'birth' of the novel out of its author's fortuitous rummaging in the Custom-House attic. More specifically, the novel's catalytic question—the one with which the Puritan fathers are obsessed—is, of course, a question of paternity: 'I charge thee to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer!', urges Dimmesdale from his perch high above Hester in the marketplace.⁶ In the reading I am about

to flesh out, Hester is a victimized woman and Pearl the illegitimate child of a father-master whose identity we do not know when the novel opens. This is surely a common enough 'real-life' scenario in the mid-nineteenth-century South, as the quotation from Douglass's *Narrative* suggests, and as he knew at first hand. The fact of miscegenation before the Civil War has been voluminously documented, most recently by John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, who show that inter racial sex was a great (and in some ways hypocritical) rallying cry of Northern abolitionists. But if the abolitionists who denounced miscegenation in the South 'attributed to slavery a form of sexual exploitation that occurred in the free-labor society of the North, where prostitution grew visibly by mid-century and working women had to contend with the sexual advances of their employers',⁷ the novel's depiction of miscegenation does not merely reproduce the terms of the Southern confrontation between a white master and a female slave. Rather, the novel shifts the genders of that equation, with the effect ultimately of revealing the white fears that linked North and South: a shared belief in the unbridled sexuality of African men and the vulnerability of white women, a shared panic when confronted with the possibilities of racial mixing. While Hester, the abused female 'slave', is on numerous occasions described by the narrator as 'chained',⁸ at the pivot point of this reading is Pearl, whose presence leads us irrevocably into the heart of this novel, if only because hers is a heart so difficultly discerned. If the central question out of which the novel grows is that of paternity, not even Hester, who presumably understands Pearl's origins, can explain where Pearl comes from or what precisely she is. No fewer than six times in the chapter which bears the child's name, Hester asks a variant of the question that has plagued critics of the novel as well. 'Child, what art thou?' Hester repeatedly asks; the problem has led more than one critic to settle things by locating Pearl's origins in a supposedly determining biographical fact: Hawthorne's own troubled daughter, Una.⁹

But Pearl is a mixture, or more acutely, a *mixed-breed*, about whom the novel never seems to tire of attempting to describe. She possesses at once 'the wild-flower prettiness of a peasant-baby' and 'the pomp...of an infant princess' (p. 114; ch. 6), but her mother can't help wondering whether 'Pearl [is] a human child' (p. 116; ch. 6) and not some 'little elf' or worse yet, 'fiend-like' and possessed by an 'evil spirit' (p. 120; ch. 6). What's more, as the narrator tells us,

The child could not be made amenable to rules. In giving her existence, a great law had been broken; and the result was a being, whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder.

(p. 114; ch. 6)

What is the Great Law that has been broken in this book in which, as we know, the words 'adultery' and 'adulterer' never appear? And whence does Pearl's devilish behaviour derive? The book offers at least two answers, one of which I

suggest has not been thoroughly analysed until now. So let us take the more familiar solution first.

To do so, we need to plunge for a moment into the editorial notes in the recent Penguin edition of the novel. Accompanying Hester's question to her husband, Roger—'Art thou like the Black Man that haunts the forest round about us?' (p. 102; ch. 4)—and specifically attached to that phrase 'the Black Man', Thomas E. Connolly gives this circumscribing reading in an endnote:

[W]itchcraft sprang from primitive religions that expressed belief in the incarnation of a god in a human or an animal. This god was always called a devil by the Christians and it appeared disguised as an animal or dressed *inconspicuously* in black; hence the Devil is called the black man.

(p. 281; my emphasis)

This note stands in a direct ancestral lineage from Matthiessen's belief that Hawthorne had engaged contemporaneous events in his other novels, but not in *The Scarlet Letter*. When like Connolly we read 'black man' selectively, in a quasi-allegorical mode, contemporaneity collapses under the overbearing claims of timelessness and the novel is taken to reflect just one more version of, in Nina Baym's words, 'the conflict between repressive societies and defiant individuals'.¹⁰ Pearl's curiously mixed behaviour then only reiterates the Puritan belief in deviant behaviour as devil-inspired, and Hester is the heroine of another classically American confrontation between self and society. This closed interpretive circle is complete when 'history' (so-called) enters and *The Scarlet Letter* can be made to *stand in* as another version of *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*, to quote the title of the definitive study on the topic.

But I would argue that in 1850, in hyper-racialized America, North or South, blackness never appears *inconspicuously*—nor is there anything inconspicuous about the presence of blackness in *The Scarlet Letter*. In fact, once we begin to read the word other than allegorically—once we notice that the novel compulsively figures the Other and Other-ness as black, and that the *OED* reports use of the word 'black' in reference to those of African heritage as early as the year 890—we begin to see how a standard and seemingly harmless footnote in the standard textual apparatus cuts off a *racial* reading of *The Scarlet Letter*.

To return now to a further delineation of the black man's presence in this mid-century 'Puritan' tale, and the second (and now nearly apparent) explanation of Pearl's devilish behaviour, we might remember that Pearl, too, is obsessed with her origins, and teases Hester constantly—in one instance, particularly poignantly—about this mystery. On their way into the forest, Pearl asks to be told a story.

'A story, child!' said Hester. 'And about what?'

'O, a story about the Black Man!' answered Pearl, taking hold of her mother's gown, and looking up, half earnestly, half mischievously, into her

face. 'How he haunts this forest, and...offers his book and an iron pen to every body that meets him...and they are to write their names with their own blood. And then he sets his mark on their bosoms! Didst thou ever meet the Black Man, mother?'

'And who told you this story, Pearl?' asked her mother, recognizing a common superstition of the period.

(p. 202; ch. 16)

As Pearl presses the point further, Hester at last gives in:

'Wilt thou let me be at peace, If I once tell thee?'

'Yes, if thou tellest me all', answered Pearl.

'Once in my life I met the Black Man!' said her mother. This scarlet letter is his mark!'

(p. 203; ch. 16)

In Hester's admission is the strongest evidence for miscegenation, especially when placed beside the text's obsessive figuring of Dimmesdale (and now the name begins to resonate) as black. Dressed in black and wearing black gloves, Dimmesdale speaks of sinful men as 'black and filthy' (p. 153; ch. 10), describes his own fallen state as 'the black reality' (p. 209; ch. 17), is burdened by a 'black secret' (p. 164; ch. 11), and thanks Hester for bringing hope to his 'sick, sin-stained and sorrow-blackened' self (p. 219; ch. 18). And in the most extraordinary example, a renewed Dimmesdale returning to town is tempted by 'the arch-fiend' to do it all again, that is, to 'drop into [a young maiden's] tender bosom a germ of evil that would be sure to blossom darkly soon, and bear black fruit betimes' (p. 235; ch. 20).¹¹

Pearl shows concern not merely about her origins, however; she also wants to know when she will be recognized, when the minister will confess to his role in her life. 'Will he go back with us, hand in hand, we three together, into the town?' (p. 228; ch. 19), she asks, in one of the more pointed instances, as the three leave the forest. From within the paradigm of miscegenation, Pearl's questions take on an added significance, especially when considered in relation to her refusal in the forest to approach the minister and Hester, who has let down her hair and taken the 'A' off and thrown it 'to a distance among the withered leaves' (p. 219; ch. 18).

But Pearl...now suddenly burst into a fit of passion, gesticulating violently, and throwing her small figure into the most extravagant contortions. She accompanied this wild outbreak with piercing shrieks, which the woods reverberated on all sides; so that, alone as she was in her childish and unreasonable wrath, it seemed as if a hidden multitude were lending her their sympathy and encouragement.

(p. 226; ch. 19)

It is not the first time, we should note, that Pearl has seemed to embody a multiplicity within her sole self. Earlier, in a line that echoes Enobarbus's description of another figure of racial otherness, Cleopatra, and that seems to point toward the composite, varied nature of Pearl's appearance, the narrator tells us that 'Pearl's aspect was imbued with a spell of infinite variety; in this one child there were many children...' (p. 114; ch. 6).¹² Pearl has here stumbled upon a kind of primal scene in the forest, that unbridled space where the black man as representative of everything uncivilized and unstructured has his free rein. But why does she react so violently? In this reading, she speaks as a mulatto child whose existence can be dismissed ostensibly as easily as Hester has cast off the Scarlet Letter—the marker that is always compared and equated by the narrator to Pearl herself.¹³ Thus, Pearl reads the discarded 'A' as a discarded Pearl. To bring Pearl back, Hester replaces the letter and hides her hair:

'Wilt thou come across the brook, and own thy mother, now that she has her shame upon her—now that she is sad?'

'Yes; now I will!' answered the child...

In a mood of tenderness that was not usual with her, she drew down her mother's head, and kissed her brow and both her cheeks. But then—by a kind of necessity that always impelled this child to alloy whatever comfort she might chance to give with a throb of anguish—Pearl put up her mouth, and kissed the scarlet letter too!

(p. 228; ch. 19)

Not even this momentary reconciliation is immune from Pearl's insistent doubleness: once more she 'alloys' rare comfort with a mischievous, and very nearly simultaneous, gesture that elicits pain.

The chapter 'The revelation of the Scarlet Letter' has as its most significant consequence Arthur's acknowledgment of his role in Pearl's life, signalled first by his public announcement—'Hester...come hither! Come, my little Pearl!' (p. 265; ch. 23)—and then by hers, a reversal of Dimmesdale's earlier kiss, which Pearl had washed off her forehead:

Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and...her tears fell upon her father's cheek....

(p. 268; ch. 23)

In the novel's final pages, the rivalry between the two men—each of whose sins has seemed 'blacker' to the other¹⁴—collapses into equivalence. The novel ultimately equates Dimmesdale and Chillingworth when each publicly accepts Pearl as his own: Dimmesdale on the scaffold, and Chillingworth in his will (pp. 272–3; ch. 24).¹⁵ Pearl receives an inheritance from her mother's cuckolded husband and becomes 'the richest heiress of her day' (p. 273; ch. 24), but it is a

bequest the mixed-breed child can gain and enjoy only in England, the Old World newly free of slavery. In 1850, such a fairy-tale ending is impossible in the New—although it is interesting to note that the novel’s ending may share with the abolition of American slavery a certain unpredictability, as Hawthorne himself famously explained:

[Slavery is] one of those evils which divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream.¹⁶

The profound passivity Hawthorne insists upon in this oft-quoted passage—the sense one gets in reading it of the apparent inconsequence of individuated, human agency—serves our purposes here as an ironic counterpoint to the myth of the transcendent author that Hawthorne is often said to embody and that I examine in this essay’s remaining sections.

III

It is singular, however, how long a time often passes before words embody things; and with what security two persons, who choose to avoid a certain subject, may approach its very verge, and retire without disturbing it.

(Nathaniel Hawthorne)¹⁷

In what follows, I consider two recent articles about *The Scarlet Letter* that investigate Hawthorne’s engagement with the issue of slavery, but that nevertheless provide no account of the black man in the text. I have in mind recent essays by Jonathan Arac and Jean Fagan Yellin, each of which I take up in turn after a closer look at Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*. In general, I want to speculate upon the continuing predominance of the quasi-allegorical reading of the black man in *The Scarlet Letter* by considering some of the conceptions that frame our readings of this highly valued, canonical work.

To begin such an analysis, I would return us to the assumptions that underlie Matthiessen’s critical method in *American Renaissance*:

[M]y main subject has become the conceptions held by five of our major writers concerning the function and nature of literature, and the degree to which their practice bore out their theories.

(p. vii)

Here Matthiessen announces his governing interpretative tautology: the terms of his analysis derive in full from the minds of the authors who become at once creators and critics of their own texts. We would want to note this formulation's overriding valorization—even fetishization—of the minds of these five authors; to do so is to recognize the degree to which one of the constitutive documents of American literary criticism is embedded fully in paradigms of the author as a unique, generative agent, creator and controller of meaning.

Indeed, precisely this obsession with the author links together the two passages from *American Renaissance* that I quoted in the first section and that seemed from another perspective to offer contradictory positions about the relation between an author and history. Whether Matthiessen depicts the relationship as 'the major obligation of the artist...to confront actual life', or, alternatively, as the author's choice to 'escape from mere contemporaneity', in either case the author 'confronts' or 'escapes' history; in both cases, he is an agent somehow separated from it (pp. 192 and 320). Within this paradigm, I want to argue, it has proven difficult to acknowledge and account for the presence of the black man in *The Scarlet Letter*.

In 'The politics of *The Scarlet Letter*', Jonathan Arac seeks deliberately to revise our common contextual understanding of Hawthorne's novel. Citing Walter Benjamin's challenge to the cultural historian to 'brush history against the grain', Arac attempts '[t]o raise up to prominence what is usually smoothed over' by acknowledging at the outset that '[s]lavery was the issue that agitated American politics most deeply in Hawthorne's time, and abolitionism made the young Henry Adams feel that Boston in 1850 was once again revolutionary.'¹⁸ Arac proposes 'to define a relation between *The Scarlet Letter* and the political response to masters' barbarism and slaves' anonymous toil' (p. 248). He also brushes against the grain Hawthorne's claims to an artistic space immune from politics, in part by bringing to the surface the constructedness of that myth:

Poe may have preceded Hawthorne in the attempt to establish such an artistic space, but Hawthorne was the first to do it effectively, to make it stick, in a way recognized by his contemporaries and for the future.

(p. 248)

But in spite of these preliminary unmaskings, Arac's reading of the politics of *The Scarlet Letter* reinscribes one of the sustaining myths of the American ideology he self-consciously sets out to interrogate: namely, the myth of the empowered and self-possessed individual, whose infinite potential as a maker of history and author of meaning is his inalienable American birthright. Thus, while Arac may be brushing history against the grain, he never challenges the primary agent of that history.¹⁹

I want to say at this point that I find Arac's reading of the replacement of action by character and stasis in *The Scarlet Letter*, 'The Custom-House', and *The Life of Pierce* engaging and convincing. I am nevertheless taking issue with

the degree to which Arac's analyses depend upon the figure of the author as the mechanism that enables his manoeuvres around and across these texts. Arac's inquiry, in fact, derives from a related assumption that raises important questions he of necessity must disregard. Arac tells us how his '[s]tudents marvel that the author of "The Custom-House" was in less than three years to write *The Life of Franklin Pierce*' (p. 251). As reasonable as this observation appears, it nevertheless warrants examination. We are implicitly asked to presume that these students' concerns are somehow natural or innocent—worthy of our contemplation and even our wholesale appropriation for originating from such untutored and guileless readers. But the issue of common ground between *The Scarlet Letter* and the political biography actually resists a number of questions with regard to the function of authorship: for example, what precisely is the nature of the presumed contiguities between texts produced by the 'same author', and how can that 'sameness' best be understood? Rather than demonstrating the relative naïveté of the students, their observation actually demonstrates how embedded they are in the ideology of the individually distinct and empowered agent/ author. And while it might be argued that such ideological embeddedness rising to the surface (or presented) as naïveté is the very mark of ideological interpellation, an informed poststructuralist critique would want nevertheless to interrogate such 'natural' assumptions.

Foucault's well-known essay on the author provides a point from which to launch this critique. To do so, it is important to see that the students' implicit demand for continuity (or integrity) in the authorfunction—their question, after all, grows out of their disbelief that the author who abhors politics in 'The Custom-House' could turn around and benefit from it a short time later by writing a campaign biography—demonstrates their full subjection (I choose the word carefully) within a system that makes of the author 'not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work' but rather 'a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, ...composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction.'²⁰ The contradiction these students believe they have uncovered in the works of the 'same' author forces them (and Arac) to re-investigate the 'received understanding' of the author's biography.²¹ As Foucault says, 'we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius...because...we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion' (p. 119), and the author as the privileged term of agency performs in the example from Arac's students its highest organizing function by deflecting critique from the global concept to the local example. Adjusting Hawthorne's biography permits these readers to account for the contradictions without seeing through to what the system of authorship obfuscates: namely, the embeddedness of artistic creation within social systems, or (in Raymond Williams's words), the fact that '[c]onsciousness...is social being'.²² Arac's students merely point out an incoherence that becomes *the exception that proves the rule* for authorship as the necessary governing frame for

the interpretation of texts, rather than an exception that forces other questions about the ‘naturalness’ or ‘logic’ of the system in the first place.

Arac’s own understanding of politics and *The Scarlet Letter* grows out of a similar concern for the continuity of the author: ‘The problem is to determine a relation, perhaps even a common ground, between the writing of *The Scarlet Letter* and that of *The Life of Pierce*’ (p. 251). The geography of Hawthorne’s career is the landscape upon which Arac will measure out that ‘common ground.’ But we might notice of this goal that it shares certain characteristics with another of Arac’s students’ observations: that ‘*The Scarlet Letter* [is] an intransitive “work of art”, unlike, say *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which is “propaganda” rather than “art”, for it aims to change your life’ (p. 251). Both Arac’s and his students’ observations beg the question of the canon. That is, Arac’s assumption in seeking out ‘common ground’ via the figure of the author is reinforced by the assumption that generically, *inherently*, *The Scarlet Letter* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* represent different modes of writing that can only be associated at the level of their authors, or their authors’ intentions. Arac’s ‘resolution’ of his students’ second observation reinscribes the same dichotomy: ‘If recent revaluation has shown that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is also art, may it not be equally important to show that *The Scarlet Letter* is also propaganda’ (p. 251).

But more important for our purposes, the distinction Arac’s students make between *The Scarlet Letter* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* recurs in the implicit distinction he draws between Hawthorne’s novel and the political biography. The task as Arac has it is to link the artfulness of one with the politics of the other via Hawthorne, rather than to work from the assumption that the relationship might be determined in terms of some other criteria—for example, as documents existing at the intersection of a variety of historical or socio-political discourses and produced in relation to them. Arac’s essay does not allow for the possibility that factors other than an author’s biography might be the coordinates upon which to map relations between texts, whether within an individual corpus, or across and between different authors. Instead, Arac’s methodology valorizes his students’ conception of the canon and of ‘artistic’ production to precisely the extent that at the fundamental level he utilizes the political biography to access ‘The politics of *The Scarlet Letter*’.

Arac continues to focus upon the author when he turns to the issue of the relationship between ‘The Custom-House’ and the novel it introduces. ‘There is always some doubt what we mean when we say, “The Scarlet Letter”’ Arac reminds us: do we mean only the twenty-four chapters of the novel ‘proper’, the novel including ‘The Custom-House’, or the actual embroidered article sewn to Hester’s dress? (p. 251). Arac resolves this ambiguity by linking biographical facts in Hawthorne’s life to the ‘situations’ of characters in the novel²³—a process he describes in terms of allegory,²⁴ and that begins, significantly, with a claim of ownership: ‘By taking possession through “The Custom-House” of the (physical) scarlet letter as his property, the author of “The Custom-House” personalizes the narrative’ (p. 252). Arac’s conclusion about the effect of

possessing the letter is by no means the only conclusion one might reach. From the same act, it is in fact possible to conclude just the opposite: that the author by taking possession of the 'A' *de-personalizes* the narrative because both the letter and the written history he finds in the attic are (he insists) objects of his embellishment in *The Scarlet Letter*, rather than his own *original* productions.²⁵

Indeed, one can say even more: in the calculus of identity politics as Arac deploys it, taking possession of an object represents the enabling activity for the construction of individuality; Hawthorne 'personalizes' the narrative and takes possession of it with the same gesture, thus constituting himself in the terms of the possessive individualist ideologies that underwrite his status as an author in the first place. But from the point of view of Arac's announced desire to interrogate 'the American ideology' and to reveal slavery as the issue at the core of political praxis in the antebellum period, this reliance upon the tenets of possessive individualism is, to say the least, ironic. Most importantly, as we will see, Arac's depiction of Hawthorne's ownership of his text puts him in no better position to see slavery (or the metonymic figures within his own text that represent it) than the critics he is presumably revising.

For while he argues in his opening pages that he wishes to reintegrate slavery into the fuller context of antebellum America, Arac's primary definition of slavery as 'masters' barbarism and slaves' anonymous toil' rewrites race as social class and economics, and in so doing restricts his conceptualization of slavery to the realm of political economy in which the ideologies of possessive individualism gain their most profound validations. This rewriting proves consequential at precisely the instant when the black man makes an appearance in Arac's text: 'Hester is described as not true to the letter when she analyzes it contractually, as the mark of her meeting with *the black man* in the woods' (p. 261; my emphasis). The black man here remains 'anonymous' because Arac has validated not so much Hawthorne's 'barbarism', as its culturally-inscribed opposite: Hawthorne's valuable labour as an individual and an intentioned author. In this way Arac's essay participates in precisely the system it set out to uncover—the workings of 'the American ideology'. The black man must remain invisible when viewed from within the discourses of possessive individualism that underwrite the essay's explication of indeterminacy—what Arac tellingly calls 'Hawthorne's own authorial meaning'.²⁶

A brief glance at Jean Fagan Yellin's 'Hawthorne and the American national sin' reveals that many of the paradigms we have been considering recur, although the essay puts them to a slightly different purpose, and exhibits, as a consequence, a peculiar kind of success. By 'success' I am referring to the language of morality that first appears in Yellin's title, and that permits her ultimately to denounce Hawthorne for failing to 'respond imaginatively to the centrality of race and slavery in America' until 'long after he had produced his great romances, in which any recognition of these issues is conspicuously lacking'.²⁷ Besides some entries in the Notebooks of the 1840s and the essay 'Chiefly about war matters' (1862), Yellin demonstrates that Hawthorne seems

to have troubled himself relatively little about slavery; indeed, we have already seen his well-known insistence that slavery would ‘vanish like a dream’. This Yellin rightly (if implicitly) deprecates as a paltry substitute for the vocal denunciation of, say, a Whittier, and it is clear from her article that she wishes to have found an equally emphatic moral stand from one of the century’s great novelists.

But I have called Yellin’s success ‘peculiar’—a better word would perhaps be ‘partial’—because she relies upon assumptions about artistry and authorship that actually undercut her attempts to see the black man as he *does* in fact make his appearance in Hawthorne’s best-known novel. That she adopts a traditional understanding about the methods of artistic production emerges when Yellin names as her focus ‘the essential facts of chattel slavery’, but then distances herself (and by extension, Hawthorne) from an engagement with that ‘essential fact’ by suggesting that slavery ‘might naturally be expected to illustrate [the romances’] major theme of psychological bondage’ (p. 76). This re-naming, however ‘natural’, actually does a disservice to Yellin’s interpretative efforts, and in her conclusion she can find no links between ‘metaphorical slavery and the literal enslavement of blacks’ (p. 88). Yellin searches for Hawthorne’s ‘recognition’, as well as for some signs that he ‘finally did respond imaginatively’, but the terms ‘recognition’ and ‘response’, no less than the adjective ‘great’, delimit Yellin’s capacity to account for the presence of the black man because these words carry a wide range of commonsensical assumptions about literary agency and an author’s turning inward to compose solely out of the stuff of his own isolated psychology and individual experience. Such terminology, along with the argument that the ‘studied ambiguity’ of these works represents ‘deliberate artistic decisions’ bespeak Yellin’s assumption that in the romances she will find only *conscious* translations of the ‘essential facts of slavery’, and that the absence of such evidence in *The Scarlet Letter* marks, then, ‘a strategy of avoidance and denial’ (p. 97) on Hawthorne’s part. Blinded by canonicity and by a genius-centred model of literary production, Yellin, too, cannot see the black man, and once again, Matthiessen’s binarism recurs: there is either conscious engagement or conscious escape. Yellin blames Hawthorne where Arac credits him—but both read his novel guided by an assumption that what they find between its covers represents the deliberate choices of its individuated author.

In a sense, Yellin’s essay registers a pattern Barbara Herrnstein Smith identifies as the cycle of the canonical within the academy:

[B]y providing...‘necessary backgrounds’, teaching...‘appropriate skills’, ‘cultivating...interests’, and, generally, ‘developing...tastes’, the academy produces generation after generation of subjects for whom the objects and texts thus labeled do indeed perform the functions thus privileged, thereby insuring the continuity of mutually defining canonical works, canonical functions, and canonical audiences.²⁸

Canonical texts reproduce us and we reproduce them, and canonized along with the privileged text is a certain range of permissible interpretations restricted by that privileged status. Yellin is certain most of all of the canonical status of the works she studies, and it is that very notion of canonicity that makes it impossible for her to see the simple, untranslated presence of a black man in Hawthorne's most famous novel.

IV

Of course, my reading of the presence of the black man in *The Scarlet Letter* also makes claims upon notions of artistry and intention, but primarily by negation. In place of the canonical model of the empowered genius, I want now to take the unnoticed and seemingly unbidden presence of the black man in *The Scarlet Letter* as a point of departure for describing another mode of literary production in the American Renaissance. To do this, I will look briefly at one other text—an 1851 review of *The Scarlet Letter*—the language of which points up the need for reconceiving literary creation in terms of the discursive conditions that structure the production of writing within particular historical frames.

The review, entitled 'The Writings of Hawthorne', appeared in the January 1851 issue of *The Church Review*, a periodical associated with the Protestant Episcopal Church and published in New Haven, Connecticut. Apparently written by the conservative theologian Arthur Cleveland Coxe, who later became an Episcopal bishop, the review describes all kinds of immoral literature, and, with reference to Hawthorne, specifically attacks 'any toleration [of]...a popular and gifted writer, when he perpetrates bad morals', especially because 'stories should always be of moral benefit'.²⁹ But a single passage in this otherwise predictable review serves our purposes, for it highlights precisely what is at stake in shifting the focus away from an author-centred interpretative paradigm and toward a neo-Marxist assumption about the embeddedness of artistic production within socially constituted networks of meaning. Coxe writes that

the language of [Hawthorne], like patent blacking, 'would not soil the whitest linen', and yet the composition itself, would suffice, if well laid on, to Ethiopize the snowiest conscience that ever sat like a swan upon that mirror of heaven, a Christian maiden's imagination.

(p. 507)

Two points about this excerpt must be made. The first merely acknowledges this review's position in the line of works we have been considering in which meaning belongs to, and is determined by, the author. There is no sense that anyone or anything other than Hawthorne can be responsible for the effects his book produces.

But the second point is by far the more significant, and focuses our attention upon the striking metaphor the review employs to demonstrate the effect of

Hawthorne's novel on the morally pure 'maiden'. The passage relies at its core upon an image of the (female) reader as a 'mirror'—as defenceless as she is pure—and able only to reflect passively whatever is placed before her. This sense of helplessness is extended by one of the operative, contemporaneous meanings the *OED* gives for the action of 'laying on': related to the practices of the publishing house, the action refers specifically to the passive imprinting of a (white) sheet of paper as it is placed upon inked type in a press. Confronting this defenceless maiden as mirror and as blank page is 'the composition', Hawthorne's novel, spectacularly anthropomorphized with the verb 'Ethiopize', for which the *OED* offers no entry, and which we could best define as 'to make black'. Thus, *The Scarlet Letter* and the review project versions of what is often taken to be the nightmare image of American race relations: in the review, 'the composition' figured as black threatens to overpower and 'Ethiopize' a 'white' woman in a thinly veiled scene of reading as rape; in the novel, the black man unequivocally succeeds, as Hester herself admits.³⁰ And once the spectre of miscegenation enters the review, 'heaven' itself is soon threatened, so dire are the consequences of the insidiously corrupt novel Hawthorne has written.

I place this review alongside the black man in the novel in order to demonstrate an organizing principle that lies beyond the reach of both Coxe and Hawthorne—but more generally, beyond any individual, especially insofar as 'individual' marks always the presumed opposite term to 'society'. For the fundamental element in both the novel and this excerpt from the review is the fact that their racialized metaphors occur in essentially non-racial contexts that do not reveal to us a 'local' or 'artistic' reason why such metaphors should be appropriate. The pervasiveness of these metaphors across divergent genres (novel, 'propaganda', review) and seemingly disparate subject positions (novelist, theologian, abolitionist) reveals this culture's propensity for speaking about sexual immorality in racial terms that derive their force from the (im) possibility of miscegenation.

Thus, the black man in *The Scarlet Letter* forces us to re-evaluate the place of the author's presiding genius within our understanding of literary production.³¹ The image's recurrence in the review and the novel compels us to re-examine the discursive power of the fact of slavery, its powerful position as a metaphor operative in texts ostensibly separate from the concerns of slavery *per se*. Here, in 'literary' and 'theological' (rather than 'political') territory, slavery rises to the surface, linguistic proof of shared consciousness and of a culture drenched in racialized symbolologies. To account for the conjunction, we must rethink the model of transcendence that scholars of Hawthorne (and of American literature more generally) have insisted upon virtually since the emergence of an American tradition in letters. The co-incidence of the racial metaphors has the effect of disintegrating the autonomy of the agents who (presumably) 'produced' them, by revealing the social dimensions of literary production.

At another point in his essay Coxe derides the fact that *The Scarlet Letter* is 'a book made for the market, and that the market has made it merchantable' (p.

507). Understanding ‘market’ here in its broadest sense—as a metaphor for a discursive space of shared meanings and exchanged discourses, as a figure for the interpellation of subjects (including authors and theologians) within particular temporal and cultural arenas—and so remembering that the review no less than the novel is ‘merchantable’ in precisely this sense, we could do worse than to take Coxe at his word. To do so, I have argued, is to take Hawthorne’s word, and the words of countless others, as well.

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NOTES

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- 1 F.O.Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941 (1968)), p. 192. Hereafter cited in text.
- 2 Eric Cheyfitz, ‘Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*: Circumscribing the revolution’, *American Quarterly*, 41 (1989), p. 357.
- 3 Although the Oedipal metaphors are my own, Michael J.Colacurcio shares my wonder while providing one of the most inclusive accounts of the pervasive influence of Matthiessen’s model of the American Renaissance on subsequent literary criticism; see ‘The American-Renaissance Renaissance’, *New England Quarterly*, 64 (1991), pp. 445–93.
- 4 The word ‘miscegenation’ that I utilize in this paper to denote interracial sexual mixing has an unusual history that it may be useful briefly to detail. The word was not available at the time of the publication of *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850; according to the OED, ‘miscegenation’ was coined in 1864 in an anonymous pamphlet published in New York City entitled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, applied to the American White Man and Negro*. In the strongest possible terms, and by drawing upon a wide variety of evidence, this pamphlet advocated ‘the intermarriage of diverse races [as] indispensable to a progressive humanity’, although it now seems likely that the pamphlet was actually intended as a biting political attack perpetrated by partisan Democratic journalists as a parody of what they perceived to be the Republican party’s (and President Lincoln’s) racial agenda. Still, in the context of this paper, it’s fascinating to note that these parodists needed to invent a new word for their mock endorsement of interracial mixing, so heavily laden were the old terms (particularly ‘amalgamation’) with the widest range of antebellum racist antipathies. On party politics surrounding miscegenation, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), especially pp. 237–41; on *Miscegenation* (the pamphlet) and the various responses it engendered, see J.M.Bloch, *Miscegenation, Melaleukation, and Mr. Lincoln’s Dog* (New York: Schaum Publishing Co., 1958); for a history of race and sexuality in the United

- States, see John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), ch. 5.
- 5 Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass An American Slave* (1845; reprinted New York: Signet, 1968), p. 24; ch. 1.
 - 6 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Penguin, 1983), p. 93; ch. 3. Hereafter cited in text by page number and chapter.
 - 7 D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, p. 101.
 - 8 Among numerous examples, one must select a very few: the narrator tells us Hester is linked to Dimmesdale by 'the iron link of mutual crime' (p. 178; ch. 13), and this image recurs in one of the novel's climaxes, when Arthur, Hester and Pearl stand together on the scaffold and form 'an electric chain' (p. 172; ch. 12). Images of bondage are hardly less ubiquitous; Hester is 'the people's victim and life-long bond-slave' (p. 242; ch. 21), and as such, she seems able to see how Arthur is similarly hounded by the Puritan orthodoxy: 'what hast thou to do with all these iron men, and their opinions?' she asks him in the forest. 'They have kept thy better part in bondage too long already!' (p. 215; ch. 17).
 - 9 T. Walter Herbert, Jr has recently taken this approach in 'Nathaniel Hawthorne, Una Hawthorne, and *The Scarlet Letter*: Interactive selfhoods and the cultural construction of gender', *PMLA*, 103 (1988), pp. 285–97.
 - 10 See her introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel, p. 19.
 - 11 The image of the black fruit first appears just before Hester emerges into the market-place from within 'the black flower of civilized society, a prison' (p. 76; ch. 1). Pearl brings the reader back to this passage when later she tells Mr Wilson 'that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison-door' (p. 134; ch. 8).
 - 12 *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. M.R. Ridley (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), II.ii.236.
 - 13 Cf., for example, pp. 124–5; ch. 7: 'But it was a remarkable attribute of [Pearl's] garb, and, indeed, of the child's whole appearance, that it irresistibly and inevitably reminded the beholder of the token which Hester Prynne was doomed to wear upon her bosom. It was the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life!'
 - 14 As Dimmesdale tells Hester in the forest: 'That old man's revenge has been blacker than my sin. He has violated, in cold blood, the sanctity of a human heart' (p. 212; ch. 17).
 - 15 The novel foreshadows this equivalence with descriptions of the two men that are virtually interchangeable—a fact about which Pearl is once more the most scrupulous reader. Looking up at the window through which Chillingworth looks down, she exclaims: 'Come away, mother! Come away, or yonder old Black Man will catch you!' (p. 155; ch. 10). Pearl speaks as if she knows the rumours spreading that the doctor's 'visage was getting sooty with the smoke' (p. 149; ch. 9) from the fires in his laboratory where he develops his 'black devices' (p. 160; ch. 11).
 - 16 Quoted in Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, p. 317.
 - 17 *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 239; ch. 20.
 - 18 Jonathan Arac, 'The politics of *The Scarlet Letter*', in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 248. Hereafter cited in text.

- 19 Cf. Arac's opening sentence: 'If the study of American literature is not merely to reproduce the American ideology, it must engage directly with the debates of literary theory, which allow us to raise basic questions about the values and practices at stake in reading, studying, and teaching American literature and culture' (p. 247). C.B. MacPherson's *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), is of course, the classic statement on the ideology and origins of possessive individualism.
- 20 Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?', *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 118–19. Hereafter cited in text.
- 21 This is, in fact, Arac's starting place: 'In arguing for a specific interpretation of *The Scarlet Letter* that is neither authorial in the "interpretationist" sense nor mystifying, as I find indeterminism, I begin from several concrete problems in our received understanding of Hawthorne' (p. 250).
- 22 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 41.
- 23 'The many correspondences between the authorial figure of "The Custom-House" and the characters of *The Scarlet Letter*—for example, the disapproval shown to both Hester and Hawthorne by an imagined crowd of Puritan authorities, the dual status Dimmesdale and Hawthorne share of a passionate inner life wholly at odds with their "official" public position, the work both author and Chillingworth do as analysts of character—allow us to naturalize the presence of "The Custom-House" and justify its excess' (p. 252).
- 24 The correspondences between Hawthorne and his characters 'undermine the self-sufficiency of "The Scarlet Letter"—making it an allegory of the writer's situation in 1850' (p. 252).
- 25 Indeed, the narrator of 'The Custom-House' makes no claims of ownership in regard to what he delineates as the historically verifiable, and therefore "original" (in the sense of temporally prior) parameters of the story. Quite to the contrary, he insists upon 'the authenticity of the outline' (p. 63; 'The Custom-House').
- 26 'My argument has tried to show that Hawthorne's own authorial meaning establishes an "indeterminacy" that is not merely a modern critical aberration' (p. 261).
- 27 Jean Fagan Yellin, 'Hawthorne and the American national sin', in *The Green American Tradition: Essays and Poems for Sherman Paul*, ed. H. Daniel Peck (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 96. Hereafter cited in text.
- 28 Barbara Herrnstein Smith, 'Contingencies of value', in *Canons*, ed. Robert von Hallberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 27.
- 29 My information on Coxe derives from a biographical note appended to a partial reproduction of the review in B. Bernard Cohen (ed.), *The Recognition of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969). I do not know how Cohen verified Coxe's authorship; the article appears to be anonymous in *The Church Review*—which, in a sense, is precisely my point. Page numbers refer to the original periodical; these two quotations appear on pp. 502 and 501 respectively. Hereafter cited in text.
- 30 I borrow the diction of 'nightmare' from Myra Jehlen. The noun 'Ethiop', and the adjective 'Ethiopian', both, of course, have long histories.
- 31 My argument here shares certain aspects with Toni Morrison's 'Unspeakable things unspeakable: The Afro-American presence in American literature'—which I

came upon after I had already presented an early version of this paper—particularly her call to re-examine ‘founding nineteenth-century works...for the ways in which the presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the language, the structure—the meaning of so much American literature’ (p. 11). However, Morrison appears less willing to abdicate the notion of an empowered author, as this quotation suggests: ‘The spectacularly interesting question is “What intellectual feats had to be performed by the author or his critic to erase [the Afro-American presence] from a society seething with [it], and what effect has that performance had on the work?”’ (pp. 11–12). In general, I have been less concerned with ‘intellectual feats’ and ‘performance’ than I have been with what Foucault calls (in *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1973)) epistemic systems of shared meaning and language. Morrison’s article appears in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 28 (1989), pp. 1–34.

HUGH GRADY

Containment, subversion—and Postmodernism

I

When in the mid—1980s writers like Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield attempted to get at what outstanding differences operated between two emerging, clearly related yet distinct critical paradigms in Renaissance and Shakespeare studies—British Cultural Materialism and American New Historicism (or Cultural Poetics)—the ‘containment-and-subversion’ debate came to the fore of discussion in the field.¹ ‘Containment’ was the province of North Americans, and if Stephen Greenblatt was certainly the central figure in this, the label could easily be applied to the works of such American scholars as Arthur Marotti, Leonard Tennenhouse or Catherine Gallagher.

For its critics, it bespoke political pessimism or even quietism, with its operating assumption that power produced subversive discourses in order more efficiently to exercise itself: subversion would be contained by the forces of a power which could be said to have actually itself produced the subversion. British cultural materialists, echoed by a number of North American scholars as well, found Greenblatt’s ‘containment’ concept at once too idealistic (the process seemed to take place in free-floating texts rather than in concrete social life) and implying too monolithic an idea of power (it seemed to account for every manifestation of human activity). Thus Sinfield wrote that Greenblatt’s vision of Elizabethan power left little room for ‘any significant flaw in the mechanism of the Elizabethan state.... Thus the power/subversion dialectic develops the structure of a circle labelled “containment” and any prospect of significant dissent and change is not just headed off but is strategically placed before it can even be thought’ (pp. 259–60). Similarly, Dollimore records a polite dissent from Greenblatt’s article which, more than any other, has come to be identified with the theory of containment, ‘Invisible bullets’:

To some extent [Greenblatt’s] paradox disappears when we speak not of a monolithic power structure producing its effects but of one made up of different, often competing elements, and these not merely producing culture but producing it through appropriations.... If we talk only of power

producing the discourse of subversion we not only hypostatise power but also efface the cultural differences—and context—which the very process of containment presupposes.... Further, although subversion may indeed be appropriated by authority for its own purposes, once installed it can be used against authority as well as used by it.

(p. 12)

Five years later, in an exchange between Catherine Belsey and Dollimore and Sinfield, the terrain shifts, but the debate in many ways simply reproduces the antinomies of the earlier one. To be sure, the context has changed, and Catherine Belsey's argument for transforming literary studies into 'cultural history'² contains far more than the remarks on subversion and containment which I focus on here. It is of more than passing interest, however, that containment and subversion persist as central issues in the debate about the New Historicism even when, as with Belsey's article, the argument clearly 'wants to go' somewhere else (in fact, toward goals I would myself generally endorse).

Containment and subversion appears first as Belsey presents her version of what has become a standard Left critique of Greenblatt, much along the lines of Dollimore and Sinfield in 1985: 'Too often...power is represented as seamless and all pervasive, while resistance, where it exists at all, is seen as ultimately self-deceived' (p. 164), she writes. Having identified with Dollimore and Sinfield against Greenblatt, however, Belsey then goes on to define a set of differences with them on other issues. Writing in reply Dollimore³ returns to containment and subversion—but rather than agreeing with Belsey's agreement with his earlier critique of Greenblatt, he goes on to defend (a certain interpretation of) Greenblatt's position—without ever really abandoning, except in emphasis, his earlier theoretical position (in which he had conceded that in a limited case Greenblatt's theory might hold).⁴ It was as if Belsey had diagnosed Dollimore and Sinfield as having much the same malady which in 1985 each had found in Greenblatt. For Dollimore in 1990, containment is seen as one possible outcome of a number of complex interactions between subversion and authority rather than the sole inevitable outcome of their interaction, as Greenblatt had seemed to imply in the end of his essay.

Confusing as all this is, I believe a use can come of an analysis—not of the finer points of *différance*, revealing as that exercise might be for other purposes—but of another aspect of these critiques—what might be called the positional rhetoric of the argumentation. In each case, the containment position is put into question as implicitly siding with the political status quo by seeming to disallow meaningful change—once by Sinfield (explicitly) and Dollimore (implicitly) in 1985, and then by Belsey in 1990. In each case the appeal of the containment position (partially defended by Dollimore in 1990) lies in its hard-headed refusal to indulge in wishful thinking, its acknowledgement of the intransigence of power before desire. This seems to be so, regardless of the fact that a more-or-less identical position by Dollimore is reproduced both times—once on the

side of subversion (1985), later on the side of (limited, contingent) containment (1990). For as he argues in his 1985 article, it is in the context and use of the argument that its politics are determined, rather than in anything intrinsic to itself (p. 13).

In this essay, I want to argue that the containment-and-subversion debate has outlived its usefulness as a way of thinking about cutting-edge issues in Renaissance or Early Modern studies and that it is time to understand that debate instead as symptomatic of a larger dilemma now facing cultural studies in general and Renaissance literary studies in particular: how to create an emancipatory stance from within the changed situation of culture under conditions of Postmodernism. The containment-and-subversion debate in Renaissance studies is largely an allegorical, displaced debate about the political efficacies or lack of them involved in either contemporary aesthetic production or the related but non-identical project of political criticism itself. As such, it is able to attach itself to virtually any set of positions, given a skilful enough rhetor. A turn to Postmodernism as a problematic of Renaissance studies now, I argue, would serve as a needed correction for a recent historicist turn in Renaissance and Shakespeare studies which has its own regressive political potential.⁵

Dazzled by an apparently inescapable series of logical substitutions, whereby a properly political approach to the cultural past is assumed to be possible only through a radicalized historicism, much contemporary radical criticism of the past is constantly displacing contemporary political and aesthetic categories onto Early Modern texts,⁶ producing a post-modern/early modern convergence which has been scandalously undertheorized. But the solution is not some imagined more rigorous historicism; in fact, I will argue, the great strengths of New Historicism come primarily from its 'presentist' rather than its historicist side; and in truth the 'will-to-historicism' is a highly overdetermined feature of contemporary professional criticism, simultaneously inscribing radical suppositions from Marxism and post-Marxism with authoritarian, positivist ones from the professionalist historicism which has been a major force in literary studies—particularly in the United States—for most of the twentieth century. It is therefore necessary to scrutinize the rapid assimilation of historicizing goals with the same critical distance as has in recent years been accorded to older, 'aestheticizing' assumptions. In this process, I believe, can emerge—is emerging—an emancipatory critical practice which will amount to a reinvention of critical art and culture under postmodern conditions, demanding much greater self-consciousness of the impact of the present on our reproductions of the past than is currently the case with much of the New Historicism.⁷

Rather than attempt to assign the various productions of New Historicism to one or the other side of a containment/subversion divide, we do better to follow the lead of Louis Montrose in seeing New Historicism as a set of problems rather than solutions:

Inhabiting the discursive spaces traversed by the term ‘New Historicism’ are some of the most complex, persistent, and unsettling of the problems that professors of literature attempt variously to confront or to evade: Among them, the essential or historical bases upon which ‘literature’ is to be distinguished from other discourses; the possible configurations of relationship between cultural practices and social, political and economic processes; the consequences of post-structuralist theories of textuality for the practice of an historical or material criticism; the means by which subjectivity is socially constituted and constrained; the processes by which ideologies are produced and sustained, and by which they may be contested; the patterns of consonance and contradiction among the values and interests of a given individual, as these are actualized in the shifting conjunctures of various subject positions—as, for example, intellectual worker, academic professional, and gendered, domestic, social, political and economic agent.⁸

Such a view of the prolixity of new historical discourse is in my view greatly to be preferred to attempts to reduce Greenblatt and the other Cultural Poetics practitioners to one-dimensional advocates of ‘containment’—a reduction which, as I will attempt to demonstrate below for the central case of Greenblatt, cannot be sustained in a careful review of his central critical works.

II

In his landmark *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), Greenblatt developed a unique theoretical scaffolding that drew heavily on Foucault’s theories of power, and the considerably less radical theorist, the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz—with numerous additional borrowings from Lacan’s structuralist psychoanalysis, the young (and old) Marx, and an array of Renaissance scholars and historians of early English colonialism in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.

His methodology, although on close inspection displaying more than a few continuities with an older historicism, was, as he deployed it, notable for its free-wheeling and even shocking juxtapositions of literary texts and historical materials. He was perhaps inspired by Foucault’s memorable introduction in the first chapter of *The Structure of Things*, with its *tour de force* analysis of the painting *Las Meninas* by Velazquez, or the unforgettable description of the torture and execution of the regicide Damians in *Discipline and Punish*. Typically a Greenblatt chapter or article is begun with a vivid incident—at times from the life of the author of one of the texts to be discussed (as in the description of the dinner party that begins the discussion of Thomas More), at times (as in the description of the pillage of a West African coastal village by English visitors in 1586 which opens the chapter on Marlowe), with an incident

which has no apparent direct connection with any literary text—‘arbitrary connectedness’, as Walter Cohen has called it.⁹

There have been other reactions to this method as well. ‘How does Greenblatt get away with it?’ a student of mine enquired confidentially after class one day, half in wonder, half in outrage, after puzzling over one too many transitions like the following: ‘If, on returning to England in 1587, the merchant and his associates had gone to see the Lord Admiral’s Men perform a new play, *Tamburlaine the Great*,’ Greenblatt writes at the end of his narration of the burning of the village, ‘they would have seen an extraordinary meditation on the roots of their own behavior.’¹⁰ This remarkable passage suggests the methodological freedom of Greenblatt’s historicism.

The startling juxtaposition, I would argue, however, is neither as random nor as arbitrary as it may appear at first glance or even as Cohen would have it. The juxtapositions are almost always aesthetically calculated and theoretically motivated. They attempt to link in startling combinations the very categories which an older (New Critical, ‘humanist’, ‘modernist’) criticism had set up as ideological opposites, the differentiation of which constituted the privileged sphere of the literary and aesthetic: that is, the political and the literary. The brutal destruction of a village, the innocent production of a play—this juxtaposition is an Eisensteinian montage and Benjaminesque allegory¹¹ —figures which startle us with their surprising, ideology-defying linkages, and constitute an undefined thesis to be explored conceptually in the free-wheeling essay to follow. The historical incident reveals a structure of values or of practices of Elizabethan culture which becomes a heuristic lens through which to focus on aspects of the texts which a previous era of aestheticist critical theory had forbidden. Even if, at times, we leave dissatisfied with the actual connection Greenblatt has attempted to make—as I do particularly in the already mentioned ‘Invisible bullets’, to which I will return shortly—the attempt itself remains exhilarating and eye-opening. It is a method at once responsive to several themes of poststructuralist literary theory, yet concrete and rooted in material history, and its influence in Renaissance studies is already pervasive, even if few if any practitioners write with Greenblatt’s unique talents and style.¹²

Greenblatt was widely understood by readers of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* to have modelled his solution to this problem from the early, ‘structuralist’ Foucault, for whom subversion was an effect created by power in order to perpetuate and even constitute itself, so that virtually any instance of resistance to power could be seen as actually in complicity with the power which it appears to resist.¹³

A closer look reveals that even in 1980 Greenblatt was reluctant to give the ‘containment’ effect the last word, even in his reading of Marlowe—who to my mind is the canonical English Renaissance writer who best fits the theory, classically in *Dr Faustus*. Certainly for Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Marlowe’s charismatic Nietzschean heroes, like Tamburlaine and Faustus, were actually ‘tragically bounded by the dominant ideology against

which they vainly struggle' (p. 214). But in the conclusion of the chapter (and in the following chapter on Shakespeare's *Othello*), Greenblatt seems to swerve away from this function to define instead a compensating *aesthetic* effect (which later gets taken up and developed in *Shakespearean Negotiations*):

If the audience's perception of radical difference gives way to a perception of subversive identity, that too in its turn gives way: in the *excessive* quality of Marlowe's heroes, in their histrionic extremism, lies that which distinguishes their self-fashioning acts from the society around them.... [T]hrough the power of language men construct deceptions in which and for which they live.

(pp. 214–15)

Similarly, on *Othello* he writes:

In Shakespeare's narrative art, liberation from the massive power structures that determine social and psychic reality is glimpsed in an *excessive* aesthetic delight, an erotic embrace of those very structures—the embrace of a Desdemona whose love is more deeply unsettling than even a [*sic*] Iago's empathy.

(P. 254)

This notion of the aesthetic represents a return—at least for this 'moment' of the analysis—to the notion of a Utopian function for art, first developed by Ernst Bloch, elaborated and deepened by Adorno and Benjamin, and disseminated in North America in the 1970s in a number of works by Fredric Jameson.¹⁴

Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988) is an attempt to apply this methodology to examples of each of Shakespeare's major genres: history, comedy, tragedy, and romance. But genre turns out to be less significant than is the attempt to locate the cultural forms which the plays utilize to constitute their peculiar political and aesthetic statements, and the book's strong point is the theory of the relation of art and politics presented in chapter 1 and developed in a different way in each of the following four chapters. While the book is the repository of a final, expanded version of that quintessence of 'containment' theory, 'Invisible bullets', the other chapters appear to have abandoned 'containment' theory as anything but a local, provisional effect of some but not all Elizabethan/Jacobean cultural productions—a position very similar to Dollimore's limited, 1990 interpretation of 'containment'. But the key question in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, it seems to me, is the relation of art and politics, rather than that between power and subversion. It is true that in the fourth and presumably final version of 'Invisible bullets', given here as chapter 2 and expanded with new sections on 2 *Henry IV* and *Henry V*,¹⁵ the much-contested containment theory seems to survive unchanged, encapsulated in the formula, developed once in the body and repeated as the essay's closing sentence, "There

is subversion, no end of subversion, only not for us' (p. 39 and p. 65). The explanation for this melancholy dictum is Greenblatt's claim that we are only able to recognize as subversive the themes of the plays which are no longer subversive *for us*: since we are democrats, we recognize anti-monarchical materials which were presumably repressed by the work of Elizabethan ideology within Shakespeare's audience. But as for the truly alien materials, threatening of our own culture, within the texts—absolute monarchism, demonology, and so on—we dismiss them through the power of our own cultural values and concepts, just as, Greenblatt argues, the Elizabethan audience must have done in the case of the material we find subversive of *their* culture.

As I will argue below, Leah Marcus developed a much more plausible explanation of the reaction of the contemporary audience to 'subversion' in Shakespeare. And, as has so often been pointed out in connection with aspects of the early Foucault, whose monolithic notion of the *episteme* led him to similar conclusions, this argument makes it impossible to understand how historical change, revolutionary or otherwise, is ever possible in the context of such epistemological iron cages. But what is worth stressing here is that elsewhere in *Shakespearean Negotiations* this argument silently disappears, and a version of the critique I have been summarizing finds its way into the opening chapter:

But I grew increasingly uneasy with the monolithic entities that my work had posited.... I had tried to organize the mixed motives of Tudor and Stuart culture under the rubric *power*, but that term implied a structural unity and stability of command belied by much of what I actually knew about the exercise of authority and force in the period.

If it was important to speak of power in relation to Renaissance literature—not only as the object but as the enabling condition of representation itself—it was equally important to resist the integration of all images and expressions into a single master discourse.... Even those literary texts that sought most ardently to speak for a monolithic power could be shown to be the sites of institutional and ideological contestation.¹⁶

If, charitably, we wish to re-integrate 'Invisible bullets' into this new context, it can only be through an interpretation like Dollimore's, summarized above: containment is a contingent outcome of *some* subversions. However, the opening chapter leaves the subversion-and-containment problematic behind, instead giving us a deftly woven reflection on how to conceptualize a notion of the theatre which would treat it as one social practice among others, with a necessary relation to the props of political and ecclesiastical power, but a social practice with some extraordinary privileges and properties because of its status as a site of entertainment and representation, a status which gave it 'an unusually broad license to conduct its negotiations and exchanges with surrounding institutions, authorities, discourses, and practices' (p. 12).

In short, where some other new historicists have tended to compensate for a previous era of narrowly aestheticizing criticism of Shakespeare by producing a narrowly politicizing reaction, Greenblatt is attempting to do justice to an undifferentiated society in which, as he puts it, one still needs to distinguish between an 'aesthetic dimension of a social practice' and a 'social dimension of an aesthetic practice' (p. 147). This leads Greenblatt to his intriguing if not fully realized notion, alluded to in the book's title, of the theatre as enacting 'exchanges' and 'negotiations' with the society around it, taking in and transforming ideological and social material, sending it back out as art and entertainment (which in turn influences ideologies) in a kind of economic circulation of social energy. The material is not the same at all points of the exchange, and this is Greenblatt's crucial rejoinder to more homogenizing political criticism. When Shakespeare takes details from the anti-Catholic polemics against Jesuit exorcisms found in Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, and puts them in the mouth of the deposed Edgar in his disguise as the madman Tom O'Bedlam in *King Lear*, those in the audience familiar with Harsnett's indictment of exorcism as fraudulent, merely theatrical, will find themselves involved in a vertiginous moment of interpretation when they try to link the exposure of fraudulent theatrics with the action of this play. Greenblatt is not trying to revive the old theory that Shakespeare was a secret Catholic, but he does report one dizzying moment when, in the context of the polemics around exorcism at the time, the character Edgar seems more than anything like a hounded Jesuit priest in fear for his life because of the day's repressive religious statutes.

But Greenblatt's main point is to add another layer of meaning to the famously overdetermined moment when Lear points at the huddled Edgar/Tom and identifies him as 'unaccommodated man', 'the thing itself': given the context of Harsnett's argument, the effect is, among other possibilities, to figure humanity as theatricality itself, as stage illusion. It is a dark vision, but it matches the savage affect of much of this great play, and Greenblatt makes a cogent argument for it. And the example gives a hint of the fruitful complexity which Greenblatt understands as involved in the negotiations between the theatre and its surrounding social practices, a complexity which attempts to preserve both aesthetic and political dimensions of the plays.

This conception has the merit of maintaining a differentiation between the theatre and the surrounding society while expressing a profound connection as well. In my reading of *Shakespearean Negotiations*, then, the monolithic containment thesis of 'Invisible bullets' (a first version of which had appeared in 1981, only a year after the publication of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*), is a survival of an older approach to the problem which becomes transformed elsewhere in the book, notably in chapter 1 and the essay on *King Lear*. As mentioned, perhaps it should be understood as an assertion by Greenblatt of *one* of the possible outcomes of the power-and-subversion problem in Shakespeare. In any case, he is quite specific that *Lear* 'seems to confirm the official line, and

thereby to take its place in the central system of values, yet at the same time works to unsettle all official lines' (p. 128). And in the opening chapter, 'The circulation of social energy', Greenblatt, as I have tried to indicate, seems much nearer to the critics of containment than to anything else as he describes the way in which the Renaissance theatre was both under the duress of power *and* able to escape from underneath it by virtue of the cracks and fissures, the confusions and contradictions, that constituted power in that (and every other) epoch.

In short, the differences on containment and subversion between Greenblatt's cultural poetics and Dollimore and Sinfield's cultural materialism, which seemed so clear in 1985, seem to have vaporized in the meantime.

What really rankles with Greenblatt's more politically committed critics, as I read the situation, has much less to do with his critical methodology than with the (a-)political rhetoric with which he surrounds it, even though his writings are explicitly intertextual with numerous explicitly Marxist or politically radical theorists (Benjamin, Lukács, Althusser, Habermas, Foucault, and Marx himself, to name a few ofteninvoked figures). Clearly, Greenblatt and other American new historicists have recapitulated numerous themes of an older, Marxist tradition of literary studies: the need to situate the text in history, the informing influence within the text of social and political ideologies and interests; the interrelation between ruling ideas and ruling classes; the suspicion of politics-denying, aestheticist theories of Renaissance texts; the refusal to take a historically formed bourgeois subjectivity as a universal human category. And yet New Historicism, most explicitly in its most accomplished and best-known practitioner Greenblatt, has tried to put distance between itself and a Marxist label which has numerous other possible significations in non-academic America.

Greenblatt himself, characteristically, explains his relation to Marxism with an anecdote:

In the 1970s I used to teach courses with names like 'Marxist Aesthetics' on the Berkeley campus. This came to an inglorious end when I was giving such a course—it must have been in the mid-1970s—and I remember a student getting very angry with me. Now it's true that I tended to like those Marxist figures who were troubled in relation to Marxism—Walter Benjamin, the early rather than the later Lukács, and so forth—and I remember someone finally got up and screamed out in class 'You're either a Bolshevik or a Menshevik—make up your fucking mind', and then slammed the door. It was a little unsettling, but I thought about it afterwards and realized that I wasn't sure whether I was a Menshevik, but I certainly wasn't a Bolshevik. After that I started to teach courses with names like 'Cultural Poetics'.¹⁷

What is one to make of this? On its face, it is an explanation of a wish not to participate in a discourse characterized by this particular style of raucous polemic

—and simple-minded logic. There are certainly strong emotions involved in reactions to Greenblatt's choices in the 1990s as well, as I discovered at the Tokyo World Shakespeare Conference, at the session on Marxism and Shakespeare studies, in summarizing a paper in which I had in part tried to define how much of Greenblatt's theoretical practice has been indebted to the Marxist tradition. 'Stephen Greenblatt is no Marxist!' came one reply from the floor. And my attempt led a well-known poststructuralist-minded panelist to attempt to settle the question through recourse to 'what Marxists have always believed', even in that multicultural, postmodern setting of shifting discourses and identities.

Whether one approves of it or not, Greenblatt's refusal to wear the label 'Marxist' is at least consistent with the postmodern problematic of unstable identities, decentred discourses, and textualist approaches to ideology. My point here is not to attempt to adjudicate whether Greenblatt 'is' or 'is not' a Marxist; it is rather to diagnose a possible reason for the widespread perception of Greenblatt as a monolithic theorist of 'containment', when, as I read them, his own texts are much more complex and nuanced.

III

What much of the debate about containment and subversion has omitted, it seems to me, is a focus on the changing position of art and culture within contemporary life, with its inevitable effects on how a consummate aesthetic icon like Shakespeare is perceived in the late twentieth century. Contemporary art and literature emerged from the watershed turmoil of the Vietnam war era—if I may venture some rather large, tentative generalizations for the sake of self-situation—having definitively broken with a modernist past which had been under piecemeal attack for some time previously anyway. Most tattered was the older High Modernist deliberate separation from pop culture and a related cult of uncritical subjectivity, supposedly grounded 'organically' in the eternal verities of great art; but in the sixties and seventies this stance's often belligerent male chauvinism and elitist cultural presumptions began to undermine whatever moral legitimation it had accrued in the era of Cold War conformism, ultimately serving to reveal its ideological and theoretical status. The autonomous subject—even in a Nietzschean dance over a textualist abyss—could no longer serve as an unquestioned ground for contemporary literary practice—or theory.

A new generation of artists and writers, then, in the complex, partly conscious, partly unconscious choreography of cultural paradigm shifts, began to construct a new aesthetic paradigm in this context. For our purposes here, I want to assume that the complex, nuanced but far from problem-free depiction of the postmodern by Fredric Jameson is the most adequate of a plethora of treatments of the subject.¹⁸ One of the most interesting features of Jameson's article for my purposes, however, is its reproduction, in terms of the position of art in the twentieth century, of the containment-and-subversion debate which has

dominated so much of the recent discussion of the Early Modern period. This reproduction occurs at a crucial point in Jameson's complex argument: he is troubled that in moving beyond Modernism and its critical distance from the commercialism of popular culture, postmodern art has been absorbed into the newly decentred and electronically aestheticized commodity exchange system of late capitalism and has consequently lost the crucial oppositional quality of the works of modernists like Kafka and Brecht—or even, given a broad enough understanding of the term 'oppositional', of those of political reactionaries like Wyndham Lewis, T.S.Eliot, or Ezra Pound. In the coda of his article and in a number of postscripts to it, Jameson seems to back away from this implication, and he insists that with the right 'mapping', and further development, postmodern art can attain a critical dimension at least as oppositional as that of the Modernism which it has largely replaced. After all, I might interpolate, the hermetic autonomy of Modernism was revealed as a critical, anti-capitalist autonomy only when Benjamin and Adorno theorized the unconscious relation to commodity production, the circulation of capital, etc.—issues which it is Jameson's intention to interject into the debate over Postmodernism.

But Jameson's ambivalence should be quite familiar to students of recent Renaissance literary criticism: it reproduces the ambivalence of the containment-and-subversion debate as well as the related question of the political quiescence (or lack of it) of New Historicism. This convergence, as I see it, is only one of several connections between the newer criticisms in Shakespeare and Renaissance studies and Postmodernism more generally.¹⁹

The force of (the *avant-garde* portion) of the writers' and artists' communities' paradigm-shift toward Postmodernism—a shift which, as Jameson argues, is itself a reaction to much more global changes in the organization of memory, sensation, time and space in the wake of the post-World War II technologies and economies—has had a major impact on Renaissance literary studies since at least 1980. With its critique of Enlightenment rationality and its abandonment of an earlier structuralist scientism, poststructuralism has made possible a new rapprochement between 'art' and 'criticism'—which becomes possible, too, because contemporary art, expanded into new electronic media and with a new, extremely porous boundary with popular culture, is no longer 'art' at all as high modernists understood the term. But High Modernism first declined, then survived in academic museums for a while, and finally has given way to the series of experiments loosely called Postmodernism.

There have been, I have argued elsewhere, crucial postmodernist connections with all of the newer critical tendencies in Early Modern and Shakespeare studies since about 1980, whether we are discussing textualist deconstruction, several versions of feminism, cultural materialism or cultural poetics.²⁰ Two key aspects of postmodernist artistic practice are most relevant to the newer critical methods: the end of organic unity and the end of stable hierarchies as formal aesthetic properties of the art-work (or text) in favour of aesthetics of disjuncture and undecidability. These qualities are virtually self-evident in textualist

deconstruction and in the Greenblatt school of Cultural Poetics. Less evident, perhaps because of its self-conscious political agenda, has been the postmodernist connection of the anti-hierarchical method of feminism in Renaissance studies from *The Woman's Part* on—a method which has allowed suppressed feminist voices and interpretations to arise around texts which had long resisted them and thereby displayed inversions of older hierarchies which had privileged ‘art’ or ‘literature’ over (mere) sociology or ideology—to say nothing of the ancient hierarchy of the masculine over the feminine. Without attempting to privilege one over the other, I would argue that academic feminism and academic Postmodernism are complexly intertwined, mutually reinforcing discourses, occasional guerrilla engagements notwithstanding.

The great virtue of many of these newer postmodernist critical methods does not in my view lie in the ‘historicist’ turn which has accompanied the most recent developments in the field. As Howard Felperin recently demonstrated with remarkable clarity, both British and American practitioners of New Historicism are theoretically weakest in justifying their own historicism—in their accounts of historical truth and narrative.²¹ More than one commentator has seen the clear continuity between the new and the old historicism,²² a continuity which the revaluations and refunctionings involved in a move to anti-nationalist and anti-imperialist politics and to more sophisticated theories of interpretation cannot disguise. Historicist approaches to literature developed early in the twentieth century as part of the general ‘professionalization’ of literary studies as English sought a more rigorous disciplinary stance to take its place among the disciplines of the new, highly positivistic research universities, first in the United States, later in the United Kingdom. Historicism became popular because it provided a semblance of the ‘objective’ knowledge and methodology which is the hallmark of any professionalism, yet avoiding what was widely perceived as the aridity of an earlier philological approach.²³

What now seems the central problem of historicist interpretation—how to deal adequately with the otherness of the past, given the unavoidability of perceiving it through our own epistemological ‘lenses’—was barely recognized by the earlier historicists, as a quick rereading of Tillyard’s now notorious *Elizabethan World Picture* would demonstrate. But even more theoretically aware new historicists have found the problem intractable: ‘I understand my scholarly and critical task in this book, then, as something akin to wriggling out of my cultural skin, much as someone might wriggle out of a particularly close-fitting turtleneck shirt’ is how one of them puts it.²⁴ Critics writing from this stance have the unenviable (I would say approachable but finally impossible) task of rising above their own consciousness, their own culture, their own ideologies. But all too often this has meant the substitution of a second twentieth-century ideology in place of the one the critic has identified and is attacking. In the case of the New Historicism, the culturalist, aestheticizing tradition of Matthew Arnold, Leavis, the New Critics, and Northrop Frye is often seen as the enemy to be overcome (e.g. Tennenhouse, pp. 1–7, *et passim*), its tactics of reading ‘the

texts themselves' rightly diagnosed as a matter of constructing Renaissance texts through the aesthetic suppositions and categories of twentieth-century thought. At the same time, however, there has been little recognition that historicism itself is precisely a post-Enlightenment critical procedure. Note, for example, how 'natural' the turn to historicism seems in the opening of an influential essay by Jonathan Goldberg:

Only the present generation of literary critics has viewed Renaissance literature as a field for formal, rather than historical, investigation. Before the second world war, things were exactly the opposite, and it was against the relentless historicising that passed as literary criticism that the new criticism was born.²⁵

But in the context of academic criticism, defining a historicist grid of supposedly Renaissance cultural assumptions amounts to the construction of a power/knowledge nexus for a profession now claiming legitimacy to authorize and disauthorize interpretations of a politically contested twentieth-century cultural icon: Shakespeare. For whom is the historicized 'political' reading of Shakespearean texts being constructed, we might ask? For what political purposes in the present? What is so important about routing the aestheticized Shakespeare in favour of an (often authoritarian, monarchist) 'political' one?

It is certainly the case that the modern division between the political and the aesthetic is the product of a post-Enlightenment, differentiated society and that critics who impose a purely 'aesthetic' reading on Shakespeare's plays are being anachronistic, since those plays were written in a period preceding such a differentiation. But is not a relentless pursuit of 'political' readings as anachronistically differentiating, but from the other 'side' of the modern divide, as those aestheticizing critics who have been the targets of such recent disdain? Are not such suppositions as guilty of imposing a post-Enlightenment category—the political—on Renaissance texts, as an earlier, aestheticizing criticism was?

The only way out of this, in my view, is a straightforward self-situation in the postmodern era on the grounds that there is no other choice, except that of disguising the set of concepts which one inevitably uses to approach and 'read' an alien culture. It is not necessary to give up historicism, but to contextualize it. Indeed, at the present juncture in Renaissance and Shakespeare studies, it seems no longer viable to be simply 'presentist' *or* to be simply historicist; we are forced to define an adequate dialectic between the two, as the best of the new work, including that of Dollimore and Sinfield (often explicitly) and of Greenblatt (more often implicitly) has attempted. In particular, there is an important insight in the claims by Dollimore and others that Postmodernism's status as a post-Enlightenment paradigm allows it to provide a privileged epistemological 'fit' with the pre-Enlightenment Renaissance, if one that can never dissolve the difference between early modern and postmodern. What is

now needed in my view is a much better accounting of the postmodern inscriptions of historicizing theories.

There are certainly critics at work whose approaches to historicism provide important pieces for a model of what a more self-consciously theorized, explicitly postmodern historicism might look like. Jonathan Goldberg and Lawrence Venuti have both explicitly addressed this issue, for example.²⁶ In the context of a discussion of containment and subversion, however, the outstanding example to my mind is Leah Marcus's *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents*.²⁷ If I am reading her correctly, however, there is no claim that her focus on topical allusions is a necessary or sole entry into historical otherness (see, for example, the comments in the introductory chapter widening 'local' readings to include other new historicists and cultural materialists). The entry through the topical is rather a corrective to an earlier false universalization of the text and repression of the resistant local detail, an opening to historical difference, and an alternative to the essentially modernist suppositions which constituted so much of the background of the previous generation's criticism.

It is possible, however, to achieve many of these objectives with other methodologies, and ones which make use of broader, less 'local' historical trends than those in use there. And if Marcus herself has pointed out several ways in which the pre-modern Otherness of the Renaissance was clearly in transition and contained aspects of a modernity to be more systematically constituted in the Enlightenment—the idea of the author, the universality of Art, for example—it is possible to read in the Shakespearean texts the inscriptions of historical themes which take on interest in the late twentieth century because of a continuity rather than a difference with our own perceptual and institutional world. I am thinking specifically of two new phenomena very much a part of Shakespeare's texts and of ours—the workings of reified power systems in the institutions of the state and the market economy. In Shakespeare's text these often take on the aura of a monstrosity or of an alien entity, whereas for us they are natural, indeed, inevitable, and in that sense retain a degree of alterity in Shakespeare—an alterity which gives them therefore a critical force in our own day.

In recognizing the crucial impact of the present on how we constitute the past in the production of historical knowledge, then, I think it is possible to resist the epistemological temptation of reducing history to the status of a blank screen on which are only projected the shadows of the present which we mistake for the past. We can think of critical paradigms' relation to the past in something of the way that T.S.Kuhn thought of scientific ones in relation to a Nature which is never 'directly' encountered. There is no guarantee of the positive adequacy of the new paradigms' representations of reality, but they replace older paradigms now perceived as inadequate by explaining many (but never all) of the problems and puzzles which had resisted the explanatory powers of the older methods, and thus merit a pragmatic and provisional acceptance pending more use and possible modification.²⁸ It is just such periods of 'normal science' which form

the (relatively) peaceful interludes between scientific revolutions, minor and major.

Thus it seems to me that Leah Marcus's rewriting of the containment-and-subversion problem in *Puzzling Shakespeare* is a more consistent, developed, and plausible account of the potentially subversive subtexts of Shakespearean drama than Greenblatt's ingenious argument. For Marcus, the relation of Shakespeare's plays to monarchical power depends decisively on the suppositions of the audience which is watching the play. At court, for example, in front of King James on St Stephen's Night, 1606, *King Lear*, particularly in its implied excoriation of a divided kingdom, could be understood as among other things a passionate endorsement of James's favourite (but never achieved in his lifetime) project of a Union of England and Scotland into a single nation.

Performed in a public theatre, other aspects of the play's text, such as the allusions to diabolic possessions around the character Tom O'Bedlam, developed by Greenblatt, whose reading she endorses, or the implied questioning of the orthodox doctrine of Divine Providence which underlay theories of monarchical legitimacy, for that matter, would provoke other, ultimately anti-Jamesian reactions—particularly among those predisposed to them.

According to Marcus Shakespeare's plays are examples of a kind of 'double writing' (intentional in her view, but the question of intentionality is not a major issue) which allowed them to be interpreted disparately above and beyond the 'normal' textuality which deconstructive theory posits to be the condition of all ordinary language. By bringing into the debate questions of concrete audiences and their relation to interpretation while maintaining a strong consciousness of her own situatedness in the late twentieth century, Marcus creates a suggestive stance toward the creation of a postmodern Shakespeare.

IV

The inadequacies of the positivist and modernist critical paradigms of the day before yesterday have swum quite clearly into view: almost all of them involve a projection onto a pre-Enlightenment past of assumptions and categories which trace their genealogy back to the Enlightenment or its sequent periods. The Renaissance of positivist historians was a single-minded authoritarian culture of obedient links in a stately hierarchical chain with cultural documents of stable, affirmative, and unitary meanings; the modernist Renaissance was one of autonomous art-works free of all but superficial contamination by the swirling debris of historical flotsam and productive of an idealized realm from which the spiritual squalor of twentieth-century life could be serenely surveyed. With the clarity of focus provided by the new critical paradigms of our own day, all the failings, inconsistencies, and omissions of those earlier critical programmes are only too clearly revealed. Much of the terrain has already been well mapped as we leave behind the Enlightenment battery of critical concepts centred on a transcendent author, unproblematic transhistorical subjectivity and value, and

unity of meaning,²⁹ and, as is widely appreciated, a new early modern period emerges, one in which 'literature' as we know it did not yet exist, and in which poems and plays are complexly connected with every other cultural ebb and flow of the time, when 'authorship' was a far from established cultural form, when meaning and interpretation was as unstable and disjunctive as the fictive Hamlet and the historical Montaigne insisted, and perhaps most centrally, when the individual self was constituted through processes and logic far less unitary and less stable than those of the classical bourgeois epoch.

If this remarkable postmodern/early modern convergence is to be more than a passing fashion, however, both the limits of the convergence and the conditions which make it possible will need to be spelt out in much greater detail than has hitherto been the case. Clearly, it seems to me the convergence hinges on the waning of important aspects of Enlightenment discourses as constitutive of our own thinking in the late twentieth century. The historical adequacy of this new/old period can only hinge in turn on the adequacy of the theory which underlies the production of the newer knowledge—theories of culture, of interpretation, of historical change and its impact on all these concepts. If, as some suggested several years ago, the New Historicism was championed by many as a way to bypass the rigours of 'theory', it will turn out, on the contrary, I believe, to have been a way-station back into an indispensable and intellectually alive matrix of cultural theory, firmly grounded in the discourses of the present, as the only adequate way to achieve Stephen Greenblatt's admirable desire to speak with the dead.

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NOTES

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- 1 See Jonathan Dollimore, 'Shakespeare, cultural materialism, and the new historicism', in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 2–17, and Alan Sinfield, 'Power and ideology: an outline theory and Sidney's *Arcadia*', *English Literary History*, 52 (1985) pp. 259–77, for perhaps the two most influential documents of this process.
- 2 Catherine Belsey, 'Towards cultural history—in theory and practice', *Textual Practice*, 3, 2 (Summer 1989), pp. 159–72.
- 3 Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'Culture and textuality: debating cultural materialism', *Textual Practice*, 4, 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 91–100. This co-written article is divided into separately signed portions; it is Dollimore's section that I am solely interested in here.

- 4 'Subversion may indeed be appropriated by authority for its own purposes'—Dollimore, 'Shakespeare, cultural materialism, and the new historicism', p. 12.
- 5 As many readers will recall, Catherine Belsey in the article discussed above also speaks of Postmodernism as an orienting problematic for literary studies—one of several general goals in her article which I (and many others) endorse. Within this general agreement, however, exist important differences which in fact constitute the bulk of the issues discussed in this essay. Crucially as I see it, Belsey's call for 'cultural history' lacks the critique of historicism and professionalism which, as I will argue below, seems to me essential; and, as I have argued, she ends up reproducing the containment-and-subversion debate as a major problematic for Renaissance studies.
- 6 Several recent studies escape this criticism by focusing on situating Shakespeare studies in the social, political and aesthetic context of the present and recent past: see Terence Hawkes, *That Shakespeherian Rag: Essays on a Critical Process* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986); Graham Holderness (ed.), *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Michael Bristol, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989); Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History 1642–1986* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989); and my own *The Modernist Shakespeare: Critical Texts in a Material World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). In press as I write is a follow-up work to the pioneering *That Shakespeherian Rag* which takes up the issue of the relation between cultural materialism and the new historicism: Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- 7 In this regard, British cultural materialism, with its emphasis in works by Terence Hawkes, Graham Holderness, Dollimore and Sinfield and others on the social functions of Shakespeare and Renaissance literature in the present, has much less distance to cover than does American cultural poetics. The influence of an activist Left and a presentist cultural studies movement has been much more palpable in Britain than in North America, as several commentators have noted.
- 8 'Professing the Renaissance: The poetics and politics of culture', in *The New Historicism*, ed. H.Aram Veeser (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 19.
- 9 'Political criticism of Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E.Howard and Marion F.O'Connor (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 34.
- 10 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 194.
- 11 On Walter Benjamin's development of Eisenstein's and Brecht's related theories of collage and montage in an expanded theory of allegory, which in turn has influenced such poststructuralists as Barthes and de Man, see Gregory Ulmer, 'The object of post-criticism', in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 83–110. All these notions involve a juxtaposition of images/ideas producing shock—and new recognitions and understandings.
- 12 In addition to the writers to be discussed directly below or already named, one should mention Louis Montrose and Jonathan Goldberg as writers using a critical paradigm with recognizable relation to Greenblatt's.

- 13 See Sinfield, *op. cit.*, for a particularly cogent explanation and critique of the Foucault—Greenblatt connection.
- 14 It is an instance of a part of Greenblatt's text which resists even the nuanced description of Catherine Gallagher's revealing article on New Historicism and Marxism ('Marxism and the New Historicism', in Veenser (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 37–48)—and an important instance of how, even in the case of Marlowe, subversion is not simply and completely 'contained'. Gallagher, a founding member of the editorial board of the new historicist journal *Representations*, addresses the problem explicitly in her article. For her New Historicism emerged from New Left practice in the sixties and seventies in revolt against the anti-Stalinist synthesis of Modernism and Marxism forged by the New York intellectuals of the forties and fifties—specifically a revolt against its Adorno-esque idealization of art as uniquely resistant to capitalism's otherwise universal commodification of the lifeworld. This amounted to an exemption from analysis of art's ideological and socially complicit dimensions, and the New Historicism, without returning—at least intentionally—to any of the old Stalinist orthodoxies, has sought to question precisely the apparent exemption of art from political analysis. In so doing New Historicism thus has distanced itself from both Stalinist and anti-Stalinist Marxism—except, as Gallagher recognizes in her conclusion, 'many of the points I'm making here come from inside the Marxist tradition; Lukács, Adorno, Althusser, indeed, Marx himself all warned against subordinating theory, critique, or historical scholarship to practical political goals. New historicism confronts Marxism now partly as an amplified record of Marxism's own edgiest, uneasiest voices' (p. 47).
- 15 Something of Greenblatt's influence is reflected in the fact that the chapter had appeared in print as a (shorter) essay on three previous occasions: *Glyph*, 8 (1981), pp. 40–61; *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Dollimore and Sinfield, pp. 18–47; and *Shakespeare's 'Rough Magic': Renaissance Essays in Honor of C.L. Barber*, ed. Peter Erickson and Coppelia Kahn (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), pp. 30–52.
- 16 Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 2–3.
- 17 'Towards a poetics of culture', in Veenser, *op. cit.*, p. 2. However, in an interesting aside, Greenblatt immediately adds: 'It's true that I'm still more uneasy with a politics and a literary perspective that is untouched by Marxist thought, but that doesn't lead me to endorse propositions or embrace a particular philosophy, politics, or rhetoric, *faute de mieux*.'
- 18 *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991). The main theoretical statement I am drawing from is chapter 1, originally published as 'Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism', *New Left Review*, 146 (July–August, 1984), pp. 53–92.
- 19 Jameson himself was drawing from the long-standing discussion within Western Marxism, from Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1922) on, with Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* being perhaps the best-known work in this line. The discussion has attempted to theorize capitalism's apparent ability to contain anti-capitalist insurgencies, with explanations constructed in terms of Marx's theory of alienation, psycho-analysis, pervasive commercial culture, etc.—it is the line out of which contemporary cultural studies have in fact emerged. In the present context I should mention *Telos* editor Paul Piccone's theory of 'artificial

negativity', which diagnosed the political Left as needed, produced, and contained by late capitalism to counter an inherent tendency toward intellectual stagnation. Surely this thesis anticipates the most totalizing features of Greenblatt's containment theory, but grounding them in the situation of the late twentieth century. See Paul Piccone, 'The crisis of one-dimensionality,' *Telos* 43 (Spring 1978), pp. 43–54.

- 20 Grady, op. cit., pp. 210–46.
- 21 See particularly two essays in his *The Uses of the Canon: Elizabethan Literature and Contemporary Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990): 'Marlowe our contemporary' and "'Cultural poetics'" versus "cultural materialism": the two new historicisms in Renaissance studies'.
- 22 For example, Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier, 'Introduction: the historical Renaissance', in *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988): 'the line between the "old" and the "new historicism" is notoriously difficult and often not very profitable to draw. Indeed, the term "cultural poetics", coined by Stephen Greenblatt, describes contemporary work more precisely than does his other coinage, "new historicism", while avoiding the misleading and invidious implication of a radical discontinuity between contemporary scholarship and everything that preceded it' (p. 3).
- 23 Grady, op. cit., pp. 63–73.
- 24 Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 11.
- 25 'The politics of Renaissance literature: a review essay,' *English Literary History* 49 (1982), pp. 514–42.
- 26 See Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986) and Lawrence Venuti, *Our Halcyon Days: English Prerevolutionary Texts and Postmodern Culture* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
- 27 *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
- 28 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
- 29 A particularly clear elaboration of the construction of all of these features of post-Enlightenment Shakespeare studies is provided by Margreta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

RICHARD LEVIN

*On defending Shakespeare, 'liberal
humanism', transcendent love, and other
'sacred cows'¹ and lost causes*

Since Linda Charnes, in her essay on *Antony and Cleopatra* (*Textual Practice*, 6, 1 (Spring 1992)), pays me the compliment of singling me out as a 'quixotic defender of Shakespeare and the values of humanist scholarship', I felt it would be only fair to pay her back by examining these charges and recycling them to her. To the first charge I plead not guilty. I have never tried or claimed to defend Shakespeare because it never occurred to me that he needed any defence; I think his plays will still be enjoyed and studied long after Charnes and I are gone and forgotten. Moreover, I have always been suspicious of critics who present themselves as his defenders—especially when this involves saving him from enemies who misrepresent him—for their defence so often turns out to be a demonstration that his attitudes toward life or art coincide with their own. This operation long preceded the current critical wars and was a prominent feature of the period dominated by New Criticism. Since most of the New Critics employed the thematic or ironic approaches, both of which construct a distinction between the text's apparent and its real meaning, it was very easy for them to discover that the real meaning of each text was what they wanted it to be—i.e. something that they themselves believed in. It thus became a standard procedure during this period to defend the Bard by appropriating him as 'unser Shakespeare': religious critics proved that his plays extolled the doctrines of Christianity (usually of their own branch), existentialist critics proved that he shared their existentialism, pacifist critics proved that he hated war, imperialist critics proved that he was one of them, and so on. And since the various sects of psychoanalytic criticism also searched for the real meaning underlying the apparent meaning of the plays, Freudians, Jungians, and Adlerians were able to reveal his remarkable foreknowledge of the theories of Freud, Jung, and Adler, respectively. We find this same tendency in what is now called the first wave of feminist criticism of Shakespeare, which defended him as a kind of proto-feminist whose plays condemned sexism and patriarchy.² Before the advent of poststructuralism, most Marxist critics were engaged in a similar defence. Aleksandr Smirnov, for example, praises the Shakespearean canon for 'the correctness of its basic ideology' since it celebrates bourgeois 'humanism' (which he regards as 'progressive' or 'revolutionary') and censures the bourgeoisie when they violated this 'ideal'.³ Thus Shakespeare became a kind of proto-marxist. We even have an

essay from this period titled 'William Shakespeare, conservative' that proves he 'was always a conservative' and refutes "'liberal" commentators [who] continue to repeat their fallacious moulding of the dramatist in their own political... images'.⁴ The author does not disclose *his* own political position, but I would bet my next sabbatical that it bears a striking resemblance to the conservatism he finds in Shakespeare.

It seems to me then that Charnes' essay does not oppose this defensive operation, as her charge against me implies, but actually reproduces it, since she too is defending Shakespeare, or at least *Antony and Cleopatra*, by arguing that the attitude toward (i.e. against) 'transcendent love' that he endorses there is the same as her own. And this defence involves saving him from enemies, the 'liberal humanist critics' (as we just saw the conservative Friesner saving him from "'liberal" commentators'), who 'misrecognize' the play's meaning as a celebration of 'transcendent love' because that is the attitude they believe in, which makes them her enemies as well as his. She acknowledges that they have not completely misread the play, since this positive attitude appears there; they just have not read deeply enough to see that it is subverted: 'the play itself deploys such rhetoric, but it does so only to demonstrate that "transcendent love" is a discursive strategy'; 'while on one level the play beckons us with the allure of [this attitude], on another level it demonstrates' its falsity; 'although the play encourages us to misrecognize [this love as transcendent], we see that' it is not; 'the play at once invites and refuses' this attitude. But this is the basic formula employed in the New Critical ironic readings, which regularly divide each text, as I noted above, into two levels of meaning—an apparent, surface level, that seems sympathetic to the values of the protagonist(s) and has taken in previous critics, and a real, deep level that undermines it and has been discovered by the writer of the reading. In the days before poststructuralism we had a number of such ironic or anti-romantic readings of *Antony and Cleopatra*, most of them by critics whom Charnes would label 'liberal humanists'.⁵ And I argue in an article cited by her that many poststructuralist readings also use a version of this formula—I term it 'the text taketh, but the text giveth (itself) away'—that is the same one she adopts, except that she still attributes the taking-but-giving (or inviting-but-refusing) strategy to the playwright ('Shakespeare's representation') rather than to a personified poststructuralized text.⁶ It seems clear then that, even though she says her 'concern is not to "rescue" the play', this is 'precisely' (to use one of her favourite words) what she is doing by showing that it affirms her own view of love instead of her enemies' view, which means that she is defending Shakespeare from them and so is guilty of the crime she accuses me of. And I am innocent, since I never felt the need to prove that Shakespeare is on my side.

I do not know how to plead to her second charge of defending 'humanist scholarship' or 'liberal humanism' because I am not sure what it means. Apparently it refers not to a specific critical approach or even to a specific political position (since she claims it 'reigns among educated middle-class

liberals and conservatives alike') but to a collection of general beliefs about life. However, as I tried to show in my articles on the 'bourgeois or humanist subject' (*Textual Practice*, 3, 1 (Spring 1989) and 6, 2 (Summer 1992)), the critics with whom Charnes associates herself have used the BHS and its purported ideology of 'liberal humanism' as an empty discursive space for dumping all the absurd beliefs they oppose, such as the idea that individuals are completely free and autonomous or that capitalism is natural, universal, and unchanging. And Charnes simply dumps another absurdity onto 'liberal humanism' by attributing to it the belief in a 'transcendent love' that is 'universalized, naturalized, and... essentialized', rather like capitalism. There certainly are people who believe this, but I do not think many of them are 'educated middle-class liberals', a group to which I happen to belong. We know that what is called romantic love cannot be universal, natural, or essential because it is socially constructed, and we know this because it is constructed differently in different societies. So on that point I agree with her, despite my alleged 'liberal humanism'. I also agree with her contention that the love between Antony and Cleopatra is thoroughly 'imbricated' with considerations of power and politics, even though this is supposed to contradict the 'humanist scholarship' that I am supposed to be defending.

Where we disagree is on the conclusions she draws from these obvious facts. Although she claims that she does not 'abrogate' their love, she clearly believes that because it is socially constructed and imbricated it must be devalued or seriously compromised, and must even be 'imaginary' since it becomes 'a constituent element of the power relations' that are, in contrast, 'real'. And she believes this is established by the play itself: 'in a play in which the political is set up as the "Real", Love becomes Antony's representation of his own "imaginary relationship to his real conditions of existence"'. (It seems that her Shakespeare has read Althusser, just as the existentialists' Shakespeare read Sartre and the Jungians' Shakespeare read Jung). But the constructed and imbricated nature of their love does not devalue it because this is true of all human relations, which never exist in a pure state. Her criticism of their relationship implies that she is judging it against the very ideal of a transcendentuniversal-natural-essential love that she attributes to 'liberal humanism'. (This is similar to the devaluation of 'bourgeois democracy', often heard on the academic left, because its citizens act under internal and external constraints and so are not really free, which posits an ideal of complete freedom that never could exist.) Moreover, there is no reason to conclude that their love is any less 'real' or any more 'imaginary' than those 'power relations', which are just as socially constructed and imbricated with other factors—unless, that is, one begins by assuming the old Marxist binary of a 'real' material base and an 'imaginary' ideological superstructure. Many poststructuralist Marxists, including Althusser, say they have jettisoned or at least modified this scheme, but it keeps turning up, in its usual 'vulgar' form, in their actual practice, as it

does in Charnes' reading of the play (and of course in the line she quotes from Althusser).

I must also disagree with Charnes' antihistorical stance. She does make a few gestures toward historical specificity, as in her reference to how 'Shakespeare's audience' reacted to the play (which she could not possibly know, since there is no evidence), but her basic argument seems to move in a realm above time. In fact her treatment of 'transcendent love' is itself transcendent, since she assumes that the idea functioned in much the same way from the period of the Homeric legends down to our Harlequin novels. (At one point, however, she asserts that this idea 'would not have been thinkable' in Shakespeare's day, forgetting that he must have been able to think of it since she says that his play 'deploys', 'invites', and 'beckons us with' it, as we saw earlier, and also that he has the play conduct an 'investigation' of it and 'subversively insist on asking' questions about it.) She also assumes that this idea necessarily promotes political oppression and even extends her condemnation to include 'any notion of transcendent anything', apparently because such notions are part of the ISAs or what Peter Widdowson sees as 'the huge confidence trick being played upon us' by our masters to keep us quiet.⁷ Thus she is guilty of the fallacy that Gerald Graff terms 'anti-essentialist essentialism', the belief that any essentialist idea is inherently evil, that it 'always and everywhere has the same (sinister) political consequences, irrespective of the contexts in which it functions', which is clearly antihistorical.⁸ Of course these ideas have often been used to legitimate oppressive practices, so it is easy to find examples to make her case against them; but it is just as easy to find examples on the opposite side. The ideal of romantic love, for instance, played a major role in eliminating arranged marriage, which enlarged the freedom of women (and men), and it is now being employed in the struggle for gay rights. Many progressive movements that I am sure she approves of appealed to the transcendent values of liberty, equality, and justice. Even her references to women's oppression imply such an appeal, for without those values how would we know that it is oppression, or that oppression is wrong? And in their war against fascism both capitalist and communist regimes invoked a transcendent love of country—in the USSR it was called The Great Patriotic War. Among transcendent ideas, like most other things in this life, there is nothing either good or bad but context makes it so.

This brings me finally to her charge that my critiques of the Marxist critics are 'quixotic'. I find it very strange that in the year 1992 this epithet is being applied to me rather than to them. If it refers to the nostalgic devotion to a lost cause, then surely it should be bestowed upon those critics, who are now completely isolated in the British and American academy and are still clinging to an ideology that has been abandoned just about everywhere else in the world.

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NOTES

- 1 Charnes uses this term but I would not, since it belongs (with 'fetish', 'white elephant', 'mumbo jumbo', 'witch doctor', etc.) to a racialist, colonialist discourse that delegitimizes the religious beliefs of the 'natives'.
- 2 This movement began with Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (London: Macmillan, 1975) and flourished, mainly in America, until about 1985. See *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); the special issues of *Women's Studies*, 9, 1–2 (1981–2), ed. Gayle Greene and Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, devoted to 'Feminist criticism of Shakespeare'; Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Marianne Novy, *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); and Carol Thomas Neely, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
- 3 *Shakespeare: A Marxist Interpretation*, trans. Sonia Volochova (New York: Critics' Group, 1936, reprinted 1970 and 1977), pp. 90–3. Most of the essays in *Shakespeare in a Changing World*, ed. Arnold Kettle (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1964), the (mainly British) Marxists' contribution to the quatercentenary festivities, defend him in the same sense. A notable exception in this period is Paul Delany, 'King Lear and the decline of feudalism', *PMLA*, 92 (1977), pp. 429–40, which argues that in this play Shakespeare is on the wrong side, since it reveals his 'nostalgia' for 'feudal-heroic values' and his inability 'to reconcile himself with the emerging bourgeois forces' (p. 439).
- 4 Donald Friesner, 'William Shakespeare, conservative', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 20 (1969), pp. 165–78 (see pp. 177–8).
- 5 See, e.g., John Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952), ch. 5; Franklin Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1957), chs 10–12; Virgil Whitaker, *The Mirror up to Nature: The Technique of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1965), ch. 7; Roy Battenhouse, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), ch. 3; and A.L.French, *Shakespeare and the Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), ch. 5.
- 6 'The poetics and politics of bardicide', *PMLA*, 105 (1990), pp. 491–504 (see p. 498). One of the readings I discuss there, Jean Howard's 'Renaissance antitheatricity and the politics of gender and rank in *Much Ado About Nothing*', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean Howard and Marion O'Connor (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 163–87, attacks 'humanist criticism' for misrecognizing the social conflict between Don John and Don Pedro as a moral issue, but admits that the play itself 'produce[s] moral differences' between them 'in ways that obscure the social differences' (p. 176), so here, as in Charnes' indictment, the enemy is only guilty of being taken in by the apparent level of meaning.
- 7 'Terrorism and literary studies', *Textual Practice*, 2, 1 (Spring 1988), pp. 1–21 (see p. 4).

- 8 'Co-optation', in *The New Historicism*, ed. H.Aram Veenser (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 168–81. His example is the appeal to essential human nature, which 'is often a way of rationalizing coercive social practices, but...in the recent American and South African racial struggles...the idea that there is an essential human nature that racist regimes violate has had an important "oppositional" effect' (p. 174). In fact we have a new creed called 'strategic essentialism' that allows people who reject essentialist ideas to use them anyway when it suits their purpose—see Jeffrey Decker, 'American studies—toward and beyond an antihumanist method: a reply to Bruce Kuklick and T.J.Jackson Lears', *New Literary History*, 23 (1992), pp. 313–17. The same is true of an appeal to universals; many 'oppositional' critics oppose them in theory but are willing to invoke them for a good cause: Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said signed a letter to the *New York Times* protesting against the persecution of Salman Rushdie because it violates 'the universal principles of rational discussion and freedom of expression' (17 February 1989, p. A38).

LINDA CHARNES

*Near misses of the nontranscendent kind: reply
to Richard Levin*

In 1989, in an article entitled 'Bashing the bourgeois subject', Richard Levin wrote that

Anyone who has tried to keep up with the current state of critical discourse does not need to be told that the Bourgeois or Humanist Subject (hereinafter abbreviated as BHS) is in very serious trouble. Something like a major industry has developed, primarily among the cultural materialists, new historicists, and feminist critics associated with them, which is devoted to BHS-bashing. *And since no one else has yet risen to the BHS's defence, I have reluctantly agreed to take on this thankless task* (my italics).¹

And in 1990, in an article entitled 'The poetics and politics of bardicide,' he avers that

a curious thing has happened to Shakespeare himself [*sic*]. Any trace of his responsibility for what goes on in these texts is being systematically occluded, and even his name, if it appears at all, is often placed under erasure by quotation marks.²

It was these declarations that prompted me, as Levin puts it, to 'pay [him] the compliment of singling [him] out' by referring to him as a 'quixotic defender of Shakespeare and the values of humanist scholarship'.³ Since Levin has in fact singled himself out as the spokesman of common sense in a field of *outré* radicals, it would have been an oversight not to acknowledge his own interventions in the current critical debates; and I did so out of professional punctilio (in a note, I might add: the only place in the text where Levin's name appears). Levin's rebuttal of my discussion in many ways reiterates the criticisms he has made of others, without paying adequate attention to what is unprogrammatic and interventionist about the form of my argument. The strengths of cultural materialism, new historicism, feminist and psychoanalytic theory, and poststructuralism reside largely in their nuanced readings of cultural texts rather than in whatever they may assay at the level of manifesto. It follows

that attempts to reduce these complex approaches to simple maxims can lead to missing crucial local points in *particular* texts. Since Catherine Belsey has already furnished a substantive reply to Levin's general attack on feminist, historicist, and materialist scholarship, I refer the reader to it; and will limit myself here to a few clarifying remarks about my particular aims in 'What's love got to do with it?'⁴

It was neither my desire nor my aim to identify 'enemies' (Levin, p. 51), 'crimes' (Levin, p. 52), to assign 'guilt' (Levin, p. 50) or to deliver a jeremiad about 'evil' (Levin, p. 53). To my mind such terms are at best inappropriate to critical debate and at worst overwrought and inflammatory; and nowhere do I use them in relation to critics with whom I disagree. It was also not my interest to single out particular Shakespearean critics who 'read the romance' but rather to identify a tendency—in the history of criticism of *Antony and Cleopatra* in particular and in current cultural modes of reading in general—to isolate the 'love story' from other kinds of narratives. My discussion is concerned not with what Shakespeare intended but rather with the cultural work performed by critically misrecognized texts and the symptomologies of reading: the way that many critics cancel the cumulative effect of certain kinds of evidence in an impulse to render love 'transcendent', to turn a blind eye toward the less celebratory narratives that love stories both contain and reorganize. This is not a matter of 'false consciousness', but, rather, of what Peter Sloterdijk has called '*enlightened false consciousness*', which can be expressed as 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it.'⁵

To read the way love has been read in Shakespeare's play in conjunction with how it has been read in Harlequin romances is not to be 'antihistorical' (Levin, p. 53), but rather, deliberately *indecorous*. To suggest that a Shakespearean tragedy—the epitome of textual high culture—offers a reader similar structures of psychosocial investment as a massproduced 'ladies' romance' (not to mention Steve Martin movies) is to breach the academic decorum that divides 'high' cultural from 'low' cultural texts: a breach that I wanted to honour as much in the practice as in the assertion. If Levin were to reread my article keeping what Janice Radway means by 'reading the romance' in mind, he would understand that my concern was not with hidden, deeper meanings that 'subvert' the surface of a Shakespearean text but rather how productive and coercive (rather than simply misguided or naïve) certain kinds of readings can be, particularly given American culture's mutually constitutive investments in sentimentality and martial machismo. I wanted to show how virtually any narrative or impulse—whether of misogyny, racism, imperialism, Oedipalism, class aggression, acquisitiveness, patriotism—can be smuggled into legitimacy by virtue of association with 'love' and other 'transcendent' terms.

Levin does want to argue for the positive power of transcendence, particularly in progressive causes. The problem, however, is that if one grants the power of transcendence for liberalism one must also, *ipso facto*, grant its power for conservatism. For every progressive invocation of the 'transcendent values of

liberty, equality, and justice' (Levin, p. 53) can also be administered by conservatives in the form of mandatory pledges of allegiance, or appeals to God, Country, Family Values, the New World Order, the Right to Life. Levin proves my note appropriate when he says that 'the ideal of romantic love...played a major role in eliminating arranged marriage, which enlarged the freedom of women (and men), and it is now being employed in the struggle for gay rights' (Levin, p. 53). I don't know how Levin defines the term 'romantic love', but if it played a role in eliminating arranged marriages it also played a major role in constructing the goddess/whore opposition, the virulent backlash of sexual misogyny, and the nuclear family in which the father/ husband continued to reign supreme over wife and children. The argument has very persuasively been made that romantic love, far from 'enlarging the freedom of women', actually achieved, in ways far more subtle and devastating, the reverse. Romantic love as a discursive system has been around a long time. Women's right to vote and control their own lives and bodies have not. Whatever gains feminism has achieved have come from challenging the tenets of romantic love rather than realizing its promised end. And I know few people working for gay rights who regard the kind of romantic love Levin extols as a liberating force. These people are far more concerned with winning basic legal rights to establish 'alternative' families and marriages, to legally be entrusted with property and 'spousal' medical benefits, and other more practical ideals.

To argue that 'many progressive movements...appealed to the transcendent values of liberty, equality, and justice' is to conflate making an appeal with securing results. I can certainly understand the desire to believe in the transcendence of such values, which is fine as long as one keeps sight of how notoriously difficult it has been historically to get the people who most loudly use such terms—whether presidents or supreme court justices—to put them into practice; and how often they are used as a way to silence, rather than to encourage, debate.

I respect the fact that in a time when much current theoretical criticism is being dismissed and demonized without even being read, Richard Levin reads what he critiques, and reads widely. I also acknowledge that those of us, myself included, working on critiques of ideology—liberal, humanist, or otherwise—must work harder to clarify distinctions and differentiate where it is necessary between the liberalism we critique in theory and that 'progressivism' which is under siege by a political right wing that recognizes no differences between critics like me and Richard Levin, and would like to see us both—along with the rest of the 'cultural elite'—out of business.

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NOTES

- 1 *Textual Practice*, 3, 1 (Spring 1989), p. 76.

- 2 *PMLA*, 105, 3 (May 1990), p. 491.
- 3 See 'What's love got to do with it? Reading the liberal humanist romance in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Textual Practice*, 6, 1 (Spring 1991), p. 15, note 17.
- 4 See Catherine Belsey, 'The subject in danger: a reply to Richard Levin', *Textual Practice*, 3, 1 (Spring, 1989), pp. 87–90.
- 5 See P. Sloterdijk, *A Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), esp. pp. 5–7. The phrase 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it' is Slavoj Žižek's paraphrase of Sloterdijk's notion of enlightened false consciousness. See *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 29.

JOHN DRAKAKIS

Terminator 2½: or Messing with canons

Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990)

Howard Felperin, *The Uses of the Canon: Elizabethan Literature and Contemporary Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

Hugh Grady, *The Modernist Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)

At a crucial moment in James Cameron's film *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, the heroine, Sarah Connor, comes to an unusually clear realization that human beings make their own history in conditions which militate against predictions concerning the future. In one of the many postmodernist junctures in the film, when she, her son and future saviour of the human race, along with the Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger), and a black scientist accredited with an imminent breakthrough in microchip technology which will facilitate total political domination, decide to alter the course of the narrative's 'history', she confides: 'The future, always so clear to me had become like a black highway at night. We were in uncharted territory, now making up history as we went along.'

This popular film carries forward the logic of a poststructuralism which in the sphere of Renaissance Studies can be said to have begun some twelve years ago, in 1980, with the publication of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Greenblatt's most recent collection of essays, written and published for the most part at various times during the past fifteen years, reiterates, and writes, at a personal intellectual level, a genealogy of New Historicism, at the same time as it looks forward more tentatively to a future in which grand narratives and heroic political gestures will have lost their appeal. *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* represents a series of samplers supported by retrospectively formulated statements about the methodological efficacy of the critical movement with whose inception Greenblatt is accredited. What he sketches, as he tells us in his Introduction, is *not* a systematic, rigorously coherent movement so much as a 'trajectory' (p. 3) for which temporal and developmental models would seem to be inadequate. This may seem to some an ingenious justification for the republication (detractors might cynically aver, the recycling) of previously published papers dating back to 1978, but reordered in this volume with the evident view to highlighting a

predominantly Bakhtinian motif. For example, the earliest piece, 'Marlowe, Marx and anti-Semitism' (1978) appears as chapter 3 after a predominantly confessional Introduction, followed by an eponymous chapter 2: 'Learning to curse: aspects of linguistic colonialism in the sixteenth century'. Chapters 4 and 5 on 'Filthy rites' and 'The cultivation of anxiety: King Lear and his heirs' are new, while chapter 6, 'Murdering peasants: status, genre, and the representation of rebellion' (1983, 1988), and chapter 8, 'Towards a poetics of culture' (1986, 1989), have appeared before. Chapters 7 and 9 on 'Psychoanalysis and Renaissance culture', and 'Resonance and wonder' respectively, reconsider a number of the issues which have persistently dogged New Historicism. It is worth drawing attention at the outset to the predominantly anecdotal structure of *Learning to Curse*; it resurrects a discontinuous intellectual past, at the same time as it seeks to recover those isolated moments of a culture which will not yield to an openly uniformitarian approach, and which therefore requires the investigator to engage in a manipulation of theoretical models as an aid to disclosure.

Set against Greenblatt's characteristically deft manoeuvrings within the sphere of Renaissance culture, Howard Felperin's *The Uses of the Canon: Elizabethan Literature and Contemporary Theory*, also a collection of essays, some of which have appeared elsewhere and over roughly the same period, seeks, from the curious trajectory of a 'deconstructive' criticism, to return Renaissance Studies to the 'history' from which he claims that New Historicism, in collusion with its alleged British counterpart, Cultural Materialism, have diverted it. Both volumes traverse the same historical, critical, and theoretical territory in the questions that they address, but the responses to those questions and the emphases that they entail are radically different.

By contrast, Hugh Grady's *The Modernist Shakespeare* commits itself from the outset to a 'history' of modern Shakespeare criticism, starting from Walter Benjamin's methodological distinction between a 'historicism' which proffers 'the "eternal" image of the past', and a 'historical materialism [which] supplies the unique experience with the past' (cit., p. 2). Unlike either Greenblatt or Felperin, for whom the occasional essay represents an opportunity to address, or rethink, particular issues divorced from an explicitly progressive developmental model of intellectual advance, Grady proposes a complex unified field of intellectual progress, beginning with the Enlightenment and charting subsequent reactions to its manifestations in the spheres of social, economic, cultural, professional and aesthetic life. In other words, he provides, through the history of modern Shakespeare criticism, a 'history' of those movements which the differently inflected poststructuralist trajectories of Greenblatt and Felperin contest. For example, he can assert that 'there is no "authentic" Shakespeare there for the picking' (p. 4)—a position to which Greenblatt himself appears to have come in his earlier *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1988)—rather, that we 'construct' our Shakespeare along a matrix of 'the forces of modernization' (economic,

scientific, and technical in large measure), and the forces of *modernism* (cultural and aesthetic and reactive to the former' (ibid.). For Grady cultural crises activate transformations of dominant critical and aesthetic paradigms, but he resists a late Machereyan reading of art as an instantiation of ideology since he does not want, *pace* Felperin, to 'lose sight of art's critical and utopian dimension, and a recognition of the differentiation of art from both instrumental reason and from ideology' (p. 20). In short, Grady provides a series of historically specific discursive spaces within which it is possible to consider the critical differences between Greenblatt and Felperin, while at the same time situating their intellectual orientations within a set of professional practices designed to mediate the larger cultural movements of our time.

II

We have become accustomed over the past decade to Greenblatt's own style of exposition: the personal reminiscence, the anecdote, the 'thick description', and subsequent investigation of the dynamics of larger discursive domains of which these are the symptoms, the shifting between contemporary critical practice, disarmingly aware of its own power to construct narratives, and those irreducibly textual phenomena which comprise that agglomeration of texts labelled 'Early Modern Culture'. We have also been exposed to the critiques of New Historicism, especially its alleged nihilism deriving from the perceived frustrations of the possibility of direct intervention in the structures of political power, and as Grady points out, its alleged anti-feminism. In the face of such criticism, the pressure has been upon New Historicism in recent years to declare in full its theoretical co-ordinates, if it is to be anything other than a newly revamped positivist historicism, and to confess the errors of which it stands accused.

The volume begins with Greenblatt setting out to write his own critical 'history', a narrative of that which has already happened but which retrospection reinscribes *differently*. Moving via W.K.Wimsatt and Cleanth Brookes as pillars of the New Critical establishment, he comes, through Raymond Williams, to the realization that he was 'participating in a more general tendency, a shift away from criticism centered on "verbal icons" toward a criticism centered on cultural artifacts' (p. 3). Such disclosures, located as they are between postmodernist Foucauldian notions of genealogy and power, and a positivism which could conceivably be aligned with what Grady calls the 'older historicism' of commentators such as E.M.W.Tillyard (Grady, pp. 229–30), would confirm Greenblatt's own careful eclecticism, his conversation with his immediate intellectual forebears as much as with 'dead' Renaissance culture itself. But the tantalizing perfunctoriness of this historical trajectory betrays an evident and understandable impatience with questions of origin. Unlike the machinic Schwarzenegger and his band of well-meaning psychopaths who have an impressive arsenal of deadly weapons at their disposal, including the valedictory consolation of an inexplicable and irreducible humanism, the New Historicism is

armed only with an ingeniously open ear for the structure of the anecdote, a rhetorical strategy which Greenblatt mysteriously brings into alignment with 'a shared life experience' (p. 4). It is precisely the quest of reconstituting history as textuality which has made New Historicism a fruitful point of convergence for a number of current theoretical positions, particularly the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz and the cultural critiques of Michel Foucault, while withholding its firm and consistent allegiance from any one of them.

If for Geertz the practice of social anthropology is nothing more or less than 'another country heard from',¹ there is also a sense in which, by analogy, the Renaissance—which includes certain canonical texts which have been handed down, and which Greenblatt accepts unquestioningly as the distillation of Renaissance 'culture'—constitutes that 'unfamiliar universe of symbolic action'² with whom the critic engages in conversation. In a recent study, Peter Ericson has observed that 'the name *new historicism* amalgamates and cancels two earlier terms, *old historicism* and *new criticism*',³ suggesting that the close textual analysis associated with New Criticism—Greenblatt's critical forebears—has amalgamated with an established historicism in which there is assumed to be a direct relationship between specific cultural discourses and their artistic mediations, within a totality whose complex continuity and theological goals reveal themselves to the attentive critic. *Interpreting* what is already 'there', even though it is only available as already constituted narrative, replete with condensations and displacements, while at the same time *producing* meanings, simultaneously marginalizes and makes central the role of the critic, acknowledging the historicity of history at the same time as it declares it to be a fabrication whose deep structure can be ultimately disclosed. Where Greenblatt's methodology departs from that of an essentially predictive 'historicism' technically defined, is in his espousal of the Foucauldian notion of the plurality of discursive practices and knowledges, conceived as something other than levels which directly express each other, and in his commitment to an investigation of the *internal* rules governing their discrete operations. In this he shares Grady's concern to emphasize the relative autonomy of distinct discursive practices, although unlike Grady, Greenblatt refuses to sustain, at the level of methodological consistency, the implications of that position. It is for this reason that he resists the demand that New Historicism be systematized, or rendered coherent in any rigorous theoretical manner.⁴ In its rejection of a legislative function dependent upon the conceptualizing and systematizing of cultural practice, New Historicism pulls back from a detailed totalizing *historical* analysis of those irreducibly social and political conditions in and through which particular discourses emerge.

Greenblatt's theoretical eclecticism allows him to acknowledge the explicit influence of Foucault, Raymond Williams, Bakhtin, Kenneth Burke, Michel de Certeau (p. 3), but he draws on deconstruction, psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology, and Marxism in a series of conceptual and rhetorical arabesques which demonstrate extraordinary agility while at the same time calling theoretical

correctness to account. Moreover, his deployment of the device of the anecdote derives from his insistence upon its *contingent* value, its function ‘less as explanatory illustration than as disturbance, that which requires explanation, contextualization, interpretation’ (p. 5). Indeed, it is this avowedly rhetorical, but only implicitly political, and hence ‘literary form or genre’, which follows the late Joel Fineman and also leans heavily upon the Bakhtinian concept of ‘heteroglossia’, and which, Greenblatt insists, ‘uniquely refers to the real’ (ibid.). In this way, and holding on to a residual version of a referential model of language, he elides the category of ‘the real’, i.e. history, with ‘the literary’ enabling him to establish a direct homology between always already textualized materials of culture generally and its artistic formulations. Like the Geertzian ethnographer, the new historicist “‘inscribes” social discourse; *he writes it down*’.⁵ The consequence is an aestheticizing of the categories of the ‘real’, which results in an uncomfortable and problematic elision of art and politics. While not denying the relationship between art and politics—as opposed to the retreating formalism of reactionary commentators such as Richard Levin—Grady, in a commitment to Frankfurt School aesthetics would make of art something less functional than Greenblatt here suggests; although the latter’s appeal to the concept of ‘wonder’ offers some modification of this functionalist position. Greenblatt distinguishes between this allegedly radically unsettling form, and the ‘historical anecdote’ which ‘seemed to me dead precisely because it was the enemy of wonder’, in so far as, he claims, ‘it was brought in to lay contingency and disturbance to rest’ (ibid.). The contention is that the ‘historical anecdote’ is, *pace* Bakhtin, monologic in its orientation, and as such occludes real history. This is something other than what Althusser would call ‘a reading in essential section’,⁶ the *value* of each anecdote lying in its capacity to disclose difference, thus ‘making strange what has become familiar’, and ‘demonstrating that what seems an untroubling and untroubled part of ourselves (e.g. Shakespeare) is actually part of something else, something different’ (ibid.). Here the critical ‘self’, constituted in and through a plurality of discourses, is intertwined with a polyvalent past which can only be reduced to a single authoritative ‘voice’ through the mechanisms of occlusion which function to suppress the ‘real’.

Central to Greenblatt’s own New Historicist enterprise, from 1980 onwards, has been his conception of *identity*. His suggestion that writing is something ‘more than an act of self-expression’ (ibid.) involves a desire to hang on to a notion of ‘self’. which is at one and the same time autonomous and contingent, although its autonomy is severely circumscribed. His interest in the *context* of identity involves asking the fraught question: ‘where in the world one’s identity comes from and what kinds of negotiation and conflict it entails’ (ibid.). In precisely the same way, as Grady insists throughout his study, that the critic is ‘embedded’ in history, so artistic texts, or what he calls ‘cultural artifacts in general’, are, in terms of their meanings, inseparable ‘from the circumstances of their making or reception’ (ibid.). In itself, this raises a fundamental question

concerned with the pleasure which we allegedly derive from, say, Shakespearean texts, one which Greenblatt proceeds to solve by extending the deconstructive principle of 'excess' to text *and* reader. While we might readily assent to the historicizing of pleasure, the exploration of its shifts and changes' and the understanding of 'its interests', there is also, he argues, a sense in which there are certain 'long term continuities in pleasure and those things that trigger pleasure' (ibid., p. 10) and that:

neither the work of art nor the person experiencing the work of art nor the historical situation in which the work is produced or received fully *possesses* the pleasure that is art's principal reason for being and its ticket to survival.

(ibid., p. 11)

The excess in the work of art, it would seem, becomes the channel through which historical contingency mysteriously seeps away, attributing to the work 'a mobility that includes the power of ready mutation', giving the impression of the transhistorical continuity of pleasure. Meaning, for Greenblatt is, thus, a process which is both transparent *and* constitutive: the work possesses meanings which escape its historical present, while at the same time the cultural critic at some temporal distance, and through a conversation with the work, reconstitutes meaning in accordance with the work's capacity to mirror her/his contemporary concerns. Grady, on the other hand, deals with this issue in two stages; firstly he wants to assert, *pace* Adorno, that artistic form mediates social history: 'characteristically social history is *mediated* into the aesthetic paradigm by the displacements and transformations it works on *form*' (Grady, p. 77), and he wants to set the utopian potential of the aesthetic sphere against the neo-Foucauldian emphasis upon its disciplinary potential (ibid., p. 79). But in the case of Shakespeare, he then goes on to propose 'absorbency' as a criterion of transcendence, since the canon 'absorbs so much that it becomes transcendent of any historical epoch, one of the celebrated timeless masterpieces of traditional literary history' (ibid., p. 81).

The uneasy, and somewhat placatory, shifting from empirical to theoretical perspectives in this argument is troubling, especially if we recall Grady's insistence that there can be no 'authentic' essence. Although its general trajectory is a far cry from the position of Howard Felperin, as we shall see, in which *all* meaning inheres in the work itself. But in this vortex of representation, the danger is that 'the real' which, if Greenblatt's call to historicize is to be given its full value, is what lies beneath representation, becomes nothing less than a simulacrum, circling around in a world of endless exchange.

And yet, Greenblatt wants stubbornly to hold onto the empirically derived distinction between 'fictional' and 'non-fictional' discourse, the blurring of which he regards as one of the inadequacies of poststructuralism. Our awareness of the *status* of texts, he insists, both alters the way we read them, 'and changes

our ethical position towards them; (p. 15). But what remains unexamined here is precisely how a particular text acquires status and why. And then, in a move which throws down the gauntlet to those who would accuse New Historicism of espousing a mere 'conventionalism', he reverts to a starkly referential model of language in his disclosure that 'Our belief in language's capacity for reference is part of our contract with the world; the existence of a real world, real body, real pain, makes a difference' (p. 15). Textualizing history would, after all, appear to occlude reality: there *is* something beyond the text. This is possibly a drawing-back from what Grady would see as the Foucauldian commitment to the primacy of language over reason (Grady, p. 16).

Identifying the theoretical incoherences in Greenblatt's own critical discourse has become a flourishing scholarly pursuit, but it should not blind us to the dilemma which New Historicism has uncovered. Greenblatt's swerving from Edmund Scott's problematical narrative account, *The Exact Discourse of The Sutilties, Fashions, Pollicies, Religion, and Ceremonies of the East Indians* (1606) in his Introduction, into the text of *The Tempest* in his second chapter, 'Learning to curse', confronts a series of issues that will not go away. He can pinpoint those 'ambivalent' moments in the play where Caliban 'achieves for an instant an absolute if intolerably bitter moral victory' (p. 25). While Shakespeare does not shrink from articulating what Greenblatt identifies as 'the darkest European fantasies about the Wild Man' (p. 26), the play overlays Caliban's 'culture' with a fiction in which his speech is identified *either* as possessed of a linguistic deficiency *or* is entirely assimilated to the master discourse of Prospero. By analogy with the diabolically essentialist Spanish *Requerimiento* of 1513, drawn up to be read to 'newly encountered peoples in the New World' (p. 29), he concludes that the only cultural identity afforded to a figure such as Caliban is that either of 'utter difference—and thus silence', or 'utter likeness—and thus the collapse of their own unique identity' (p. 31). In Shakespeare's apparent experimentation with these issues in *The Tempest*, what is alleged to be at stake is 'our capacity to sustain metaphor', a process which, in the play, assigns to Caliban only one category of language, the ability to 'curse' (p. 31). And yet, having positioned Caliban in a role which is recognizably Bakhtinian, Greenblatt then draws back to an avowedly historicist position with his suggestion that the verse that he speaks 'compels us to acknowledge the independence and integrity of Caliban's construction of reality' (ibid.). Here then, along with a heavily overdetermined colonialist discourse, is what Grady would, presumably, identify as a 'utopian' moment, the establishment of an aesthetic and critical distance between the ideological and the 'real'.

It is at this point that the Geertzian 'thickness' of description is given a longer historical, but politically anodyne pedigree stretching back to Vico's notion of 'opacity', a feature of culture which the critic avoids only at the expense of the occlusion of detail. To deny a culture 'opacity' is, Greenblatt argues, 'to turn from the messy, confusing welter of details that characterize a particular society at a particular time to the cool realm of abstract principles' (p. 32). Applied to

Caliban's situation, it is tempting to wonder what weight 'independence' and 'integrity' are being asked to bear in this argument. No one would doubt Greenblatt's own ethical stance in the matter of colonization, nor can one seriously challenge the suggestion that 'reality for each society is constructed to a significant degree out of the *specific* qualities of its language and symbols' (ibid.). But the historicism which would derive abstract principles from the interrogation and subsequent arrangement of these specificities slides almost imperceptibly into a positivist, neutral, analytical historicity which, in the final analysis, opts for an account of the 'opacity' of culture which does not engage with the politics of signification, but instead prefers a residually essentialist, albeit pluralized, 'human nature'.

This backwards and forwards shift from subject to object, from the analysis of discrete cultures to an interrogation of the critic's own role in constituting the object of enquiry, necessitates a degree of eclecticism which, in turn, discloses all of those professional discourses in which the critic her/himself is imbricated. The metaphors to which Greenblatt continually returns are those of 'exchange' and 'circulation'; 'plays' he insists in his introductory essay to *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1988):

are made up of multiple exchanges, and the exchanges are multiplied over time, since to the transactions through which the work first acquired social energy are added supplementary transactions through which the work renews its power in changed circumstances.

(P. 20)

But this is, by his own admission, 'the voice of the other', which is his *own* voice (ibid.). Disentangling Greenblatt's own 'otherness'—which in this volume, given the conscious disturbance of a temporal framework, is internally divided—from the plurality of dead voices which comprise 'Early Modern Culture', or 'Renaissance England' is to apply a disintegrative Foucauldian methodology at the very juncture where those discourses converge. We should, perhaps, invert Greenblatt's own maxim so that it reads: 'My own speech, like the speech of the dead, is not private property.'⁷ To do so would lead the discussion away from 'identity' to larger questions of 'subjectivity', and the very mechanisms through which political control is both negotiated *and* secured in discourse. At the same time, it also raises a host of pedagogical questions concerning the production of knowledges, the functioning of intellectual discussion within the discipline of Literary Studies, and their complex relation to academic power and authority. It is this larger context that Grady focuses on so well in *The Modernist Shakespeare*.

If, indeed, we are to take Greenblatt at his word, then the fundamentally self-reflexive nature of his own critical practice may be read as a displacement into the culture of Renaissance England of current intellectual and political concerns. Learning to curse is, in some respects, a process of evolving political

consciousness which is both imposed upon individuals and groups at the same time as it articulates their own oppression. The difficulty with this is that we can never be sure whether cursing itself is a product of official authorized forms of discourse, and hence a linguistic practice that legitimizes and reinforces the dominant structures of political power, or whether it is, structurally speaking, a genuinely subversive activity which is part of a larger critique of domination. Let us take the case of 'Marlowe, Marx and anti-Semitism', whose meaning is transformed in part by its repositioning in this volume. The conjunction of Marlowe and Marx sharpens the perception of the structural significance of the figure of the Jew as 'alien' in the process of defining dominant cultural forms in both *The Jew of Malta* and 'On the Jewish question'. For Marx the Jew exists in a relation of *difference* to Christianity, a marginalized figure who is 'central to the life of the community' (p. 41) in and through whom legitimate economic activity derives its authority. In Marlowe's text, and, to a lesser extent, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Greenblatt detects evidence to suggest that both are 'defiled by the dark forces they are trying to exploit, used by what they are trying to use' (p. 42). From this juxtaposition Marlowe emerges, as he did from *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), as Nietzschean deconstructor *avant la lettre*, who engages in 'play on the brink of an abyss, absolute play' (p. 53). As an irreducibly anarchic figure Marlowe's Barabas is nothing more than a *fiction* whose ultimate function, Greenblatt argues, is to disclose the corrosive authorial truth that human emancipation is impossible to achieve. Set against this apparent Marlovian refusal of the utopian moment, Marx's situating of art in a 'post-historical' moment is viewed as a means of turning 'his readers toward pursuit of human emancipation' (p. 55). At a symptomatic level Barabas's (and perhaps Marlowe's) celebration of deception is thought to be a mark of 'his very distance from ontological fullness' (pp. 52–3), while at the level of explicit political critique, Marx's essay is gently admonished for its rejection of 'play' in favour of the principle of 'hope' (p. 56).

What the recontextualizing of this essay prompts is a series of questions concerning the kind of *political* investment that might be made in radical energy itself, and the historical context that is required in order to give that energy both meaning and direction. To read Marlowe's, and to some extent Shakespeare's, text *against* that of Marx's essay exposes those mechanisms of 'sameness' and 'difference' through which cultural identities are structured, domesticated, and, in some cases, obliterated. What is obscured in this analysis is full consideration of those symbolic and mythographical discourses which inscribe these violent hierarchies of difference, since it is here that the ideologies of racial intolerance are carefully secreted. This is the point at which discourse encounters history, and to forsake the latter for a full-blown version of textuality is to swerve from that necessary conjuncture into a dangerously bloodless formalism. What Greenblatt tacitly *assumes* is that a play such as *The Jew of Malta* is a finished work, that it obeys its own discursive laws which can be lifted without prejudice from their historical context. Generico-political considerations may dictate that

Barabas cannot be successful, but can the unctuous rhetoric of the play's Christian discourses ever be accepted at face value divorced from ideology? Neither Machiavelli nor Fulke Greville, both trenchant analysts of the material and discursive structures of power, thought so, and Marlowe's utilization of the prologue figure of Machevil, in a play whose popularity survived well into the seventeenth century, suggests something more radical than a domesticated neo-Derridean commitment to the exuberant free play of the signifier. Surprisingly Greenblatt does not, at this juncture, call for the historicizing of 'play'.

It is the critical, political, and textual dilemma involving the manner in which dominant discourses manoeuvre themselves in order to confront radical challenges to their legitimacy, that Greenblatt's essays, in the main, address. In this his focus is the reverse of Grady's whose concern is to locate the moment of transformation as one critical and aesthetic paradigm becomes depleted and is replaced by another. In the following chapters: 'Filthy rites', 'The cultivation of anxiety: King Lear and his heirs', and 'Murdering peasants: Status, genre, and the representation of rebellion', Greenblatt assembles a trio of exemplary studies. Beginning with the semiotics of 'filth' he explores, through an anecdote describing the encounter of a cavalry officer, a Captain Bourke, with urine-drinking excrement-eating Indians in New Mexico in 1881, the significance of coprophagous ritual as a gesture which is simultaneously insulting and 'an acknowledgement of defeat' (p. 63). Where, from the point of view of the observer, such behaviour may denote 'a survival of an earlier stage of human development' (*ibid.*), viewed from the perspective of the object of the observer's gaze, the elements of coprophagous ritual 'are not fully integrated, they defy hierarchical organization, they do not form a unified whole' (p. 64).

In an attempt to reconstitute the Rabelais of Mikhail Bakhtin, Greenblatt seeks to rewrite the semiotics of literary festivity to produce a 'new agonistic situation' (p. 68) in which social control is the object of a sophisticated literary commentary rather than the obstacle which Rabelaisian festivity contrives to subvert. In a discussion which extends from Rabelais through to Winstanley and the Diggers, Greenblatt shows how carnival, and its scatological vision, becomes a site of contestation rather than an expression of popular energy, open to appropriation by forces of reaction as well as an instrument of radical social transformation. In other words, radical alterity does not of itself guarantee social transformation, and the self-conscious awareness of oppression which inaugurates the desire for change, may gesture towards a utopian freedom only in certain circumstances. This represents a much stronger reading of Foucault than detractors of New Historicism are prepared to concede. Greenblatt has, unfussily, taken to heart the Foucauldian analysis of multiform instability whereby:

discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it

reinforces it, but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.⁸

We have become familiar with Greenblatt's strategy of uncovering those fissures in a literary text through which it is possible to glimpse the structural relationship between both the 'imaginary' problems *and* the 'imaginary' solutions which it proffers. Juxtaposing the child-rearing techniques of a nineteenth-century American evangelist with King Lear's treatment of his daughters, however, in 'The cultivation of anxiety: King Lear and his heirs', on the grounds that 'nineteenth-century evangelical child-rearing techniques are the heirs of more widely diffused childrearing techniques in the late sixteenth- and early-seventeenth centuries' (p. 89), posits both a universality and a continuity which risks separating event from context. Moreover, it also insulates canonical texts against the full impact of the more complex, but no less controversial, perception that 'Renaissance theatrical representation itself...and Shakespeare's self-consciousness is in significant ways bound up with the institutions and the symbology of power it anatomizes' (ibid.).

What Greenblatt is wrestling with here, in addition to the difference between the text's manifest social *content* and its latent meanings, is its *function*. If theatrical representation is to be regarded as 'a social event' (ibid.) the real question remains concerning the precise nature of its relationship with other social events and practices. One wonders to what extent the pervasiveness and ubiquitousness of the modern electronic image underwrites Greenblatt's own perception that:

Collective shared images of authority penetrate the work of art and shape it from within, while conversely, the socially overdetermined work of art, along with a multitude of other institutions and utterances, contribute to the formation, realignment, and transmission of social practices.

(ibid.)

Moreover, to fall back into the position of suggesting that the Elizabethan theatre is a 'metonymy' of social practices (p. 90) is to risk the reintroduction of a mimesis which empties the institution and its representations of radical potential. For Greenblatt it would seem, it is only at the formal level of genre that artistic expression can exert a degree of self-consciousness. For the rest there is an unsystematic shuttling backwards and forwards of social practices, a process which neutralizes if it does not render inoperative the 'socially overdetermined' elements of the work of art.

The clever re-contextualizing of 'Murdering peasants: Status, genre and the representation of rebellion' addresses these difficult questions directly through Greenblatt's semiotic analysis of Durer's 'Monument to Commemorate a Victory over the Rebellious Peasants' of 1525. He locates in this artefact a hermeneutic instability which leads to the conclusion that 'identical signs can be interpreted

as signifying both the radical irony of personal dissent and the harsh celebration of official order' (p. 109). But, as in the Foucauldian model, such 'harsh celebration' may itself become the means through which power is rendered 'fragile', and that fragility is itself *not* an inherent feature of signifying practice but historically contingent: 'the contingent condition of certain signs at particular historical moments, moments in which the ruling elite, deeply threatened, conjure up images of repression so harsh that they double as images of protest' (p. 110). Moreover, where this impinges upon artistic intention then the issue is even more complex. For Greenblatt neither intention nor genre can be reduced to 'historical situation', but, on the other hand, now neither are they autonomous: 'intention and genre are as social, contingent and ideological, as the historical situation they combine to represent' (p. 112). This is, perhaps, as near as he gets to the problematical Jamesonian notion of a 'political unconscious', particularly in relation to the suggestion that Durer's monument comprises a series of discursivities which 'by no means constitute a single social-ideological language', a monologic discourse (ibid.), but which exemplify Bakhtin's 'heteroglossia'. This accessing of the past is effected principally through the channels of narrative whose twists and turns disclose a contiguity of image and symbol rather than a totalizing and controlling artistic originality.

The occlusions in discourse, and the circumscription of authorial intention, coupled with the recognition that all discursive practice involves the production under determinate circumstances of 'other' voices, invokes the topic of psychoanalysis, which in turn raises a problem for the study of Renaissance culture. Is there such a category as a Renaissance 'unconscious', and if so, can it be analysed along Freudian lines as a system of repressions, condensations, and displacements through which the gendered human subject emerges into full social and political identity? For Greenblatt 'psychoanalysis is, in more than one sense, the end of the Renaissance' (p. 131), in that it posits a privatization of subjectivity. He uses the example of the sixteenth-century impostor Martin Guerre to illustrate the proposition that Renaissance subjectivity 'seems to be the *product* of the relations, material objects, and judgements exposed in the case rather than the *producer* of these relations, objects and judgements' (p. 137). To some extent Greenblatt's argument reconsiders by implication the conclusion which he reached in the now infamous epilogue to *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), in which he admitted to being unable to shake himself free from the 'illusion' of autonomous identity. To hold onto a conception of the self as 'a stable point of reference, a given upon which to construct interpretations, psychoanalytical or other', is to offer 'a totalizing comprehension, a harmonious vision of the whole', which is only possibly 'by repressing *histories*' (p. 138). Greenblatt does not traverse the distance between the autonomous subject of discourse and the decentred subject of poststructuralism. Rather, he reverts to the distinction between the historical narrative and the anecdote as agencies of the 'real'. What he wants to resist is a totalizing, and hence occlusive, narrative on the one hand, and its alternative,

'relativism' on the other, since both, he argues, although for different reasons, are 'uncomfortable with histories':

Histories threaten relativism, though they seem superficially allied, because the connections and the ruptures with which historians are concerned sort ill with the unorganized value-neutral equivalences that would allow each moment a perfect independence and autonomy.

(ibid.)

This tantalizing allusion to a value-laden historicity is designed primarily to head off a critique of conventionalism, but at the same time it falls just short of a detailed account of the precise political geography of those 'institutions that limit and, when necessary, exterminate a threatening mobility' (p. 139), of the kind exemplified by the case of Martin Guerre. Indeed, it is a remarkably tentative Greenblatt who concludes this analysis with the speculation that 'I think property may be closer to the well-springs of the Shakespearean conception of identity than we imagine' (p. 141).

If the concept of a 'political unconscious' hovered just beneath the surface of the chapter on 'Psychoanalysis and Renaissance culture', then in this chapter Greenblatt engages directly with Fredric Jameson's Marxist perspective in an attempt to distinguish New Historicism from a tradition of thought with which it has many things in common. While confessing some sympathy with Marxist traditions at a purely methodological level, he resists the embrace of 'a particular philosophy, politics or rhetoric *faute de mieux*' (p. 147). The main bone of contention, it would seem, is the use which a Marxist like Jameson proposes for literature. For Greenblatt, poststructuralism, and latterly, postmodernism, have shattered the myth of organic unity either as 'paradisaal origin or utopian, eschatological end' (ibid.), and have thus seriously modified Marxist discourse. And yet, he continues to hold on to the problematical formulation of a 'cultural poetics', which would seem, almost, to bracket culture *and* art as spheres to be differentiated from instrumental reason. For Greenblatt, perhaps, the utopian *moment* is possible in art, but these moments do not add up to a *telos*. He sets up an opposition between Jameson and Jean-François Lyotard in an attempt to argue that both, from opposite ends of the spectrum, are guilty of sacrificing 'history', and that the relation between art and society will not submit to a rigorous theoretical explanation:

If capitalism is invoked not as a unitary demonic principle, but as a complex historical movement in a world without paradisaal origins or chiliastic expectations, then an inquiry into the relation between art and society in capitalist cultures must address both the formation of the working distinction upon which Jameson remarks, and the totalizing impulse upon which Lyotard remarks.

(p. 151)

One difficulty with this overly generalized formulation is that it obscures what Jameson himself identifies as an 'aesthetic' event, 'the so-called crisis of representation, in which an essentially realistic epistemology, which conceives of representation as the reproduction, for subjectivity, of an objectivity that lies outside it...whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself.'⁹ For Greenblatt the work of art remains a metonym of social practice, and therefore no clear distinction is possible between *its* poetics and a 'poetics of culture', since both deal primarily in representations. His conception of art as 'the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society' (p. 158), may well offer an empirical description of process, but it is, in fact, a displacement into the realm of aesthetic pleasure of the Gramscian notion of hegemony. The pleasure and power which art exerts over its audience is *negotiated*. But the question which this does not properly resolve concerns the extent to which art is complicit with ideology. Greenblatt's deployment of Anthony Giddens's 'concept of textual distanciation' (p. 159) imports an Althusserian distinction into the argument between art and ideology which permits the former both to replicate *and* interrogate the latter. In this Greenblatt seems to be at one with Grady, although the routes by which they arrive at their respective destinations are not identical. If Greenblatt's objective in developing an 'interpretative model' is simply to *justify* the pleasure which art affords, then clearly, there is little point in positing a critical distance from its practices except to evaluate its effectiveness in eliciting pleasure. If, on the other hand, his suggestion that contemporary theory should situate itself 'in the hidden places of negotiation and exchange' (ibid.) leads to a *critique* of the mechanisms of pleasure, then his appeal to 'histories' as agencies of demystification carries a much greater conviction. In either case this falls short of engaging with the question of the extent to which the demands of genre or the structures of pleasure overdetermine artistic choice, and hence heavily circumscribe the act of creation itself.

The difficulty with the position which Greenblatt sketches out, and to which he returns in the final chapter of this volume, is that we know what New Historicism is *against*, but it is more difficult to grasp in detail what it is *for*. While the political tendency of New Historicism is 'to discover limits or constraints upon individual intervention' (p. 164), and while this involves a decentring of the concept of 'man' and a problematizing of the 'isolated power of individual genius'—Grady would say in relation to Shakespeare that much of his writing was "'given", paradigmatic rather than chosen' (Grady, p. 25)—the absence of an explanatory political framework beyond that of a leftist pragmatism serves to collapse its concerns into a residually vague humanism which its own commitment to poststructuralism challenges. Clearly, we should not underestimate the difficulties, conceptual and methodological, which follow from the suggestion that any artistic gesture of dissent is so bound up 'with collective social, energy' that it may become 'an element in a larger legitimization

process, while an attempt to stabilize the order of things may turn out to subvert it' (p. 165).

What Greenblatt cannot quite bring himself to admit is that art, like critical practice, cannot ultimately be separated from ethics, but that the imbrication of each in ideology introduces complexities which no rhetorical strategy can obscure. Here Grady's notion of the 'paradigm' would seem to offer at the least a formulaic way out of the dilemma, since it would, he claims, allow us 'to think through the intricate dialectic of the interpenetration of the social and the individual without effacing either of this mutually interpenetrative pair' (Grady, p. 27). This hangs on to an overdetermined intentionalism against the rigid Althusserian formulation of structural determinism.

Evidently Greenblatt wants art to be subversive, partly because, like his much earlier clinging to a residual autonomous identity, he is reluctant to renounce the comforting fiction of canonicity, and he can't quite bring himself to relinquish a residual commitment to historical positivism as a professional methodology. He is, rightly, critical of the easy radicalizing of canonical texts, preferring to analyse features such as 'disjunction, disintegration, unevenness' (p. 168) in their discursive and aesthetic structures. And yet, his investment in terms such as 'resonance' and 'wonder' gives rise to an uneasiness in so far as they appear to be themselves the products of a negotiation with a conservative literary establishment. For 'resonance' we might read the afterlife of the work of art, that which gives it a transhistorical significance. For 'wonder', the definition stops just short of veneration, while still investing in the work an intrinsic power independent of the reader's capacity to constitute its significance: 'the power of the object displayed to stop the viewer in his tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention' (p. 170). Linked with 'enchantment', which he defines as a state in which 'the act of attention draws a circle around itself from which everything but the object is excluded, when intensity of regard blocks out all circumambient images, stills all murmuring voices' (p. 176), it matters not whether the object of the viewer's gaze is a Shakespearean text or a Coca-cola stand; that blocking out of 'all circumambient images' risks abrogating those very 'histories' which Greenblatt had earlier championed in favour of a theory of instant gratification. What prevents it from slipping into sheer mindlessness is the fact that it is the critic who has already selected the object of enchantment.

III

The comparative unease with which Greenblatt is prepared to comment upon rather than theorize his own critical practice, is, in part, the subject of Howard Felperin's *The Uses of the Canon: Elizabethan Literature and Contemporary Theory*. This is also a collection of occasional pieces, although Felperin's task is a more confidently messianic one, and far less modest than Grady's, seeking to 'bring to book', and cast out of the temple of theory those allegedly impure

critical activities whose progenitor, it is asserted, is New Historicism. Felperin's own orientation admits to 'a kind of deconstruction' (p. v), hence his apparent suspicion of what he assumes to be 'historicisms', whether they be of the American or the British variety. Writing very much without the conscious benefit of Althusser, Felperin aligns New Historicism with its stronger form, Marxism, but also with what he takes to be its British clone, Cultural Materialism. His own stance ought to make him sympathetic to New Historicism as 'a kind of applied deconstruction' (p. vii), but his main objection is that both critical orientations have the epistemological status of 'a conventionalism' rather than 'a realism' (ibid.).

For the 'deconstructionist' Felperin, the forsaking of an historical empiricism in favour of a textualizing of history foregrounds the constructivist role of the critical agent, and leads ultimately to the charge of relativism. Where Greenblatt clings tenuously to the fruits of a residually referential model of language, Felperin deploys some of the strategies of deconstruction in order to revitalize that realistic epistemology which grounds itself in the existence of an objective world available to, but finally beyond, that of human subjectivity.

Felperin's quarry is 'interpretation', to which he reduces, curiously, vulgar Marxism, feminism, as well as New Historicism. Even more curious is his defence of what he calls 'writerly "play"' in the interests of a utopianism which involves 'changing the world for the better' (p. ix), which in practice eschews the axiomatic connection between politics and criticism, in the interest of locating these moments in texts which *resist* any readings which an interpretative hermeneutics would place upon them. Rather like the late John Wayne's habitual diminution of the enemy he could then feel justified in obliterating, Felperin proceeds through parody to pit his particular brand of anarchic utopianism against 'a more politically assertive or activist criticism' which, he insists, 'begins at the other end of reading, with the signified it desires rather than the signifier it encounters' (p. x). Set against the more contorted manoeuvres of Greenblatt and Grady, this seems a breezily reductive, not to say retrograde, position to take in relation to the question of immanent meaning. Indeed, we are left wondering, even at this prefatory stage, how the notion of 'play' which would dismantle teleology, squares with a utopianism which laments the eradication of the possibility of objectively verifiable 'knowledge'. Moreover, having resisted the axiomatic connection between 'politics' and 'criticism', he then proceeds to admit that canon-formation itself 'depends on a continuing cultural negotiation that is deeply political, a process that its successive re-inscriptions cannot help but record' (p. xii).

Felperin's title, *The Uses of the Canon*, presupposes the existence of a body of authoritative texts indefinitely available for refurbishment. Indeed, not until the end of the volume does he raise directly the issue of canon-formation and its dynamics. His first two chapters are concerned to 'historicize' the Romantic emphasis upon the universality of Shakespearean texts. This is followed by an analysis of 'The deconstruction of presence in *The Winter's Tale*' (ch. 3), a

revisitation of the site of Shakespeare's sonnets (ch. 4), two essays on Donne and Marlowe, which take Felperin closer to his quarry, a critique of New Historicism, (chs 5 and 6), a first stab at a critique of discourse analysis (ch. 7) which is followed by a protracted, and at times self-indulgent critique of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism (ch. 8), and a final chapter which proposes a rereading of *The Tempest* (ch. 9). Felperin's half-hidden agenda follows on from his earlier forays into this area in *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory* (1986) in which he concludes that:

as the only post-structuralist practice addressing itself to maintaining the traditional canon of literature as a privileged and distinctive category, deconstruction, suitably adapted, may well become the means of saving the classic texts and recuperating the traditional institution of their study.¹⁰

For him, the enemies of preserving the institutional status of Literary Studies as a distinct discipline, and the implied primacy of those professional discourses that sustain it, are New Historicism and British Cultural Materialism, two movements which, Felperin admits, derive from different traditions, but which he claims are none the less identical to each other. We are thus faced with the paradoxical sight of a deconstructionist methodology concerned to *preserve* the integrity of particular disciplines, thus domesticating a range of potentially radical epistemological questions by diverting them into the area of a reactionary formalism.

What this argument resists from the very outset, is the proposition that literary texts are themselves deeply implicated both in the material practices of the culture within which they were initially produced, and in those of the cultures into which they are subsequently received. Felperin seeks a position for the text distinct from its ideological function: 'the unmasking of the material and political interestedness of the text can elucidate only its ideological function, the legitimization or promotion of other interests it invariably, if obliquely, serves' (p. 3). This peculiar reduction of the category of 'ideology' enables Felperin to re-establish a textual *authority* which can be traced back to authorial perception. He claims that this 'unmasking' of the text 'has only limited purchase on, or interest in, any positive purpose that the text might once have served or—perish the thought—might still serve' (ibid.).

At one level, the argument claims that the resurgence of critical interest in 'history' is not historical enough. At another level, it reiterates, though in terms which are peculiarly Felperin's own, a version of the position which states that all reconstitutions of the literary past are effectively processes of contemporization, and that such reconstitutions may have their own radical agenda which the historicizing critic ignores at her/his peril. In this context, the 'idealism' for which Romantic critics such as Coleridge have recently been indicted, 'was basic to a democratization of the arts nothing less than revolutionary in its time, albeit in the retrospectively problematic sense of a bourgeois

revolution' (pp. 13–14). While this argument sharpens the focus upon the political significance of the concept of periodization, Felperin forsakes it for the suggestion that such a revolutionary 'democratization', ideologically unsound though it may have been in retrospect, is both '*hermeneutically* sound' and '*hermeneutically* necessary', since 'at a certain level the historical text must always offer itself and be received, as timeless and universal textuality even as it remains at another level remote and specific historicity—if it is to be interpreted at all' (p. 14).

This wrestles with the concept of paradigm shift that is central to Grady's account of the emergence of modern Shakespeare criticism, except that Felperin proposes a text capable of absorbing any and every critical mediation. What Coleridge did, Felperin argues, was to liberate the Shakespearean text so that it could speak 'to the nineteenth century on its own, bourgeois, individualist, and proto-psychological terms' (pp. 14–15). Just so, but the question still remains whether this possibility is a function of the text or of the reconstituting critic. At various moments in his argument Felperin, much more so than either Greenblatt or Grady, leans heavily towards the former of these two positions while acknowledging the force of the latter. It is difficult, therefore, to assent without qualification to the circularity of Felperin's conclusion whereby he asserts that the release from 'historical meaning' effected by 'idealist interpretation' serves only to return us 'to our own historical meaning, which has to be at least important, to put it mildly' (p. 15). What he omits from this discussion are the occlusive and ahistorical tendencies of idealist criticism which are, in effect, a rewriting of the past no less constitutive in its force than the practices of New Historicism. Accounting historically for Coleridgean critical practice may give the *impression* of scholarly objectivity, of making an appeal to that 'realism' which lay at the bottom of an 'old historicism' which Felperin later describes as 'a knowledge that, once ascertained, was supposed to be independent of its methods of enquiry, which were modelled, after all, as closely as possible on those of nineteenth-century empirical science' (p. 104). It is the intricacies of this critical paradigm that Grady analyses much more deftly in his account of the work of E.M.W. Tillyard. One suspects that beneath Felperin's argument lies a residual—dare one say it, positivist—faith in bourgeois revolution as the *terminus ad quem* of radicalism, and a guarantee of the institutional status of Literature in the face of those who would challenge its ideological complicity in the structures of power and political domination.

Felperin's first treatment of *The Tempest* (an essay written originally in the 1970s), raises a number of crucial issues which derive new significance from its present juxtaposition with what Greenblatt has to say about 'wonder' in *Learning to Curse*. Beginning from Northrop Frye's championing of 'Romance' as the return of a mythic presence, he moves to a view of *The Tempest* which renders ironical the play's unifying gestures of closure. For him, the alleged 'triumph of romance' becomes 'a demystification of romance, a stripping away of illusion and a repudiation of art' (p. 24), whose aesthetic effect is *not* to return the play to

'its source in religious awe and wonder, but to situate it in 'the realm of an ironic secularity, a world in which illusions of bravery are revealed as illusions and the social order is perceived not as a divine but an all-too-human and precarious construct' (ibid.). It is understandable that Felperin should wish to resist the notion that the text is itself an instantiation of ideology, but it is not clear whether he would accept Grady's Gramscian reading of the revolutionary potential of the textual productions of traditional humanism (Grady, p. 164). Unlike in Greenblatt, for whom the fact of the arresting power of art is an existential phenomenon, Felperin sees 'wonder' as synonymous with a complicity which the text itself resists, since it anticipates the critic's perception that the social order is constructed. Here a revalorization of the text is achieved through a formal analysis of those very rhetorical structures through which closure is effected, and the result is the revitalization of a critical vocabulary much nearer than Greenblatt to the New Criticism whose influence both critics acknowledge.

A critical position which oscillates opportunistically between a free-wheeling, if not anarchic, utopianism on the one hand and a dog-in-the-manger conservatism on the other, is almost certain to ask questions which are more penetrating than the answers which it can provide. We can, for example, readily assent to the proposition that a theatrical text is a 'representation', and to the curiosity that this might arouse in us concerning the problem 'of what to make of unrepresented events' (p. 37). Applied to *The Winter's Tale* this results in a stubborn refusal to consent to Hermione's innocence in the face of Leontes' accusations of her infidelity. Leontes, he argues, is caught between 'a poetics of difference' and 'a poetics of reference' from which he cannot escape, and this results, therefore, in his enactment 'in a mad parodic form a characteristic drift of European literary criticism: a superstition of the word that endows it with the power to conjure its referent into being' (p. 48). From this, he goes on to assert that the world of *The Winter's Tale* has 'finally, no objective reality or ontological stability, but recedes into an infinite play of signs and deferral of affirmative or authoritative meaning' (p. 51). Here, then, is a text which undermines the authority of the canon of which it is reputedly a part, but more than that, what makes it, paradoxically, so authoritative a text is its irreducible linguistic selfconsciousness.

What this ingenious account elides, however, is the manner in which unrepresented events in the play *are* represented in language. Such a focus would certainly inflect the question of Hermione's alleged guilt differently, and, perhaps, uncover a rhetoric of married love already heavily imbricated in the patriarchal discourse of feminine culpability, for which the endless deferment of meaning is an inadequate explanation. It is here that Greenblatt's resurrection of 'histories' would carry most force, whereas for Felperin 'lost presence' is a metaphysical object of nostalgia which language itself is doomed never to recover. Moreover, if, as Felperin contends, the metalinguistic charge of 'great literature' is what guarantees its canonical status, then what can he make of the

affective power of art, its capacity to elicit ‘wonder’, as Greenblatt would have it, or to ‘absorb’ meanings as Grady suggests?

The motif of linguistic self-consciousness pervades those of Felperin’s chapters which deal with texts. The language of Shakespeare’s Sonnets, it is argued, aspires to ‘a royal or orphic bringing into being of its object’ (p. 59), but the ‘decipherment’ of what he calls poetic and iconic representation operates at a spatial remove from its object. This is another way of saying that we generate meanings from within the historical contexts which produce our own subjectivities, but for the residually historicist Felperin, such contexts are themselves texts, which are elusive: ‘the contextual norms that might secure our reading of texts are themselves a kind of text that requires a further, ultimately elusive determination’ (pp. 62–3). If contextual norms are themselves texts, then they are subject to the mechanisms of difference, in short, they exemplify the very conventionalism against which Felperin inveighs later in the book. His way of resolving this issue for himself is to claim that poetic writing ‘decontextualizes’ its putative object¹¹ and to reinstate the authorial presence of the great artist, Shakespeare, who, alone in the Sonnets, perceives the difficulty of aligning writing and mimesis, offering a ‘writerly’ solution to the problem, ‘which is to say, a dissolution’ (p. 63). This is merely another way of saying, along with Adorno and Grady, that great writing is pathologically subversive *because* it deconstructs the very discursive context whose rules and tropes it sets out to perform. If New Historicism is, as Felperin contends, a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, too aware of complexity ‘to make bald claims for its own historical certitude and interpretive authority’ (p. 107), then his own practice rests firmly on the hermeneutics of urbanely naïve optimism. In accrediting Shakespeare alone with a superior deconstructive intelligence in the Sonnets, Felperin forsakes the strategic imperative to deconstruct the one remaining canonical transcendental signified whose endlessly performative presence provides a continuing focus for the discipline of English Studies.

It is, perhaps, the nature of a theory of infinite play that it should not confine itself to theoretical correctness. If Greenblatt is pragmatic in his deployment of theory, then Felperin—and Grady, to a certain extent, although his perspective is an avowedly Marxist one—is no less so in his challenges, many of them perceptive, to a range of materialist critical practices. Felperin’s overall claim, which he sustains from the outset, is that canonicity implies the life of a text beyond history, and that that life is a necessary precondition for subsequent interpretation. His objections to Greenblatt’s new historicist rereading of Marlowe, for example, is that it seeks to occlude the critic’s own historically overdetermined reinscription of Marlovian texts. Through his strictures on the Bakhtinian constraints to ‘play’ (p. 117), and in his allegation that Greenblatt offers no more than a neo-Nietzschean modernizing of Marlowe’s texts as ‘a void of purely textual free play’ (p. 121), Felperin seeks to erode the historicizing claims of New Historicism itself. He argues that it is, more precisely, a ‘post-historicism’ (ibid.), since it persists in *making* those contexts within which it

positions individual texts. New Historicism has, of course, long been accused of serendipity in the assemblage of its textual materials, but what Felperin fails properly to register is the poststructuralist nature of its disciplinary practices. The anecdote, which is, to use Joel Fineman's phrase, 'the smallest minimal unit of the historiographical fact',¹² fulfils a cultural role which Felperin reserves for the subversive tropes of the canonical text, and points, sometimes to a discourse contained by dominant power, sometimes to a point of resistance to that power. The possibility that, as Felperin claims in his analysis of 'Early Utopian discourse' (ch. 7), a writer such as Shakespeare may have known 'something that prevents the decisive hierarchization of the new world materials' (p. 130), involves a refusal to consider textual occlusions in favour of a plenitude that in saying everything concludes finally that nothing can be said.

But what is it that Felperin has against New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, two critical movements which are, for his purposes, identical? We might also ask what he has against feminism as an interest group whose alleged appropriation of texts for ulterior political purposes would advance the interests of some at the expense of others. At one level his concentration on the methodological and epistemological problems of New Historicism is well placed, especially on the question of the uncomfortable fit between a textualist history on the one hand and those older, one presumes empiricist, 'habits of thought to which it is overtly opposed' (p. 143). This is another version of the claim that New Historicism is merely opportunistic in its institutional strategies, with exponents such as Greenblatt 'trading in' an 'earlier "realist" model of history, culture and literature, for a sleeker "textualist" and inevitably "conventionalist" model' (p. 151). Perhaps what emerges here is the cynicism of American academe, rather than a direct and detailed engagement with the epistemological issues which Felperin earlier promised to discuss. Nor does this apparent modernization of critical methodology lead necessarily, as Felperin claims, to the charge of 'relativism' (p. 152). As in Felperin, so in Greenblatt, the canonical status of a writer such as Shakespeare is never challenged; indeed, it is reaffirmed. But what worries Felperin is the amorality that he associates with relativism; what he might have been better considering was the notion of history itself as a site of contestation whose movements, continuities, ruptures, and contradictions are themselves transformed into sites of contestation by politically sensitive modes of radical criticism. Grady discloses a version of this notion of history in his own diligent excavations of the political investments which modern critical paradigms have made in the process of constructing their objects of enquiry, and like positivist historicism, New Criticism, the 'spatial hermeneutics' of G. Wilson Knight, or the plenitude of postmodern critical positions, Felperin's particular amalgamation of Frankfurt School aesthetics and Yale School deconstruction is equally amenable to such excavation.

Felperin's argument often suffers from an overly polemical insistence upon the irreducible sameness of a range of critical positions, and in this he shares a certain ignorance with Grady, especially when it comes to non-American modes

of radical criticism. His preoccupation with origins leads him into a series of comparisons whose validity is, at best, imperfect. For example, New Historicism (and Cultural Materialism, it would seem) is conventionalist because of its reliance upon a structuralist base. Thus, the new historicist preoccupation with the minutiae of the cultural life of the Renaissance, enacts a methodology which presupposes synchronicity: 'a slice or cross-section of history' (p. 154), something that is 'certainly culture-specific and conventional...but one that has been sealed off from any continuing historical process' (pp. 154–5). No reading of Foucauldian discourse theory could possibly rest content with this account, nor does the phrase 'continuing historical process' adequately describe those temporal ruptures through which the workings of ideology are disclosed. Moreover, as Grady rightly points out, in its preoccupation with the discursive regimes of institutions, Foucauldian discourse theory breaks significantly with structuralist presuppositions (Grady, p. 16). New Historicism, unlike Cultural Materialism, offers, in the main, an institutionally sanitized model of political process, to be sure, but its immediate effects notwithstanding, its methodological commitment to analysing discursive practices in a dialogic, if not dialectical manner, remains an important, if somewhat limited, strength.

Against the political conservatism of New Historicism, Felperin extols the 'genuinely historical and political criticism' which he associates with Cultural Materialism (p. 157). But, here again, in a very selective survey, he observes that the emphasis upon the emergence of modern selfhood, combined with what he calls the interpreter's 'presentness' (p. 159), discloses an agenda which in its fundamentals is no different from its trans-Atlantic counterpart. Rooted in Foucault's 'archaeologies of discourse', what British Cultural Materialists suffer from, he argues, is a nostalgia for the past, 'literally understood as a communitarian longing for home, for an England that in certain respects once was and might be again' (p. 162). This is a curious charge in the face of Felperin's own paradoxical brand of moralizing deconstruction, which takes as an act of faith the ethical orientation of canonical texts.

In the writing of a feminist such as Catherine Belsey, Felperin detects a longing for 'scholasticism', while Francis Barker, it is alleged, longs for 'feudalism' (p. 165). Of course, what Felperin has in mind here, although he does not disclose his secret until well into this fiction, is that the origin of this nostalgia is none other than F.R. Leavis, whose conservatism, it is implied, feminists and poststructural Marxists secretly share. We have only to look at the ways in which Grady teases out the reactionary fugitive/agrarian strands in New Criticism, and connects them with the right-wing tendencies of Leavisite practical criticism, to see just how inadequate this account is. Where Felperin's free-wheeling speculation borders on the offensive is in his disclosure that a feminist such as Belsey longs for 'a universal and absolute social authority long since unavailable' (p. 166). The 'undeclared object of [feminist] desire' may well be 'identity' (*ibid.*), and that desire may well seek to construct a consensual community of interest, but this owes its political commitment *not* to an alleged

religious fanaticism, but to the experience and theoretical analysis of exclusion and oppression within a social formation whose dominant structures are predominantly masculine. Felperin here becomes a prisoner of his own implicitly sexist rhetoric which reformulates the psychoanalytical identification of femininity with 'lack', and which recasts critical and canonical authority in the role of object of desire. Little wonder that in the larger context of the volume he should display a certain nervousness about those who would use Literature in the pursuit of sectional interests. Moreover, the suggestion that Belsey simply substitutes 'discourse' (p. 167), for the Leavisite term 'sensibility', thereby eliding her 'cultural materialism' (*sic*) and Leavis's 'essentialist humanism', suffers from that blurring of perspective which the long view from across the Atlantic invariably induces. That the questioning which Felperin sustains throughout this volume of essays should collapse into such insouciance is as regrettable as it is symptomatic.

In his final chapter Felperin returns to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a text which has persistently attracted the attentions of new historicists and cultural materialists. In a tone which barely disguises irony he laments the 'post-colonial' emphasis which has been placed on the play (p. 171), although he argues that this text 'in our time is still very much an allegorical romance' (p. 173). Prospero's 'imposition of hierarchy upon difference' makes the play, Felperin contends, 'potentially allegorical of *all* hegemonic structures' (p. 174).

Historically, of course, Felperin is right to point out that *The Tempest* has often been the subject of 'colonial allegorization' (p. 176), especially in the nineteenth century, but that here the task of canon-formation proceeded hand-in-hand with 'the work of empire building' (p. 178). If, he argues, *The Tempest* has in the past been crucial to the business of canon-formation, then modern radical criticism, with its imperative to demystify, renders this text 'a test case for the viability of the canon itself' (p. 180). Except that, leaving aside the really radical move of allowing the play to sink into obscurity, any attention devoted to it, from whatever perspective, is designed to reinforce its canonical status. Hence, for Felperin 'canonical text and anti-canonical critique have actually been mutually reinforcing', producing what he calls 'a boomerang effect' (p. 181). This, allied to the marginalization of the institution, combines to contain and neutralize opposition in a move which depicts the methodological procedures of New Historicism as enacting those structures of domination and negotiation which they are designed to demystify. But Felperin seems to want to regard canonicity as fulfilling two different functions in this argument; on the one hand, it functions as 'the continuing strong-hold of ruling-class ideology', but on the other, the boundaries have become so permeable that it is now also 'a battlefield of ideological contestation' (p. 185).

Of course, these are not mutually exclusive positions, since it is the function of ideology to negotiate through a range of symbolic discourses the interests of a dominant group. Only in times of crisis, when existing paradigms have become depleted, are those symbolic discourses exposed as inadequate. It is this state of

affairs, as Grady shows so convincingly, that necessitates a degree of transformation, producing a situation in which other voices struggle to be heard within a process which operates through a dialectic of difference. Felperin's problem is that he aims to square the circle of an anachronistic humanism which seems to resist the pressures of 'modernization', and the need to take up a partisan stance, involving a complex analysis of the politics of representation as part of a strategy of contestation on the very site where cultural power is said to reside, the canon itself. Whether it is possible to think of a canon as 'an arbitrary or consensual body of texts without positive or political value in their own right' (p. 189) is a moot point, since the concept of canonicity, as Felperin well knows, implies authority, which may be consensual, but which is never arbitrary. Nor is it significant simply to divert attention from the demystification of canonical texts to the deconstruction of institutional power; the two are always already mutually integrated, and any transformations which take place are always open to recuperation from a liberal humanism which prides itself on the flexibility of its own boundaries. For Felperin, the enemy turns out in the end to be 'professionalism', which serves no interests other than its own, and which preserves the canon 'not as a real but as an illusory battlefield, where actual battles with winners, losers, and social repercussions have ceased to take place' (ibid.). Except, of course, that Felperin's own approach lurches uncomfortably between the casually conversational and the rigorously professional.

Set against *Learning to Curse, The Uses of the Canon* fulfils the function of seriously interrogating the trajectory of current trends in Renaissance Studies, and set against both, Hugh Grady's *The Modernist Shakespeare* writes, for the most part in very substantial detail, the 'histories' of which these approaches are a current *terminus ad quem*. Greenblatt's manner is the most tentative, preferring to dismantle the canon through the introduction and juxtaposition of narratives which augment and challenge literary representations, while Grady's project is much more ambitious than the modesty of his claims would suggest. Felperin's manner is more combative, betraying an irritation with what he takes to be the inadequacy of current academic criticism, and in the process oscillating playfully between a range of theoretically incompatible positions. To read these three stimulating volumes is to become apprised of the major questions which have arisen as a result of the radical transformation which the field of Renaissance Studies has undergone in recent years.

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NOTES

- 1 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), p. 23.
- 2 ibid., p. 24.
- 3 Peter Ericson, *Rewriting Shakespeare, Rewriting Ourselves* (Los Angeles and Oxford, 1991), p. 14.

- 4 Cf. Geertz, op. cit., p. 26: 'the essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them.'
- 5 *ibid.*, p. 19.
- 6 Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London, 1979), p. 138.
- 7 Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford, 1988), p. 20: 'The speech of the dead, like my own speech, is not private property.'
- 8 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 101.
- 9 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, foreword by Fredric Jameson (Manchester, 1984), p. viii.
- 10 Howard Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory* (Oxford, 1986), p. 218.
- 11 Cf. Grady, *The Modernist Shakespeare*, p. 216, where he provides a critique of Felperin's essay on *The Winter's Tale*, focusing on the assertion that 'poetic language is characterized by precisely this making explicit the groundlessness of ordinary language', and then arguing that Felperin imposes his own *technique* on the play while at the same time claiming it as 'a Shakespearean thematic in the play' (*ibid.*, p. 217).
- 12 Joel Fineman, 'The history of the anecdote', *The New Historicism*, ed. H.Aram Veenser (New York and London, 1989), p. 57.

Reviews

RUTH EVANS

- **Jill Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer. Feminist Readings Series* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp., £45.00 (hardback) £10.95 (paperback)**
- **Christine Richardson and Jackie Johnston, *Medieval Drama. English Dramatists Series* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 175 pp., £30 (hardback), £9.50 (paperback)**

Chaucer is not the cultural icon that Shakespeare is, and the Letters page of the *London Review of Books* is unlikely to resound with a 'Geoffbiz'-type struggle over the 'meaning' of his texts. Yet he is still regarded as the 'father' of English poetry; Neville Coghill's translation of the *Canterbury Tales* sells well; there are stage versions of the *Tales*; his texts are still widely taught at 'A'-level and at degree level. Chaucer remains, however, part of that undifferentiated 'Middle Ages' which is invoked by popular culture across a range of texts and practices—films, musicals, advertisements, board games, descriptions of Saddam Hussein's Iraq—to suggest (amongst a number of meanings) a comforting, disturbing or risible lack of *modernity*.¹ Within the academy, medieval literature still labours under the disabling consequences of its institutional history: in the words of Lee Patterson, it is seen by 'most literary scholars and critics...as a site of pedantry and antiquarianism, a place to escape from the demands of modern intellectual life'.² The grievous impact which all this has had on the status of medieval literature and on perceptions of how it is taught is felt by all medievalists.

Yet the whole field of medieval studies has in the last ten years been radically changed and enlivened by distinctively modern discourses—semiotic, Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic, deconstructive, historicist (evidenced by journals like *Exemplaria*, *Representations* and the *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*). Chaucer has been the focus of particularly rich theoretical rereadings (Aers, Knight, Marshall, Leicester, Delany, Dinshaw, Patterson, Schibanoff). It is therefore important for medievalists to acknowledge this critical revolution and to situate their own readings within this wider critical frame, in order to counter the various damaging institutional constructions of the period. Jill Mann's book does at least acknowledge the impact of theory on medieval critical practice, but

does not, unfortunately, face up to its challenges. Richardson and Johnson's book, although in places showing an awareness of some of the major challenges to conventional reading practices which have occurred in the past two decades, does not in any way insert itself into contemporary critical debate. This does not necessarily invalidate the kind of material which both books offer, but it does make them less enabling as critical tools within our institutions and it means that they do not fairly represent the new critical work which is being undertaken.

It is difficult to see how Mann offers a 'feminist reading'. The book proclaims itself to be feminist by virtue of its inclusion in this series, and the general preface lays out the series format: 'Each volume surveys briefly the development of feminist literary criticism and the broader questions of feminism which have been brought to bear on this practice.... Can there be a politics of feminist criticism? How might a theory of sexual difference be seen to be directly applicable to critical practice?' (pp. vii–viii). However, Mann does not follow the format or address these questions: she claims that restrictions of space have squeezed out 'any systematic survey of previous feminist writings on Chaucer' (p. xi), but such a survey is much needed both for students and for sceptical post-medievalists who have trouble believing that any serious or exciting theoretical work is being done on medieval texts. In her Preface Mann refuses to define what her feminist reading is, stating that 'it is not tied to any particular school of feminist criticism', though many of its arguments are formed 'in mental dialogue with their imagined representatives' (p. xii). Her reluctance to engage with the sexual/textual politics of Chaucer's texts from a clearly defined position means that she can put whatever constructions she likes upon 'feminism'. Feminism, for Mann, is both irritant and enabler. She often speaks in a curiously distanced and scornful way of 'the women's movement', remarking for example that it 'has freely availed itself' of 'the power of pathos' (p. 140), and roundly condemning feminists for failing to recognize the exemplary nature of the tales of Constance and Griselda, the pathos of which serves to 'educate' readers into 'pity'. At the same time, feminism, for Mann, legitimates the re-production of immensely conservative reading positions. Chiefly it enables the perception of 'the subtleties of authorial intention' as opposed to 'the crude interpretations of the reading public' (p. 33)—albeit a medieval public. Mann's Chaucer is a good old-fashioned liberal humanist, who strives to 'exculpate himself from his relentless accusations of male duplicity' and successfully negotiates 'the difficulty of how to write of the pitiable sufferings of women without appearing to patronise them' (p. 47). Mann takes Chaucer at his word: she advocates (in the case of the *Man of Law's Tale*) 'an imaginative surrender to the story' (where is the notion of the 'resisting reader'?) and even 'our own surrender to Chaucer' (p. 142).

This focus on authorial intention is of course highly problematic. Chaucer *may* have felt that to speak of rape (in alluding to the Tereus/ Philomel story in the *Legend of Good Women*) was a serious responsibility, as Mann's often very persuasive—not to say, coercive—reading suggests, but to read his deployment

of the modesty topos in the Prologue to the *Legend* as evidence of that kind of modern feminism which declines to speak on women's behalf (a position available to both men and women, although Mann reads it in particularly male terms), needs much more thorough historicizing and contextualization. Chaucer does not consistently maintain this position (there is plenty of unapologetic ventriloquism in the *Canterbury Tales*), and his self-ironizing techniques are open to other interpretations. There is also the question of the extent to which it is possible legitimately to speak of 'feminism' in the late Middle Ages. Chaucer as 'all womanis frend'?³ The trouble with locating feminist intentions in the author is precisely that they can never be decided; anyway, the issue of the inscription of 'feminist', or even gendered, positions in texts is vastly more complex than that of authorial intention.

Mann's concern is to protect Chaucer's reputation: on page 82, for example, Christopher Ricks, of all people, is trundled on to defend the place of stereotypes in Chaucer's work. Lack of political commitment is betrayed by statements such as that the existence of stereotypes is an 'interesting fact to be confronted' (p. 82). Yet the fundamental organization of the book reinforces the very stereotypes which stand most in need of challenging. The chapters are organized thematically: 'Women and betrayal'; 'Anti-feminism'; 'The surrender of *Maistrye*'; 'Suffering Woman, suffering God', and 'The feminised hero'. All of these categories except the last represent the old commonplaces of traditional medieval criticism: it is, after all, hard to avoid the subject of women when discussing Chaucer's texts because they are its dominant subjects, and anti-feminism is an important aspect of late fourteenth-century culture. Yet it is also a truism of feminist criticism that to speak of women and of anti-feminism in texts does not automatically qualify as a feminist strategy. And in fact, despite the emphasis on women, Mann is most anxious to stress Chaucer's human fairness: he will not allow the domination of women by men, or vice versa. The *Wife of Bath's Tale* is 'a visionary glimpse of mutuality in male-female relationships' (p. 92)—and any other reading is defined as 'inaccurate'. Her insistence on the contingency of gendered behaviour is not however advanced as a way out of the sexual fix—it is a forgetting of sexual difference altogether.

This kind of amnesia affects her whole approach. We are told for example that in the tale of Thisbe in the *Legend of Good Women* 'male courage and female courage become indistinguishable' (p. 43). The adjective 'slydinge' applied to Criseyde's mind 'underlines with brilliant economy Chaucer's profound perception that Fortune exists not only in external vicissitudes—but also as an ineradicable part of the human mind' (p. 29). In Mann's discussion of *Troilus and Criseyde* the rhetoric becomes positively Lawrentian: the poem, she claims, expresses 'the miraculous fusion of two wills into one...a fusion which makes obedience not a matter of the execution of commands, but the spontaneous moulding of oneself to the other, so that it is no longer possible to say whose will dominates and whose is subjected' (p. 105)—and there is much more of this. She sentimentalizes male-female relationships, constantly salvaging all the

problematic relations of the *Canterbury Tales* and offering them up as 'versions of tenderness' (p. 86). What is missing in Mann's account is some notion of the processes of representation and of how literature itself functions as ideology.

Her extensive analysis of 'pite' (pity; sympathy; pathos; suffering) makes a similar plea for the reader's submission to the imperatives of the text. The double-edged nature of Criseyde's 'pite' (which makes her love Troilus but also—and tragically—Diomedes) is presented by Mann as an object-lesson for men in accepting women's 'chameleon-like' nature because this is after all how men want women to be. The Chaucerian narratives of womanly 'pite' (in the *Legend of Good Women*) operate to 'feminise' readers in the process of reading, permeating them 'with the female responses that are crushed and set aside in the male-centred narratives of heroic legend' (p. 41). There is nothing here which problematizes the audience's role in constructing meaning, or about the way that such pity constructs the men and women in Chaucer's texts in social and class terms; men also show 'pite'—in the *Franklin's Tale*, for example—but it constructs them *differently*: as *gentlemen*.

The analysis of the *Clerk's Tale* is perhaps the most sustained and serious reading of a single text in the whole book. Mann reads Griselda as Christ: 'God is more truly imaged in Griselda's boundless suffering than in Walter's tyrannical cruelty' (p. 158). Mann at first appears to take the Clerk at his word (Griselda's story, he tells us, is not directed at wives, but is for 'every wight' (*CT*, 1142–7)): her gender-denying account indeed takes Griselda as everyman—or rather, everyGod. But she points out that the text tells us that 'patience, like pity, is a *womanly* quality' (p. 160). And here she anticipates 'feminist' objections: the 'suspicion' that the text might thus be confining women in a traditionally subordinate role by 'praising them for their meek acceptance of it' is reassuringly answered by the fact that 'patience is not for Chaucer a gender-specific virtue—it is an ideal for both sexes alike'. The *Clerk's Tale* finds 'an imaginative form within which [suffering] can be apprehended as a mystery': but there is nothing mysterious about late medieval Christianity's cruelly punitive attitude towards bodiliness, and hence women, who were associated with the carnal.⁴ I do not know why Mann avoids the kind of historical analysis which would allow understanding and not ineffability before the 'mystery' of suffering.

What is new and potentially valuable is Mann's emphasis on the Latin rhetorical and scholastic tradition which informs Chaucer's work. She offers lucid discussions of texts like Jerome's *Adversus Jovinian*, Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* and Matheolus's *Lamentations*. This is a departure from the dominant paradigms of Chaucer criticism, which have either focused on Chaucer's debt to a homogenized medieval Christianity (Robertson) or to the French courtly and bourgeois traditions (Muscatine). The result, however, is that Chaucer's texts appear as the products of a Renaissance humanist—an ambassador of high culture and learning—and most emphatically not as the products of a complex late medieval historical situation. In that context Latin culture certainly played a part, but (as Chaucer scholars have recently pointed

out) so did popular heresy, shifting notions of social class and the threats to the sex-gender system posed by women's unprecedented entry into high-status labour. The dialogic quality which Mann finds in Chaucer's texts is one of scholar talking to scholar (a process in which she is implicated although she won't admit it), and she therefore has no need to consider either the complex nature of historical reality or the wider society in which those texts were read and received (by women?). Thus Defoe's *Roxana* and the nineteenth-century writer Mary Oliphant are invoked at different points to reinforce the universal meanings of Chaucer's texts. The description of Troilus as a 'feminised hero' is crying out for historicization: the reader needs to know what kind of evidence allows us to determine that 'courage, strength, dignified self-restraint' were the nexus of qualities which made up the late fourteenth-century definition of 'manhod' (p. 166). The specificity of class—Troilus is a *knight*—is entirely missing from this account.

The book is pervaded by a kind of nervous defensiveness which results in the brash dismissal of 'extremist' positions. It's a kind of damage-limitation exercise, designed to curb the excesses of critics like Sheila Delany or David Aers, who do not share Mann's distaste for the taking up of overt political positions. Some readers will find it all very comforting.

Richardson and Johnston, on the other hand, seem oblivious to the threats of feminism. Their book is an early volume in a major new series from Macmillan entitled 'English Dramatists'; there is a dearth of useful and accessible critical material on medieval drama, so the book is welcome, but readers looking for new insights or for a significant critical approach will be disappointed. *Medieval Drama* is divided into two halves, due to 'the essential differences in the form and function of the Mystery plays and the Moralities and Interludes' (p. 6). The first half deals with the 'Mystery Plays': a general introduction, and then a chapter each on a representative play from each of the four 'cycles', each of which is used 'to talk about its host cycle in general' (p. 6). The authors rightly condemn the 'anthologising zeal' (p. 47) which has meant that for many readers the Towneley *Secunda Pastorum* is medieval drama, so why have they chosen it? Not only are they complicit with exactly what they want to reject, but they contradict their own principles of selection when they say that it is 'by no means representative...of an anomalous, atypical medieval play' (p. 47). The second half of the book deals with 'Moralities and Interludes': a general chapter on *Everyman* and other moralities, and then chapters on 'Place', 'Audience', 'Signifying practices' (on the morality plays' 'expression' of political forces in Tudor society by means of devices such as costuming and 'theatrical metalanguage'), and 'Popular and elite' (which is a way of talking about class in relation to the drama without talking about class). It is not clear why all four of these categories cannot be used in relation to the mystery plays as well: the first half of the book does in fact deal with them but doesn't foreground them so insistently. But the book's thesis is that the Tudor moral interludes have 'political and social purposes'; the implication here is that the earlier forms of

the drama, such as the mystery plays, did not have any such role, which is of course untrue. Matters of organisation, as Mann's book demonstrates, are vital in determining readers' responses and have to be thought out carefully.

From this summary, it should be clear that this relatively compact book (175 pages, including notes and bibliography) is largely introductory rather than representing a major new contribution to the field. However, it does incorporate recent important scholarship, namely that represented by the vast REED (Records of Early English Drama) project, and is also a significant attempt to treat the plays as stage-centred texts (although they underplay, or fail to mention, some of the scholarly debates: on the composite nature of the N-Town cycle; on the aims of the REED project; on the relative importance of typology as a critical tool). Yet it is a great pity that a book which is clearly intended for new students has missed the opportunity to raise, even modestly, some more searching questions about the role and function of medieval drama. The introductory chapter on the mystery plays is often admirable in the clarity with which it presents what can be gleaned from guild records about performances, and there are plenty of sensible caveats about the lack of documentary evidence which would enable us to reconstruct the exact conditions of production and consumption of the cycle plays (York is something of an exception here). The authors include very many interesting details, for example, about the Rogers' *Brevary*, the indispensable early seventeenth-century document which is the main source for sixteenth-century life in Chester (see p. 81) or the Mercers' Indenture from York, which has been invaluable in reconstructing conditions of performance for 1433 (p. 90). It is very useful for the reader to have this kind of evidence helpfully brought forward and its importance foregrounded.

But it's all presented very empirically and in an unproblematised form. I suspect that for many students the material in these introductory chapters will remain inert 'background', and will not present itself as the demand for a radical rereading of the texts which it should. The work of the historian Mervyn James on the myth and cult of Corpus Christi has been highly influential in reconstructing a context for the mystery plays which situates them within the social, economic and political life of their urban communities.⁵ This historical work has yet to be exploited in readings of the dramatic texts; although Richardson and Johnston do make use of historic records (especially Alexandra Johnston and Margaret Rogerson's York volume), their readings of the plays are not at all informed by the new historicist approaches represented particularly in the work of Theresa Coletti.⁶

The important work of the feminist historians Martha Howell and Judith Bennett on areas such as women's work, guilds and citizenship, or of ecclesiastical historians such as Margaret Aston on Lollardy, makes it very difficult to maintain theses such as that the plays 'formed a significant expression of social unity and bonding' (p. 234). The authors do not attempt to explore the multiplicity of cultural configurations found within urban populations in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—populations in which women had high-status

labour positions but did not act in, or determine the form of, the plays, and in which those who contested the sacraments, and especially the primacy of the Eucharist, did not see themselves represented in the process of social bonding.

The second half of the book, on the moralities and interludes, is rather more inventive and critically aware than the first half. The analysis of *Mankind*, for example, makes use of Austin's notion of performative language, built into a complex argument about the role and responses of the audience. Unfortunately, not all of the recent critical concepts mentioned are applied or presented in a way which is enabling for students. Bakhtin appears on p. 131 in a brief discussion of—invariably—'carnival'; and Foucault makes a fleeting appearance on p. 146 in a comment which I think students would find difficult to understand: his processes are 'an epistemic way of explaining discourse'. The bald statement that 'if there is any way in which language may achieve materiality it would be by means of meta-language' (p. 141) is not accompanied by any explanation of 'materiality' or of the debate which lies behind the proposition. There is no attempt to consider the way in which gender is inscribed in the drama: in discussing the debt of *The Castle of Perseverance* to the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, the authors remark that 'it would be silly to have all the vices and virtues in female form' (p. 100), but this is pitifully inadequate as a comment on the use of female allegorical personifications and their embodiment on the stage. Even though I would want to avoid a feminist critical practice which only noticed gender when female characters/personifications/authors were at issue, there is surely no longer any need to justify a critical awareness of the way gender informs representation. Bruce King's General Editor's Preface to the series talks about re-examining 'the important English dramatists of earlier centuries in the light of new information, new interests and new attitudes'; while this is vague, it does nevertheless suggest that there should be some attempt made to confront, in a new book, the way that the explosion of critical theory has affected the drama. In the final chapter on the interludes, the authors summarize critical positions in terms of a crude opposition between viewing the plays as 'some kind of prehistoric appendage to Shakespeare studies' or 'encouraging the reader to appreciate and enjoy the drama of the Interlude for itself' (pp. 148–9). Their project is overtly the latter, yet this is undercut by the suggestion, on the very last page, that *Dr Faustus* represents some apogee, some balance, some perfection of form which the earlier drama can only aspire to. The reader is left wobbling between the binary oppositions of medievalism and modernity. But what on earth is the 'muscularity' of the Elizabethan public stage (p. 155)? Perhaps gender has found its way into the argument after all.

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NOTES

- 1 The *Empire State Report* (November 1989) carried the following story: 'In yet another example of modern American thought, the American Cancer Society agreed to cancel a fundraising carnival in Saratoga because local yokels complained that the event's theme—a medieval fair—sounded like something, well, evil.' Quoted in *Old English Newsletter*, 24, 1 (Fall, 1990).
- 2 Lee Patterson, 'On the margin: Postmodernism, ironic history, and medieval studies', *Speculum*, 65 (1990), p. 87.
- 3 The phrase is the Scottish Chaucerian poet Gavin Douglas's description of Chaucer: Gavin Douglas, *Prologue: Aeneid* (1513) (l. 449).
- 4 See for example Sara Maitland, 'Tassionate prayer: Masochistic images in women's experience', in Linda Hurcombe (ed.), *Sex and God* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987).
- 5 Mervyn James, 'Ritual, drama and social body in the late medieval English town', *Past and Present*, 98 (1983) pp. 3–29.
- 6 See, for example, Theresa Coletti, 'Reading REED: History and the Records of Early English Drama', in Lee Patterson (ed.), *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380–1530* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 248–84; Theresa Coletti, 'A feminist approach to the Corpus Christi cycles', in Richard Emmerson (ed.), *Approaches to Teaching Medieval Drama* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1990), pp. 79–89.

MPALIVE-HANGSON MSISKA

• **Homi Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration***
(London and New York: Routledge, 1990),
322 pp., £35.00 (hardback), £9.95
(paperback)

At a time when a number of international and domestic events serve to remind us of the ambiguous ethics surrounding the varied uses to which the idea of the nation is put, the publication of Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* is an invaluable addition to our analytical resources.

Nation and Narration contains sixteen essays. The introduction sketches the thesis underlying the collection as a whole, that narrations of and about the nation often reveal an ambivalence along the axes of history and signification. The nation can be conceived of as a form of tension between the ideal and mythological, on the one hand, and the 'real' and historical, on the other, with the former tending towards the dissolution of difference and the latter presenting difference as a necessary constituent of the nation-space. It is perhaps in its overall insistence on the idea of the nation as a cultural and contingent production determined in various ways by subjects of narratives of specific historical and social formations that the thematic and political coherence of the collection comes across most impressively. There are however equally important points of divergence which often relate to differences in aspects of critical theory with which individual authors align themselves.

The book begins with Ernest Renan's 1882 lecture, 'What is a Nation?' in which Renan sets out to refute some of the popular criteria on which the nation is said to be founded. First, he advances the view that the idea of the nation in the West owes its origin to the Germanic invasions which precipitated the fall of the Roman Empire. Afterwards, he considers the connection between the nation and race and concludes that race has played little part in the creation of modern states.

As regards the view that language is the defining criterion of nationhood, he contends that such an assumption is a product of mistaking language for an index of racial identity, which is false given that historically the correspondence between nationality and language in Europe is tenuous indeed. In addition, he dismisses dynastic and religious explanations of nationhood.

His own view is that the nation is 'a soul, a spiritual principle', which is constituted by a legacy of shared memories and a conscious choice to live together. Thus, Renan delicately balances historical explanation with the principle of individual choice, reinterrenching the notion of *patrie* with all its

connotations of common origin while acknowledging that the nation is neither permanent nor natural.

A thorough critique of Renan's argument is to be found in Martin Thom's essay, 'Tribes within nations'. Thom questions Renan's secondary argument that the Germanic invasions are the foundations of modern European nations, and suggests that in the context of nineteenth-century debates on the history of France, Renan's interpretation represents a particular and by no means commonly held valuation of the Germanic invasions. It is a Romantic reading of the past, which takes the early German invaders as a primitive but heroic people who created the modern Christian civilization out of the ruins of imperial Rome. Contrary to this assessment, the Romanist view, such as Carlo Cattaneo's, depicts the Germanic peoples as an example of an original and more specific barbarism. Both positions served particular ideological needs of nineteenth-century nationalism.

It is out of the divisions within the historical explanations of the nation that Durkheim formulates the nation as an abstract network of social relations while retaining the voluntarist criterion advanced by Renan.

In Timothy Brennan's essay, 'The national longing of form', the Third World novel and nation are examined in the context of imperialism and decolonization. The assumption among metropolitan critics that all fiction from such countries elaborates the process of nation building is dismissed as a gross oversimplification. There are nationalist writers, but there are also those who, though rooted in the aesthetic traditions of Europe, interrogate the story of the nation, an example of which is Vargas Llosa. Llosa's *The War of the End of the World* foregrounds the difficulties of nation building in a post-colonial formation. The essay draws our attention to ways in which the circulation of images of the nation in the Third World is mediated by colonial and neo-colonial relations.

Brennan's account of Third World nationalism is followed by Doris Sommer's 'Irresistible romance' which recovers the political significance of the novels of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Latin America. She argues that the 'Boom' writers of the 1960s and 1970s, by their novelty and the compatibility of their aesthetic programme with the postmodernist culture of Europe, created the impression that nothing of great literary significance had ever preceded them.

On the contrary, Sommer discovers a robust tradition, one which employs historical romance in laying the cultural foundation of the emerging nations. Marriage and romance are used as narrative and thematic strategies for the erasure of the memory of colonial difference. Sommer demonstrates that this form of narrative did not and could not easily abandon or undermine the heritage of violence and hierarchy in Latin America.

Sneja Gunew's paper, 'Denaturalizing cultural nationalisms' shows how in the binary opposition between white and aboriginal, a particular form of political exclusion is produced and sustained: the tensions between Anglo-Celtic and whites of other European origins are absorbed into a homogeneity which is constantly at odds with the real divisions informing the hierarchical ordering of

literary texts. Gunew sees the nation as constituted by two opposing spaces, the public sphere—discourses forming what is considered culturally legitimate—and the counter-public sphere, ‘those writings which are currently excluded’. Underpinning the dichotomy is the question of tradition as it pertains to institutions which form the basis of the contemporary Australian nation, and which acquire their legitimacy by their links with a purportedly original European Anglo-Celtic culture to which the non-Anglo-Celtic Australian cannot lay claim. Thus the very founding myths of the nation reproduce relations of hierarchy and subordination in the entire field of cultural practice. The paper foregrounds the extent to which the term post-colonialism can screen off the operations of local difference.

The periphery in Geoffrey Bennington’s ‘Postal politics and the institution of the nation’ is the place one must start from in tracing the story of the nation if one is to avoid colluding with the myth that the nation has a centre. The term ‘post’, as it operates in literary criticism in such notions as ‘poststructuralism’ and ‘postmodernism’ as well as in the cultural practice of postal services, elides the anteriority of its referent.

It is in the light of this that Bennington considers the concept of nation via the marginal politics of postal networks. He discusses Eugène Vaille’s *Histoire générale des postes françaises* which advocates the view that the post and communication in general pre-date politics. Vaille’s position is contradicted by Montesquieu’s which takes the post to be the invention of politics. Montesquieu’s wish for the simplification of the postal network as a way of avoiding unnecessary secrecy is shown to yield the very political effects it is designed to correct. Bennington concludes from this that true politics is about the absence of a postal network which would ensure the absolute secrecy of the secret. By the same token, if the postal network guaranteed that letters exchanged between Rousseau’s citizen as a member of the sovereign and the citizen as subject would reach their destination there would be no need for politics nor the post, indeed even for the nation and narration. As far as the author is concerned, ‘in order to have a name, a boundary and a history to be told at the centre, the state must be constitutively imperfect.’

In Simon During’s ‘Literature—nationalism’s other?’ the border between contemporary narratives of the nation in Australian and those of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British nationalism are crossed and recrossed. He argues that contrary to the view held by most humanists and Marxists, nationalism is not ‘a nasty ideological formation’, since in Third World countries it is the language in which ideas about liberty are expressed. Indeed, that is also true of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain where the language of nationalism became the means by which the shift from the old order into modernity was managed. During strongly rejects the view that the literature of the period was predominantly concerned with the production of a narrow ‘Englishness’. As part of the civil imaginary the relationship between the writing of the period and the general articulation of the nation is a more complex affair.

These texts, relying on the modern split between politics and ethics, occupy the secular sphere, producing and disseminating representations of behaviour and taste.

Even in the wake of the French Revolution, the literature of the period largely commits itself to civil society rather than to the state. This withdrawal from the ethical and nation, for During, finds its quintessential expression in de Quincy's *The English Mailcoach*, where the English subject is presented as decentred. Finally, the author offers his account as a lesson to the post-colonial writer who must not be afraid of being nationalistic.

If During is right in saying that as part of the civil imaginary, eighteenth-century writing was not nationalistic, according to the argument presented in John Barrell's essay, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Englishness of English art', eighteenth-century British discussions of English art are patently no part of the civil imaginary, since some of them are clearly nationalistic.

The production of Englishness as an aesthetic category occurs precisely during this period and principally through the work of Sir Joshua Reynolds. Reynolds starts off with a customary aesthetic which acknowledges the value of the local and of habit in painting. However, by 1770, he entirely abandons this theory and instead prescribes, as the fundamental objective of good art, the transcendence of the local, a position which was inconsonant with the dominant theory of the time which saw art as having a civic rather than a nationalistic function.

Nevertheless, in 1776, Reynolds firmly returns to the customary aesthetic though he is clearly under the impression that what he is undermining is not so much civic humanism as a pedantic rationalist approach to the study of art. The more he supports the customary aesthetic and moves further away from the universalism of civic humanism, the easier he perceives art as a representation of national character. This shift is mirrored in the way ornament, which earlier had been perceived as peripheral to the aesthetic and ethical value of art, was to replace the traditional centrality of the human figure in Reynolds' later revaluation of the elements of narrative space.

In his essay 'Destiny made manifest', David Simpson argues that though Walt Whitman has been held as a socialist hero, his egalitarianism depends on a view of American society which dissolves difference into a depoliticized homogeneity. Simpson examines the narrative strategies at work in Whitman's writing for evidence of the writer's political beliefs. He shows how Whitman's attempt to create a democratic transaction between the narrator and the reader belies the presence of a privileged authorial subject.

Simpson further explains the extent to which certain subjects such as Spanish-speaking Americans are excluded in Whitman's texts even though such groups are an important part of the period in which the author is writing. Furthermore, his use of Indian words is shown to represent merely the writer's linguistic authority rather than a genuine strategy of political inclusion. According to Simpson, the central problem in Whitman's writing is that he prioritizes metonymy over metaphor. Simpson's contribution is a useful example of how

one can profitably engage with the politics of representation by attending to the ideological value of narrative strategies.

Rachel Bowlby investigates another set of narratives of the American nation in her chapter, 'Breakfast in America'. She argues that the cultural production of the American nation in novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* disperses the term nature across discourses of class, race and gender in such a manner that the story of the nation is always returned as a profound ambivalence, one that cannot be easily wished away by the magic wand of narration.

Obviously, the notion of permanent ambivalence which is a helpful reading strategy needs to be used with some caution if it is not to collude with deterministic narratives which foreclose political transformation.

Inserted between the nation and otherness as regards the management of philanthropy, so argues Bruce Robbins in his 'Telescopic philanthropy', is the interplay between politics and professionalism within the nation. He demonstrates how Dickens's critique in *Bleak House*, which is directed against professionalism as an agency of dehumanization, itself depends on the values of professionalism such as the writerly use of wit and comedy.

The location of *aporia* or closure at the centre of Dickens's project persuades Robbins to imagine an enabling discourse beyond the general *aporia* of all institutional practices, including critical practice which depends on institutional affiliation for its critique of cultural institutions. He argues that *aporia* must be replaced by *poros*—a set of devices for resolving difficulties which reduce one's dependency on universals.

Robbins calls for a kind of critical practice that is self-reflexive in its relations with cultural discourses constituting its area of inquiry.

James Snead's 'European pedigrees/African contagions' offers an account of how the nineteenth-century European tendency to define the nation by exclusivity is foiled by its inherent tendency to expand outwards, thereby bringing into its orbit alien signifiers which expose the limits of the drive towards exclusivity. In Snead's view, African and African-American literature challenges the propensity to stabilize signifiers, by constituting a history of affinity rather than one of difference into a collective and inclusive text that speaks of hybridity.

Francis Mulhern returns to the link between nation and narration within the academy through a study of F.R. Leavis's strategies of reading and the broader political processes which determine the Leavisite project.

Leavis's humanism is shown to work by constituting a subject of its reading and writing practice in which the function of criticism is a matter of reducing the gap between the ideal and the real subject. Part of this normalizing tendency involves negotiating the tricky dichotomy between the dynamic of industrialization and civilization, between modernity and tradition. Thus Leavis bemoans the gradual decay of the organic community and it is in an attempt to correct this state of affairs that he increasingly comes to literature in terms of

Englishness. In *Revaluation*, he constructs a series of binary oppositions, all of which reduce themselves to an ethnocentric view of poetry. *The Great Tradition*, despite the fact that of the three chosen writers only one is English, presents the English novel as a representation of the English character.

Furthermore, the author sees Leavis as a symptom of a profound shift in the class composition of the academy in which an older imperial aristocracy is succeeded by a lower middle class whose guarantee of integrity is the self-evidentness of Englishness.

Finally, Leavis's essentialist humanism ends up as misanthropy, specifically in the last lecture given by Q.D. Leavis in which the yearning for the great tradition expresses itself as a violent antipathy towards all forms of otherness.

Gillian Beer's 'The island and the aeroplane' analyses the relationship between the nation and the aeroplane in Virginia Woolf. She argues that Woolf's critique of patriarchy and imperialism adds a particular complexity to her use of the island story, as it enables her to deploy the multiple signification of the aeroplane and bring into shifting relations such elements as land, water and margins, on the one hand, and air and the aeroplane, on the other.

The arrival of the aeroplane unsettles the idea of the nation as an island. Not that this is new, for at the centre of the idea of England as an island there is a series of contradictions, one of which is that England does not occupy the whole island. Moreover, the etymology of the term 'island' suggests not so much a secure fortress as an intimate relationship between land and water, one which leaves wide open the possible entry of otherness.

In Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, the aeroplane diminishes the landmarks of nationhood as it offers the promise of transcending national limits. In *The Waves*, the refusal to impose past narrative categories on the present constitutes a radical reading of the nation-space. However, the euphoric image of the aeroplane of Woolf's earlier work gives way to a more ambivalent one in her later work in which the aeroplane is sometimes seen as an image of death. On the whole, the combination of cynicism and humour and the consistent rejection of closure saturate Woolf's account of the nation story both as autobiography and history.

Homi Bhabha's 'DissemiNation' concludes the book. Using a Derridian style, he examines the cultural production of the nation as a social and textual affiliation, requiring a mode of interpretation that resists the linearity of narrative time. Bhabha usefully employs the terms pedagogy and performance in order to focus on the nation as history and signification. He sees the inherent disjunction in the idea of the nation not only as a theoretical construct but also as part of a political praxis within which the possibility of a constructive fracture of the nation becomes real as counter-narratives return the essentialist representation of the subject to the domain of history.

It would be difficult to convey adequately the subtlety of argumentation and the analytical depth of the essays. Suffice it to say that *Nation and Narration* brings together original work, representing some of the best effort on the subject.

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- **James Donald (ed.), *Thresholds: Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 189 pp., £35.00 (hardback), £9.99 (paperback)**
- **Sarah Kofman, *Freud and Fiction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), 196 pp., £29.50**

Thresholds, as James Donald explains, is the fruit of a series of talks given at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London early in 1987. That is to say, many of the contributors have reworked their initial formulations quite extensively for this publication. The essays range in topic from Victor Burgin's 'Geometry and abjection' to John Forrester's 'Psychoanalysis: telepathy, gossip and/or science?', comparing and preserving, at least in intention, a synchronic diversity useful to the future historian. Several of the pieces are illustrated: six works from Mary Kelly's 'Interim' are reproduced extremely satisfactorily here. A conscious balance between word and image, male and female is maintained. What the writers have in common is their attempt to find a way of analysing the dynamics of culture that would take account of the central fact of the unconscious and its operation.

In his unassuming and remarkably clear introduction—many of the essays are much less accessible—Donald sketches the history of cultural studies by means of quotation from E.P.Thompson, Raymond Williams, Althusser, and Foucault, to trace how the model has shifted, first to accommodate notions of the unconscious, then to modify them. Psychoanalysis, with its (unstable) map of dynamic structures in the individual, offers a means by which the cultural historian may attempt to factor the unconscious into her study. The procedure is notoriously problematic, not least since the theory involved was developed specifically from clinical procedures directed towards the treatment of individuals. In these essays the version of psychoanalysis universally invoked by the contributors is one already directed towards an investigation of social organization itself: the psychoanalysis used in *Thresholds* is that produced by the feminist rereading of Lacan's rereading of Freud. For all the variety of their provenance, the essays return to common themes: the organization of desire, fantasy, and identification as they are structured in the encounter with what Donald calls the social real.

Homi Bhabha's 'A question of survival: nature and psychic states' is one of the most striking contributions and particularly hard to take issue with. In an argument that is forceful to the point of ruthlessness Bhabha dismantles Benedict Anderson's claim for the historical univocity of Englishness before amplifying the poignant witness of colonial dispossession and loss offered by Fanon and

Said. The elegance of Bhabha's manoeuvres and his rhetorical mastery are as daunting to criticism as the almost unassailable voice of the oppressed. Bhabha's reading of Fanon argues that the political dialectic of the relationship between colonizer and colonized is disclosed in the language of psychoanalysis. There is true brilliance in the invention with which he makes this interpretation stick, in a sustained reading of Fanon. But Bhabha's is not merely an exercise in interpretation: more directly than any other essay in the collection this seeks a path towards political agency. He finds it in a version of Freud's work on melancholia. It is not hard to see why the melancholic as victim of loss should offer an appropriate subjectivity for the study of the colonized: in Bhabha's hands, however, it is the potential energies inherent in the melancholic position that are emphasized. It is unfortunate that this crucial part of his argument is so allusive and compressed, for it is here that the hope for transformation must lie.

Mary Kelly's work is noticeably less disorientating to the observer than five years ago: it is a measure of how such work has moved us on. Her topic, though, the representation of the ageing body, remains central to the questioning of female subjectivity. Her essays introduce 'Interim', her work in progress. In the section of it called 'Corpus' she pairs image and text in thirty laminated panels, designed to be the size of small hoardings. Divided into groups of six, the panels are arranged under titles taken from those *attitudes passionelles* defined by Charcot, the nineteenth-century neuropathologist. Kelly explains the importance of Freud's move in directing attention away from those spectacles of the hysterical female body to an auditory focus: she traces the reverberations of that shift as it is still to be observed in the images of popular culture. Like Laura Mulvey, whose insistent and productive circlings round the Oedipus myth are also reprinted here, Kelly is both maker and theorist of art. It is that perhaps which persuaded Donald to include two essays from her. It is possible, as I noted above, to reproduce her work with a high degree of success: the materials and technologies she has employed are designed to encourage such circulation. Her own strategy as artist is to place the femininity so extravagantly and uncompromisingly on the surface of the image—no need to seek out the enigma of woman—that regular habits of identification are thrown fruitfully into disarray in the female spectator and she may see the defining net and slip through, laughing. To name that possibility, to trace that space opens up new subjectivities for women in mass culture.

Other provocative essays include work by Parveen Adams probing Freud's account of hysterical identification and its relation to gendered identity, and John Forrester's insider's account of the culture of psychoanalysis. Elizabeth Cowie gives a critical and historical assessment of the part psychoanalysis has played in film theory, while Elizabeth Wright, in 'The reader in analysis' seeks a way to create a dialogue between reader-response theory and psychoanalysis. It is in Robert Young's essay, historicizing the current intimacy between politics and psychoanalysis, that the salutary observation is offered that the relation of the psyche to the social is one of incommensurability.

'Thresholds', as quoted in the title of this book, are secured visual representation by means of a very beautiful and enigmatic cover photograph, where a model apparently kitted out for an evening at the ICA stands grasping a bow in a doorway. There is no sign of arrows.

Sarah Kofman's presentation at the 'Speculations' conference held under the auspices of the Freud Museum in London in 1991 was met with considerable enthusiasm. Increasing attention had been paid in the United States to her work since the early 1980s: in 1991 she was included among the fifteen feminist theoreticians from France presented in Jardine and Menke's collection, published by Columbia, *Shifting Scenes*. The paper she gave in London, however, and the publication of *Freud and Fiction* which it helped to mark, was the decisive moment in alerting a British audience to her critique of Freud.

Kofman has taught at the University of Paris since 1970 (without achieving tenure: its most recent refusal, in 1989, provoked media protest, it is claimed). Her twenty books include works on Comte, Nietzsche, Kant, and Derrida, though it is her engagement with Freud that probably commands the widest interest. Translated excerpts from Kofman's own autobiographical writings were published in a 1986 issue of *SubStance* devoted to the 'Aesthetics and Politics of an Ethnic Identity'. These painful reconstructions of Kofman's experience as a young Jewish daughter in occupied France are set up in a space created by the interplay of dream, memory and history. The writer's confidence in the analytic process and its accounts of psychic economy and dynamics, no less than her expertise in its interpretive techniques, could hardly be more strongly affirmed.

It is as a subtle practitioner of his own hermeneutic arts that Kofman approaches Freud's analyses of literary texts. It is also as a former analysand, who has declared that it was only when she stopped trying to make sense and just talked that she 'turned the corner' in her own analysis. In Kofman's hands this now merely orthodox recognition that language must exceed the scope of interpretation becomes the instrument of a critique of Freud that can be both intimate and radical.

Freud and Fiction is the middle volume of a trilogy, investigating the aesthetic, fiction, and the figure of woman (*sic*) in Freud, that was originally published in France between 1970 and 1980. (The other volumes are published in English as *The Childhood of Art* and *The Enigma of Woman*.) It has taken from 1974 till 1991 for the present work, *Freud and Fiction*, to reach Anglophone readers. Sharing the moment of Kristeva's *Des chinoises* and Irigaray's *Speculum de l'autre femme*, it has not altogether escaped dating.

What remains revolutionary, however, is Kofman's problematic. She takes as her starting-point Freud's readings of four more or less literary texts—the fragments of Empedocles, Hebbel's play, *Judith and Holofernes*, Jensen's *Gradiva* and E.T.A.Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*. It is upon these readings, as hermeneutic phenomena, that she muses. Though she is out to define their boundaries, if not to probe their limitations, it is by means of an unhurried retracing of what she suggests as the process of Freud's thought. She moves

between an apparent identification with his methods and perceptions and a shrewd interrogation of them. This allows her to offer a highly sophisticated account of the way Freud used fiction not only to endorse his models of psychic dynamics but also to refine and elaborate them: the essay on *Gradiva* is particularly accomplished and suggestive.

Kofman opens by exploring Freud's attempt to validate his new concept of the death instinct by declaring it prefigured in the principles of Empedocles. It is the first investigation in a series where the benefit to Freud of 'finding' a particular set of notions already embodied in textual form is assessed. Her observations are nuanced, diverse and bold: the Empedoclean myth, for instance, 'serves as a substitute...for a completely rational basis to Freud's final theory of the instincts'. Caught between the need for a 'scientific' methodology and the conviction that psychic life can never be directly observed but only known through signs and images, Freud turned to literature to find the traces of a shared endopsychic knowledge.

There have been many objections to Freud's appropriation of cultural objects: Kofman chooses to debate the matter on new ground. Her examination of the heuristic value of the figure of Judith offers this defence: refusing to apply the analytic method to literature is retrogressive, since in effect that move merely concedes a sacred character to literature. What Freud does, she claims, is establish 'a genetic relation between different productions' and at the same time assert that they are irreducible at the structural level. This argument is used to sustain Kofman's position as well as Freud's.

In fact, Kofman never repudiates the Freudian methodology of interpretation, though she pays scrupulous attention to the complex motivations that may power it. The explanation she suggests for Freud's misrepresenting the importance of castration in *The Sandman*, when really, as she claims, it is the production of writing that is at stake, is both classically Freudian and subversive of Freud's supreme authority as interpreter. By suggesting that it is his own incestuous desire that drives him to obfuscate what is going on in this text, Kofman insists that Freud is a reader as helplessly bound as the analyst by the counter-transference. Kofman's own readings push back the boundaries of what have been established for some time as sacred writings and redefine them. It is, in the end, in order to claim her own place within this realm of privilege. Repeatedly, Kofman manages to expand Freud's text so that the processes of his creativity are thrown into relief, while at the same time transforming it into an arena for her own performance.

It is not easy otherwise to locate the politics of Kofman's enterprise. She is caught between the hermeneutic passion and an awareness of its potential illegitimacy. Her expansion of analytic interpretation purports to be made in the interests of multiplicity: claims to restore the 'correct' understanding of a text only violate 'the play of meaning' as she says. But this now transparent rhetoric, with its denial of responsibility, needs to be questioned. It excludes agency and the sceptic's question, *cui bono*? Kofman is committed to the demystification of

the analytic community's sacred texts, but in whose name? In a single notable passage she adopts a feminist stance, to point out that Freud's conception of women coincides with the text that he exploits because both are in the grip of the same ideological tradition, which imposes itself like the truth. In its originary moment and directed towards a professional readership that observation must have been quite outrageous. More often, Kofman offers herself as a better Freud, closely modelled on the master but exceeding him, a necessary supplement. These are a politics that remain defined by an Oedipal enclosure.

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• **Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous***

Possessions: The Wonder of the New World

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), ix+202

pp., £22.50

A rather world-weary Sunday reviewer, commenting on the plethora of books which appeared in 1991 to mark the quincentenary of Columbus's famous voyage, and balefully predicting a deluge in 1992, suggested that such works would belong to two well-established genres: type *a*, the anti-colonialist exposé of the brutalities of European and American history; and type *b*, the boy's own adventure tale of heroic feats achieved against seemingly overwhelming odds. Stephen Greenblatt, probably the most famous literary critic writing about the English Renaissance, had to be different....

Greenblatt has always manifested a strong interest in colonial themes, from his early work on Walter Raleigh, through his article on speech, metaphor and cultural difference, 'Learning to curse', to the much-touted and analysed 'Invisible bullets', so he can be accused of jumping on the band-wagon rather less than most. However, *Marvelous Possessions*, based on his Clarendon lectures at Oxford and Carpenter lectures at Chicago (both 1988), is his first book devoted to the subject.

Greenblatt's basic argument is disarmingly simple: 'Wonder is...the central figure in the initial European response to the New World, the decisive emotional and intellectual experience in the presence of radical difference' (p. 14). Or, to put it more poetically, 'Wonder—thrilling, potentially dangerous, momentarily immobilizing, charged at once with desire, ignorance, and fear—is the quintessential human response to what Descartes calls a "first encounter"' (p. 20). Greenblatt starts his book, as if baiting critics—of both his privileged position and rhetorical style—with an anecdote of a holiday in Bali. Wandering 'by moonlight on the narrow paths through silent rice paddies glittering with fireflies', he comes across a tiny village and sees the light from the '*bale banjar*, the communal pavilion in which I knew—from reading Clifford Geertz and Miguel Covarrubias and Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead—that the Balinese gathered in the evenings' (p. 3). The light, to his disappointment, comes from a VCR, where the villagers are watching themselves performing a ceremony. Later, in the town of Amlapura, he sees a cinema showing *Death Wish II* alongside which an aged *dalang*, a mystic storyteller, performs stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* on a rough trestle stage with 'exquisite puppets cut from buffalo parchment' (p. 5). Greenblatt concludes that both these encounters

reveal a 'Balinese fascination with images on screens' and warns that 'it is important to resist what we may call *a priori* ideological determinism' because cultures can assimilate both other representations and modes of representation. From the anecdote a theoretical formulation is distilled to deal with the question which interests Greenblatt, 'the problem of the assimilation of the other is linked to what we may call, adapting Marx, *the reproduction and circulation of mimetic capital*' (p. 6). Capital is invoked for three reasons: first, capitalism and mimesis are connected because 'it is with capitalism that the proliferation and circulation of representations... achieved a spectacular and virtually global magnitude' (shades of Fredric Jameson here?); second, because representations can be stockpiled or accumulated to generate new ones; third, because mimesis is a social relation of production, representations being 'not only products but producers, capable of decisively altering the very forces that brought them into being'.

I was irresistibly reminded of Barthes's essay, 'The writer on holiday'. I cite this passage from the 'Introduction' to illustrate how close to the wind Greenblatt sails, how near he risks rather embarrassing self-parody in sticking to old formulas. Little in the theoretical discussion of representation is new and the clever list of points begs innumerable questions (the analogy—or is it a homology?—teeters on the brink when Greenblatt acknowledges the danger of collapsing the distinction between 'mimetic practice and any other kind of social practice': 'in concentrating on mimetic practice...we...risk ignoring other important qualities: modes of non-mimetic production as well as reproduction, *presentation as well as representation, reality as well as simulation*' (p. 7; my emphasis)). I would also suggest that this is all a bit of a blind; that it serves to hide the very real fear one might have that there is rather less in the idea of a colonial history of 'wonder' than there might be in such boring old words as 'imperialism', 'exploitation', 'slavery' and all the Marxisante paraphernalia an eclectic anthropologist like Lévi-Strauss brought to bear on the history of the Americas (Lévi-Strauss only makes it into one footnote). Certainly the comments on mimesis and capitalism seem to have little to do with the rest of the book. After the relative failure of 'the circulation of social energy', perhaps Greenblatt is still searching for the big hit he made with 'self-fashioning'; the question is, is 'wonder' a good enough catchphrase?

Marvelous Possessions sets out to chart the history 'from medieval wonder as a sign of dispossession to Renaissance wonder as an agent of appropriation' (p. 24). (Why does only one of these period-labels merit capitals, I wonder?) The second, and I think the most brilliant chapter, 'From the Dome of the Rock to the Rim of the World', deals with *Mandeville's Travels*. Greenblatt labels Mandeville 'the knight of nonpossession' (p. 28), suggesting that only in the course of the narrative of his travels does he discover his identity. Whilst Columbus and Cortés dream of riches and fame, Mandeville has to renounce them 'in order to keep faith' (p. 27). For the fictitious Medieval traveller (see pp. 32–6 for a discussion of Mandeville's identity and its significance), 'the most

perfect wonder is the wonder that is also a material reality' (p. 36), so that 'it is very difficult for Mandeville to believe that a sign, any sign, does not have some legitimate claim, however marginal, to reality' (p. 41). While he sets out to find the geographical and spiritual centre of the world, Jerusalem, the 'sacred metonymy' connoting the real, he is forced to acknowledge a radical decentring, a metaphorical world where 'every point has an equal and opposite point' (p. 43). The traveller is displaced 'from the Dome of the Rock to the sphere'; 'from the dream of possession to a dispossessed wandering, Mandeville passes from a possessive insistence on the core orthodox Christian belief to an open acceptance of many coexisting beliefs' (p. 45). Having beguiled the reader with this Jacosonian plot, Greenblatt moves in for the rhetorical *coup de grâce*. Is this an 'early and eloquent expression of tolerance', he asks? Tolerance is 'only genuinely possible with those with whom one has to live', and like Paul de Man, another celebrator of the openness of metaphoricity, *Mandeville's Travels* are 'surprisingly ungenerous' to one group of people: the Jews. Whereas for de Man the 'mutual celebration of difference is complicated...by the history of which he never spoke' (p. 50), Mandeville removes the Jews from the Holy Land and then has them appear elsewhere as the spiteful monsters of anti-Semitic tradition. Why? 'As unredeemable enemies, they secure the identity that is always threatening to slip away from Mandeville's text' (p. 51). The seeds of the intolerance are there, which would lead to the conquest of the Americas; after all, 1492 was the year that the Jews were driven from Spain as well as that of Columbus's famous voyage, and the Admiral urged that the profits of his endeavours be spent on the reconquest of Jerusalem.

One feels almost churlish criticizing such a carefully constructed and persuasive chapter which neatly links together so many related problems of ethnocentrism. But inevitably questions have to be asked; surely the point about the construction of an 'other' to secure identity is a commonplace of colonial criticism from Fanon onwards (at least!), to say nothing of the psychoanalysis from where it came. Not only am I not sure whether Greenblatt is telling us anything new, but it is not obvious from the historical generalizations that one can locate a neat break between the Medieval knight and the Renaissance conquistador. Doesn't Greenblatt's point about tolerance show that unless one abjures one's own identity there must always be different identities against which the self must be defined? To find, for example, that Englishmen in both the twelfth and sixteenth centuries waged a vicious propaganda campaign against the Irish is hardly surprising as they wanted to occupy their land. To find that Mandeville and Columbus both employ anti-Semitic rhetoric is not, *ipso facto*, very helpful in charting a history of responses to the strange and wonderful. As in the theoretical introduction, at crucial points analysis is absent. Greenblatt is surely right to stress that tolerance is only meaningful if it demands co-habitation; but we would do well to remember that *Mandeville's Travels* is the apocryphal work of an eccentric pilgrim, not the work of a desperate colonial administrator,

and if he ‘takes possession of nothing’ (p. 26), perhaps we should not be too surprised.

Columbus’s writings, the subject of chapter 3, ‘Marvelous possessions’, are of an altogether different genre; whilst Mandeville removed the Jews from the Holy Land, Columbus omitted the Spanish from the landscape of the New World because his ‘actions are performed entirely *for a world elsewhere*’ (p. 56; Greenblatt’s emphasis). What matters is the communication between colonizers and the motherland: natives become passive witnesses to a series of speech-acts they have no chance of comprehending because ‘for Columbus taking possession is principally the performance of a set of linguistic acts’ (p. 57). The ‘extreme formalism’ (p. 59) of Columbus’s colonialism became enshrined in the *Requerimento* a legal document in Spanish which informed the Amerindians ‘of their rights and obligations as vassals of the kings and queens of Spain’ (p. 97), and which would seem like a Dario Fo joke, but was supposedly read out by all conquistadores after 1513. The burden on Columbus was to persuade those back home that the whole enterprise was worthwhile—quite clearly he could not ‘take possession of nothing’! Exploiting the newness of his achievement (‘prior to Columbus there had been nothing comparable to the absolute break brought about by the exceptionally long ocean crossing’ (p. 55)), Columbus came to use a sense of wonder to beat off ‘those cavilling skeptics who want more tangible signs of gain’ (p. 73). Again there is an ‘extreme formalism’ at work because ‘The marvelous stands for the missing caravels laden with gold’; metonymies not metaphors connote a tangible reality and the wonder of Columbus diametrically opposes that of Mandeville. Ultimately, Columbus is led to naming ‘the manifestation of power through eponymous titles’ (p. 82); ‘the claim of possession is grounded in the power of wonder’ (p. 83).

The chapter is less provocative and remarkable than the second for two main reasons; first, Greenblatt does not pick up the Jewish theme, so tantalizingly offered at the end of the discussion of Mandeville, which adds to the eclectic nature of the book (perhaps we need to bear in mind that it is based on lectures). Second, what is discussed and concluded is what might be expected given the premisses set out. Certainly the analysis pales beside Peter Hulme’s perceptive comments in *Colonial Encounters*.

Chapters 4 and 5, ‘Kidnapping language’ and ‘The go-between’, continue the examination of the interrelation between figurative language and exploitation, centre and periphery. Chapter 4 shows that Mandeville was blind to the complications of cross-cultural communication, because his dialogues were always with ‘imaginary others’ (p. 91); voyagers to the New World ‘frequently express frustration at the difficulty of understanding the other’ (p. 92), a problem which only intensifies as more contact is made. Greenblatt borrows the term ‘caesura’ from poetics (an analogy?) to describe the space between ‘the material sighting and then its significance’ in New World writings, ‘the place of discovery where the explanatory power of writing repeatedly tames the opacity of the eye’s objects by rendering them transparent signs’ (p. 88). We are now into quite

familiar Greenblatt territory, the 'savage' as either extreme of metaphor, absolute difference or identity; picking out a comment by Peter Martyr, Greenblatt notes, 'One moment the Indians have no culture; the next moment they have ours' (p. 95). Of course, all this 'does not lead to identification with the other but to a ruthless will to possess' (p. 98), perpetrated by the improvisations of the European invaders (I was again reminded of Peter Hulme, who coined the phrase 'polytropic man'), who counterfeit in order to conquer. Chapter 5 contains a fascinating discussion of Herodotus' *Histories*, which, in contrast to 'a type of historical authority that draws its strength and coherence from its massive centeredness...[view] history as necessarily decentered; his authority is bound up with an appeal to what he has personally seen and heard outside the city limits' (p. 123). A bit like Mandeville really. Herodotus is then used as a stick with which to beat Renaissance chronicles which not only lack 'the intelligence and range of Herodotus, but there is something inherently debased about their accounts of glorious conquests' (p. 128). Greenblatt turns to Bernal Diaz's *Conquest of New Spain*, clearly a paradigmatic example of a 'chronicle of a great culture's destruction' rather than 'the history of a great culture's salvation'. Diaz's eyewitness account of the human sacrifice in Aztec temples, far from distinguishing his religious beliefs from those of the barbarians, reveals an identity not a difference: 'what Bernal Diaz actually describes is not the unimaginably alien...but a displaced version of his own system of belief: temple, high altar, cult of holy blood, statues before which offerings are made, "symbols like crosses"' (p. 134). The wonder he experiences at this unexpected 'homology' (Greenblatt's term) 'effects the crucial break with an other that can only be described, only witnessed, in the language of sameness' (p. 135). Like Columbus, but unlike Mandeville and Herodotus, Diaz's wonder 'is a prelude to appropriation' (p. 136). The Aztecs may be cannibals, but Diaz was part of 'the greatest experiment in political, economic, and cultural cannibalism in the history of the Western world' (p. 136). The work concludes with a comparison between Dona Marina, the Indian woman used by the Spanish in Mexico and New Spain and Montaigne's trustworthy servant who authenticates the 'Essay of Cannibals'. Cortés relied upon Dona Marina to interpret everything beyond 'enigmatic and opaque visual evidence' because he 'understood next to nothing about the complex culture which he had violently penetrated' (p. 145). She 'could have chosen to tell him virtually anything'. This is precisely the problem which confronts Montaigne, the sophisticated gentleman forced to rely upon the testimony of a (probably illiterate) servant. Montaigne's 'understanding of the vast cultural differences between Europe and the New World, grows out of a meditation upon the vast social differences within his own country' (p. 149); like Mandeville, Montaigne, the son of a Jewish mother about whom he rarely wrote, 'is a knight of non-possession' (p. 150). Montaigne articulates what Mandeville 'could only set forth under the cover of a fraud. We are incomplete and unsteady, we are go-betweens, we do not know whom God loves and whom He hates.'

Greenblatt's book is undoubtedly not to be dismissed lightly and is backed up by a huge battery of scholarly references (is it a piece of uncharitable sniping to register a feeling of unease that the book acknowledges the help of six research assistants? All of them, incidentally, are women). It should be required reading for anyone working with early colonial texts from whatever discipline. But, of course, I have some serious reservations. Greenblatt seems to be unable to resist rhetorical flourishes and often goes for elegance rather than substance (perhaps this is what happens if you use research assistants—I shall probably never find out). Whilst this makes chapter 2 such a *tour de force*, it also results in the 'spot-the-symbolism' ending of chapter 4, with the over-ingenious Martin Frobisher bringing back 1,296 tons of fool's gold (I stress this in case you miss the irony). Similarly, the point about Jewish identity having been made at the end of the second chapter, Greenblatt then goes right through the book before bringing up the question of Montaigne's hidden Jewish lineage. Presumably, this makes the form match the content, the centre is the periphery and so on, but it is a lot less clever than actually working through your insights. Bear in mind these words if you think I am just a smart-arse reviewer trying to show off:

I have tried in these chapters, not without pain, to register within the texture of my scholarship a critique of the Zionism in which I was raised and to which I continue to feel, in the midst of deep moral and political reservations, a complex bond...the question I am still struggling to resolve: how is it possible, in a time of disorientation, hatred of the other, and possessiveness, to keep the capacity for wonder from being poisoned?

(p. ix)

The point is not that Greenblatt has written a bad book, because he hasn't; but it isn't the major work it could have been. I would question the classification of Herodotus, just as I would question the classification of Mandeville. It is not enough to take passages and compare them as if they all belonged to a 'discourse of travel' (p. 2); who decided on this discourse? Were texts always read in the same way, as if they belonged to the same discourse? Herodotus' *Histories* may well privilege a wandering, powerless observer, a *flâneur* in the arcades of life, but they were not necessarily always read this way and could be used to foster the very exploitation Greenblatt sets them against, as Peter Hulme has argued (the same might be said of Mandeville). Greenblatt is in danger of being as extremely formalistic in his pleas for tolerance as Columbus was in desiring possession. It is all very well to set up Mandeville, Montaigne and Herodotus as writers keen to accommodate difference, but this might have as much to do with genre as an autonomous politics. A comparison of Montaigne's essays and colonial texts—something tried thirty years ago by Margaret Hogden in her survey of what she called 'early anthropology'—has to acknowledge the difference between kinds of writing. One should also remember that Montaigne was a self-reflective aristocrat, Columbus and Cortés were men on the make and

to ignore such classpolitics in the name of a non-poisonous wonder is perhaps a little foolhardy (would the author of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* have ignored or overlooked this? Greenblatt may be as keen to abjure his past as he is to acknowledge his Jewish identity). Certainly Montaigne seems to be more aware of these problems than Greenblatt. *Marvelous Possessions* is a brave book in many ways, not least, I think, because it dares to be bland on occasions. I can't help thinking that it could have been really influential and path-breaking; perhaps as celebrated as *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.

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- **Shoshana Felman, *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 1987), 184 pp., £17.95 (hardback), £7.95 (paperback)**
- **Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 200 pp., \$24.95 (hardback), £8.95 (paperback)**
- **Juliet Flower MacCannell, *Figuring Lacan: Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), 208 pp., £10.99 (paperback)**
- **Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of psychoanalysis* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 384 pp., \$24.95 (hardback), \$12.50 (paperback)**

A spectre is haunting the academy: some practise ideas without a calling. Large segments of the 'humanist' intelligentsia have entered into an alliance to exorcize this spectre. By declaring everything new from abroad a radical challenge to the status quo—without defining what precisely this status quo might be—many contemporary critics homogenize all kinds of differences. Concerned with legitimacy, with socially authenticating critical acts, much of theory today is attentive to ascribing collective meaning to individual acts. So it comes about that contemporary thinkers who call into question 'authority' equal radicalism politically squared. Lacan's is a case in point.

For Felman, Gallop, MacCannell and Ragland-Sullivan, Lacan's approach to knowledge, his rigorous attempt to displace the primacy of the mathematization of consciousness in favour of the mathematization of the unconscious, incontrovertibly attests to his politico-conceptual radicality. In order to attest to that much, each critic follows a distinct symbolic order of her own. Each either extracts a privileged cluster of master concepts from the Lacanian text or supplants it with an apparatus of home-made terminologies. So Shoshana Felman

develops her elegant narrative along a path which favours terms such as 'reading', 'performance' and 'practice', while probing Lacan's concept of transference in a literary and philosophical context. Jane Gallop centres on authority, castration, and the subject presumed to know, while also and simultaneously experimenting with Lacan's concept of transference. Juliet Flower MacCannell's elliptical free-style narrative operates with terms like 'structure', 'culture', 'power' and 'interhumanity'. On her agenda is Lacan's concept of the subject in its relation to power. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan appears to be more of an exception, routing her presentation of Lacan's concepts through a massive philosophical landscape. She ultimately reduces the much-celebrated diversity, plurality, ambiguity and uncertainty of Lacan's conceptual empire to a single, fundamental, allinforming category: desire. So in the hands of these four critics, Lacan's universe and its four dimensions of the imaginary, symbolic, real and symptom is shuffled back and forth between inductive and deductive reduction, multiple extension and plural contraction, just as, until recently, modern physics moved extension and contraction within the four dimensions of its universe. Surprisingly, and all anti-historicist squabbles notwithstanding, Lacan and his critics seem to be caught in the predicaments of the quantum age.

Of the four critics, Ragland-Sullivan appears the most straight-forwardly philosophically engaged. From the publishing house she chose, and the title of her book itself, to the division of the material and the style of her presentation, this study is what some might call traditional. To opt for a patient exegesis of Lacan's texts in the context of psychoanalytic, linguistic, psychological and philosophical schools, displaying propensities for clarity, thoroughness and erudition, is somewhat unusual in an era which, naming itself postmodernism, calls for the abolition of categorial, definitional and hierarchical thinking. Yet the fact that this critic solidly subscribes to the modalities of 'traditional' scholarship by no means indicates that her logic differs from the one sustaining the other three studies. Or to put it otherwise: while Felman, Gallop, and MacCannell, in contrast to Ragland-Sullivan, reflect, to various degrees, the impact the dictatorship of postmodern ideology has imprinted on their ways of writing, their styles, their modes of presentation, while their studies of Lacan reflect the extent to which they incorporate postmodern idealities and their concomitant value-systems into their work, the foundational principles sustaining the logic of all four critics do not differ very much.

In MacCannell, Gallop, and Felman, the narratives shift from one terminology to another. In Felman's study, for instance, the original term 'transference', deduced from Lacan, metaphorizes not only into 'performance' and 'practice', but also into 'reading', 'interpretation', 'cognition' and 'knowledge'. The following logic is applied: since transference, the verbal or silent exchange between the analyst and analysand is both (1) the product of the ways each party in that structure understands (reads, comprehends, interprets) that specific situation, and (2) the production of something which had not existed up to that moment, transference is a practice or a performative act. Moreover, since what is

understood in transference or in this performative act is not really understanding in the traditional sense, i.e. an understanding which produces an identical meaning for both parties involved, that which takes place in the transferential process is better described as reading. Since, in reading (which we could also call interpretation), many or multiple meanings or understandings of a text are possible, reading is always producing something new, and is therefore an open-ended practice. So what used to be called interpretation in formalist criticism is now in Felman's study called reading. And what used to be called understanding in pre-postmodern philosophy, namely the application of a truth value to a specific observation or experience, or what used to be called meaning in the business of traditional criticism, is now also called reading. So for Felman, Lacan's linguistic model, which does not allow for a fixation between signifier and signified, however arbitrary it may be, but favours an endless journey from one signifier to another along the so-called signifying chain, is useful not only for the formulation of models of reading—which she explicitly synonymizes with understanding and with which she implicitly replaces interpretation. It is also useful for the formulation of the nature of poetry. For poetry, just like psychoanalysis, she writes, 'resists our reading. When caught in the act, both are always already, once again, purloined' (p. 51). And, moreover, Lacan's psychoanalytic transference model which does not allow for solution, closure or a cure, and which consists in the performance of speech acts or silent acts, interpretation and/or reading, is synonymous with a practice rather than a theory. In addition, since Lacan's psycho-linguistic model repudiates the possibility of attaining truth—since this model, to the contrary, postulates the infinite paths of and to knowledge—Lacanian psychoanalysis is for Felman synonymous with science, for science is the drive to go beyond. Just as in science the path to knowledge includes a myth or a fictive moment (hypothesis), in psychoanalysis *qua* science there is the oedipus myth or oedipization which inaugurates the path to understanding. To borrow a metaphor from physics,' she writes, 'one could say that the fictive psychoanalytic myth is to the *science* of psychoanalysis what the Heisenberg principle is to contemporary physics: the element of mythic narrative is something like an *uncertainty principle* of psychoanalytic theory' (p. 158). With this insight she ends her adventure into the elective affinities between psychoanalysis and contemporary culture, but seductively opens the door for mythic narratives of the intermarriage between physics and psychoanalysis.

Perhaps it is Shoshana Felman's tendency towards harmonizing, towards avoiding any kind of atonality in her composition, which is most striking about her book. So when she tells us in the introduction that she is not interested in the controversies about Lacan's personality, nor in the explication of a set of foreclosed conceptual dogmas, she truthfully states her methodological parameters, while elegantly closing the doors on issues before argument has commenced. By this I do not mean to say that the controversies about Lacan's personality could be of much interest to the reader. What *is* of interest, though, to most women sensitized to feminism is Lacan's controversial concept of women,

of feminine sexuality, of phallocracy and power which Felman effectively brackets, and which the other three critics writing on Lacan have squarely faced. So what emerges from Felman's narrative is a balanced, positive, symphonic account of her own dialogic adventure with Lacan's ideas, a dialogue which takes place in formal privacy by avoiding argument, disagreement and controversy. Something important can be learned from Lacan is her message: his radical insight into reading has great potential for contemporary pedagogical and philosophical theories. With her appealing classicism Felman must manage to appease readers struggling with the stylistic monstrosities of Lacanian passages or with the difficulties of his more sibylline algorithms. So what is Lacan's originality in her view? 'Simply put, the originality of Lacan lies in his radical understanding of the radicality of Freud's discovery, and in his eagerness to carry the consequences of this discovery to their logical limits.... Lacan's originality... lies in his uncompromising inquiry into the originality of psychoanalysis' (p. 53). So what we witness in Felman's study is not only her private dialogics with Lacan, his impact on her life, as she would like us to believe. What we also see *a fortiori* is Felman's active participation in a radical cognitive revolution which Lacan seems to have ushered in. Why else these comparisons with Copernicus and the revolution that carries his name?

While the autobiographical dimension in Felman's study is barely visible, in Jane Gallop's *Reading Lacan* the autobiographical is squarely placed at the beginning, the middle and the end. In this study, discussing Lacan's *Ecrits* against the backdrop of Lacan's as well as her own unconscious desires, we are informed how Gallop's book was at first turned down for publication; when she started or interrupted psychoanalysis; when she dreamt of Lacan and how Lacan, in her dreams, authorized her assessment of his unconscious desires; and when she had to cope with irregularities in her sex life. This striking information would be unthinkable, one tends to think, without the autobiographical narratives women experimented with in the self-confident wake of feminism and neo-feminism. What is somewhat puzzling in Gallop's case is that a critic who, adamantly subscribing to a conceptual system that relegates identity, presence, authority and subjectivity to the rubble of history, would need to speak in the first person singular, would need to authenticate presence with autobiographical facts. Here I am certain Jane Gallop would be quick to point out, as she does in the context of a similar paradox in the introduction of her book, that

one can effectively undo authority only from the position of authority, in a way that exposes the illusions of that position *without renouncing it*, so as to permeate the position itself with the connotations of its illusoriness, so as to show that everyone, including the 'subject presumed to know', is castrated.

(p. 21)

The agility with which Gallop anticipates inconsistencies in her argument is very much the trademark of her presentation and it is no doubt to her credit that she is not afraid of confronting some of the unsettling paradoxes of her discourse on Lacan. Yet the charm with which she faces these very real difficulties might not seduce every reader into accepting her solutions. Solicitousness notwithstanding, not every reader turns accomplice to her logical turns. Some arguments are convincing, others are not. What she pursues is this: (1) a theory of cognition grounded in a Lacanian understanding of transference which she redefines as reading; (2) the meaning of some of the major concepts of Lacan as they are presented in his *Ecrits*, such as his concept of the mirror stage, of language, of metonymy and metaphor, of the endless chain of the signifier, of the subject; (3) the psychoanalytic relation between Lacan and Freud. As does Felman, Gallop's logic posits Lacan's usefulness for a radical cognitive theory. The clinical psychoanalytic situation becomes a blueprint for literary and cognitive theory. This situation entails the crucial transferential relation between the analyst and analysand. And, like Felman, Gallop adopts the Lacanian concept of the fundamental, inherent productivity of new possibilities in language. So what happens or doesn't happen verbally between analyst and analysand, that intersubjective relation, is the foundation for her new theory of interpretation. Text and reader metaphorize interchangeably, via the transferential process, into both analyst and analysand, doctor and patient.

The key concepts structuring this narrative are binary: castration and authority, reality and illusion, nowhere and presence. In the course of her presentation, in which Gallop closely imitates Lacan's etymological and stylistic inventions (neologisms, hyphens, slashes, neo-capitalizations)—'PrefatHeory' is a good example—this binary structure is sometimes dialectically mediated into a new binary system, and sometimes not mediated at all. For at times one of the two concepts of the binary structure must radically leave the stage of idealities for ever, thus leaving the surviving concept with the un-Lacanian task of foundationally carrying the day. For instance: the pair of castration and authority, of admission of inadequacy and subject presumed to know, does not only change into castrated authority or authorial castration, in that Gallop is, albeit castrated, an authority on Lacan's radical originality. Rather, the binary structure of castration and authority is reduced to the master concept of unrivalled authority, that is to castration—since in her interpretation of Lacan every human being or subject is subject to the signifying chains that allow for no fixation of meaning, value or truth. Caught in the everpresent prison-house of language, the parameters of the human condition, the inescapable grounding of existence, the *conditio sine qua non* of all subjectivity, is castration. Castration is that which unites us all, the alpha and omega of the great chain of being. There is no authority, no analyst who has power in the analytical situation, no power structure between text or reader. 'The power in analysis is not the analyst's power, but something powerful that happens between subjects' (p. 28). According to Gallop, then, it is Lacan's great achievement to have made analysis an

intersubjective experience. The analyst or the critic does not know more, does not even know. In the clinical situation, when the patient realizes that the analyst does not know more, when transference takes place that is, then analysis comes to an end. But what happens in reading or in the cognitive situation, if we apply her psychoanalytic model to the sphere of reading, when we anthropomorphize the text? Does the text, when realizing that the reader does not know more, when transfer takes place, come to an end? Or is it to be understood the other way round? Reading ends when the reader realizes that the text does not know more than the reader? If this is so, what is so radical about that claim? Gallop, despite a theoretical framework which validates the laws of the unconscious, displacement, condensation, simultaneity, timelessness and repetition, is still sensitive to a phallogentric rationality of the finest kind and explains:

I am still within the effects of a massive reading transference onto Lacan's text specifically and psychoanalytic literature more generally. Having denounced the illusory and ideologically oppressive effects of that transference, I nonetheless am in no position simply to give it up. Transference does not, as Freud came to regret, work that way. As a way out from within that transference, I am attempting to do psychoanalytic reading that includes recognition of transference as it is enacted in the process of reading.

(P. 30)

In fact, Gallop uses pre-emptive strikes to outlaw possible objections to the presentation of her theoretical model. This is particularly apparent when she senses that her hidden agenda might be called into question, when her self-appointment to the bishopric of the Lacanian church is at stake. For there is no doubt that she understands herself as a major figure in the transatlantic psychoanalytic papacy, a major figure in the psychoanalytic French-American symbiosis: 'if one's project is to carry Lacan across, it cannot be accomplished within the confines of a francophile colony internal to America...if my ultimate project is to foster some sort of dialogue between Lacan and America, then the dialogue cannot be a play of mirrors...' (p. 59). Yet also this self-ascribed rational mission is not without problems: electing herself to a position of authority seems to clash with the spreading of a gospel which she herself has reduced to the master concept of castration as foundational principle of all existence and knowledge. We are instructed as follows: writing on Lacan is not really her desire but Lacan's or the Other's which she enacts, while it is simultaneously her desire to master the Lacanian text which will always stand in the way of really mastering that text. Ergo: while not really mastering the Lacanian text, her book masterfully illustrates how Lacan (or any text) cannot be mastered,

So if Felman strategizes her narrative around transference, of the locus from which cognition arises, Gallop draws her circles around the concept of

'castration', the intersubjective and intrasubjective condition which limits the production, reception and circulation of knowledge. Being only part of a totality or a whole, being 'partial' is thus the nature of all knowledge. Felman endows this 'partiality' with an aura of harmony, perfection and completeness, evoking the symmetrical powers of infinitesimal integrals in her depiction of the progression of knowledge. Gallop is likewise on the track of an affirmative act when she discourses on the 'castration', 'lack', and 'partiality' inherent to knowledge, though she sometimes seems to sigh nostalgically for an irretrievable non-partial past. Both Felman and Gallop then see no reason to critique Lacan, to bring up the value-laden connotations of 'partiality', or that 'partiality' might have a grip over that ostentatiously missing link to power. Their view of 'castration' silences power, their view of 'castrated' or 'partial' knowledge appears disconnected from power. Lacan's 'castration' is powerfully powerless.

This is not the way, however, Juliet Flower MacCannell chooses to view this problem. For in her narrative on culture and the cultural unconscious, on interhumanity and social relations or ties, Lacan's concept of the 'partiality' of knowledge, of the 'castration' of the subject, implies not primarily an intersubjectively valid ontological or epistemological condition, as Felman and Gallop would have it, but also an ideological category. Lacan's concept of knowledge speaks of partiality, but for MacCannell that which is left out of it is not arbitrary or ethically neutral but possesses a partiality, or a politicality, of its own. What Lacan seems to be showing, she writes, is how 'the negative side of metaphor—its ability to distinguish and discard, cut off, select, etc.—becomes a *determinant* of the social ties (discursive forms) between human beings' (p. 91). So castration indicates above all structures of power and the lack of it, of privileges and oppression, of completeness and its absence. The subject is not only split, and castrated, owing to the metaphoricity of language, the subject is also, and above all, alienated. Alienation, as a contemporary cultural condition, is one of the key terms of MacCannell's presentation. Being castrated is thus in her reading not a natural but an unnatural condition, not desirable but deplorable, not existential but political. It is a condition imposed by the predominant culture, which linguistically and semiotically sediments its prerogatives in the unconscious of the collective it represents. So castration is no longer an existential condition, as Felman and Gallop maintain, but a cultural effect. And Lacan's radicality is then to be found in her reading of his critique of a culture which produces effects of alienation.

What MacCannell brings to the table is a vocabulary which knows of communicative processes and sociological perspectives, of culture industry and mass culture, of social critiques and political stands. With this she does not ascribe to Lacan a notion which his text does not possess in the first place. We are born into socializing language that abides by the rule or the law of the name-of-father. What this critic does add, however, is a specific emphasis by her interpretative juggling of one of Lacan's master concepts, the concept of the Other, which is, as most major Lacanian concepts, a geometrical figure

consisting of three dimensions or a *matheme* extended to the fourth power. MacCannell reduces it to one-dimensionality. The Other, which includes in Lacan's text the imaginary as well as the symbolic, the real as well as the symptom, the prediscursive as well as the discursive, the ego, the superego and the id, which, in short, is a dynamic amalgamation of diverse energy flows and shields in that it is both the recipient, the consumer, and producer of influences and powers, emerges from MacCannell's text simply as language, which she synonymizes with culture or the cultural unconscious. And, moreover, by adding an adjective to that culture, by calling it ill, she also differentiates that culture (or language) from a sphere which is healthy and powerful enough to overcome what she thinks are the ills of cultural life. So in her narrative, Lacan is busy with diagnostics and prognostics, he is both the detector as well as the healer of cultural ills, the analyst of the abnormal and the prophet of a new norm, doctor and priest at once.

No doubt, Lacan's texts provide some categories which are useful for a Leftist agenda. Yet to metaphorize *all* of Lacan's conceptuality into radical politics requires some persuasive power. MacCannell's pages reflect the uneasiness which accompany such an effort. The study gives the appearance of a nonchalant postmodern arrangement, defying, as it were, traditional ways of organizing and presenting the material. For instance, the two parts of her book, 'Lacan's Culture Criticism' and 'Splitting the Atom: The New Order', are creatively divided into four and two chapters respectively, preceded by an introduction and by a quite traditional chapter on the reception of Lacan by the feminist, philosophical and literary camp. In addition, her presentation contains mini-excursions into Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Kleist's *Penthesilea*, and various philosophers are given sudden appearances as well. Divided into long and short micro-chapters as the case may be, and picturesquely decorated by intermittent short and long titles, her narrative amounts to something like a kaleidoscopic drama. 'My method has been to illustrate my points with literary, linguistic and social examples, and I feel that this is correct from a Lacanian viewpoint, which is a decentred, interdisciplinary one' (p. XX). That's all well and good. Except that it stands in sharp contrast to her persistent effort to focus on one centre and one discipline, to knead all of Lacan into the central prophet of manichean ethics, to declare Lacan the radical voice of what is good and bad in the future of humankind. For that is what her book is all about.

It should be said to MacCannell's credit that politics figures in her *Figuring Lacan*. And it must also be said that an account of politicality, of how people are with each other, will, if it is uninterested in sophistic squabbles, necessarily involve the contours of an ethical hierarchy, of powerlessness and power, of a better and a worse. And since this critic is intent on declaring Lacan the means of differentiating between good and bad, she has to show how his concepts critique the given and point to something better to come. In dividing the world into the presence and absence of good and evil, linear logic is indispensable, and cause and effect are necessary to make that point. So what massively emerges

from MacCannell's pages—in spite of her unrelenting belief in the evil nature of the concept and the concept of rationality—is hardcore cause and effect rationality, logic that knows of a before and after, of linearity and teleology, of concepts that know of conceptualizations. Her postmodern ellipse does not eclipse the logocentricity of her equation. It works like this: (1) We live in a civilization which puts too many demands on the individual. Technology, mass culture, post-industrialism impose performative behaviour which leads to inter-human alienation. Since Lacan criticizes culture, his system is important to examine and perhaps even to cure certain ills of cultural life, which is first and foremost alienation. So reading Lacan, understanding his SIR system (symbolic, imaginary, real) is a crucial undertaking, 'crucial for the shape of modern culture' (p. 20). (2) Lacan's SIR system is both a detector and a critique of alienation, because for Lacan the inter-human is always given over to a medium (language, culture), which will shape and (re)direct it. Because this medium is also the source of our ills, language is both the cause and the cure of alienation. (3) Since Lacan's entire discourse, analytic discourse, is marked not only by a passive acceptance of the necessary suffering imposed by culture, but by a resistance to the sacrifice of meaning to cultural significance as well, living in language is both acceptance of and resistance to the castrating effects of language or the symbolic order (p. 40). (4) Since in Lacan metaphor stands for (a) the symbolic, (b) the law-of-the-father, (c) culture, (d) concept, (e) language, (f) the moral law in the unconscious, (g) the patriarchal, (h) the predominant ideology, (i) the concept, (j) in short, for domination, and since for Lacan metaphor (with all its synonyms) is not synonymous with metonymy but to the contrary relegates metonymy to all that which the symbolic is not, the revolt of metonymy to metaphor, of desire to concept, of the female principle to the male, might be the solution to the problem of alienation. So finally: metonymy (with all its synonyms) is the saviour of civilization.

If we posit for the sake of the argument that Lacan's conceptuality resembles a square divided into four equal triangles representing the fields of the symbolic, imaginary, real and symptom respectively, and that the joining point of these triangles is not only the centre of the square but simultaneously the centre of a circle which, being contained in the square, in turn incorporates a certain sphere of these four triangles depending on its size, then it seems that each of the critics discussed thus far has gently removed this circle from its position in the middle of the square and placed it closer to either the base line of one of the triangles, or towards the joining point of one of the right angles of the square. With this procedure, Lacan's fourfold conceptuality does not get completely lost, in that each circle does include portions of the four fields. What does get distorted are the proportions as Lacan staked them out. Thus, for instance, Felman's circle almost completely inhabits the two triangles of the imaginary and the symbolic; Gallop places her circle on the base line of the symbolic; and MacCannell has moved her circle along the dividing line between the imaginary and the real. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan does not appear to fit in that scheme, in that her study

concentrates on the equibalance of the quadrilateral nature of Lacan's system. Yet, all rigorous intentionality notwithstanding, in the final analysis, her circle too moves towards the right angle adjoining the imaginary and the real; in her circle too the symbolic and the symptom are eclipsed by the all-encompassing concept of desire. This does not occur because she shortchanges some of the Lacanian concepts in favour of others in order to buttress her case, for in her solid discussion of Lacan's conceptuality, his view of how the mind is constituted, of what consciousness is, she insists repeatedly on the equibalanced interconnectedness of all four terms and spheres. The eclipse occurs because she validates Lacan's view of the subject, of the mind, and of knowledge in the context of Western Idealist metaphysics. Understanding Lacan's philosophy as a hitherto nonexistent position radically displacing Cartesian and Kantian rationality, understanding it as a position that satisfactorily solves the mind/body problem, that accounts for the way matter comes to reside in the mind—then Desire in consciousness shall be where Ratio without desire was. Desire is thus the deep grammar of Ragland-Sullivan's account; Lacan's concept of desire is the final attempt to date to put the history of Western rationality on its two authentic feet.

So it is the focal point of Ragland-Sullivan's study to show Lacan's new epistemology, to show how Lacan, in his endeavour to bridge philosophy and psychoanalysis, 'created the first epistemology since Descartes to locate the source of knowledge in a different place' (p. 130). Lacan arrived at this achievement by indicating, first of all, that knowledge is not only based on consciousness, but rather that a second, perhaps more important structure lies behind consciousness and interacts with it: the unconscious. That unconscious has as its object the 'moi', a field of energy, emotions, desires, experiences imprinted on it from the outside. This outside is designated by the term Other (A). The 'moi', the object of the unconscious which is both imagistic and linguistic in that it incorporates primary (corporeal) and secondary (exposure to language) experiences, functions as the subject of the unconscious in its interrelationship with the 'je', which appears to be more of a double object than a subject: it is an object in that it also experiences the impact of the Other(A) via the 'moi' with which it has a reciprocal relationship; and it is an object of consciousness imprinted on that consciousness via the symbolic order. It appears more as a puppet of speech and action than a subject, thus calling into question the 'free intentionality' celebrated by systems which are against overdetermination. What is important here is the concept of the Other, 'a principle of intersubjectivity and the cause of all subjectivity' (p. 187), an absolute but also dynamic generative principle which in its multidimensional relation with the 'moi' and the 'je', with consciousness and the unconscious, grounds the metaphoricity of language, logic and ontology. Ragland-Sullivan writes that the 'consistency of Lacan's epistemology has all the aesthetic beauty of a mathematical theory or the cantos of Dante' (p. 220), and that his art of calculating the unconscious, of mathematizing the unconscious against the grain

of a cause-and-effect theory of mind, places Lacan 'on the side of modern physics, applied mathematics, and modern biology' (p. 186). Lacan's view of the psychic world, his picture of the mind is in step with modern physics, with quantum mechanics, black holes theory, and relativity (p. 158). With his concept of the dynamic 'moi', and of the dynamic interrelation between the four aspects or dimensions of knowledge, Lacan has displaced Descartes and Kant. By introducing psychoanalysis into philosophy, that is a mathematical account of psychoanalysis, he also shaped the symbiosis of psychoanalysis and philosophy into a science, which shares the ground with the grounding principles of the natural sciences. In Ragland-Sullivan's presentation then, Lacan appears as the 'quantum theorist of the human sciences' so to speak, something of a usurper of Descartes and Newton at the same time.

In order to present the radicality of Lacan's epistemology, Ragland-Sullivan has not shied away from any scholarly effort, has refused to take any intellectual shortcuts. Dealing with the development of the human subject, with language, the unconscious and consciousness, interested in understanding the history of Western thought, and intent on staking out a place for Lacan in contemporary theory, all of this means for her a thorough familiarity with the current body of knowledge in such diverse fields as psychiatry, American Ego psychology, phenomenology, analytic philosophy, linguistics, and even modern physics. Thus she is able to explain Lacan's various concepts, which her patient exegesis of the most obtruse of Lacan's texts brings to the fore, in the context of an international interdisciplinary discussion. Ragland-Sullivan refuses to work impressionistically, refuses to follow the current dictates of suggestively mentioning a Hegel here and a Heidegger there in a potpourri of displaced particles. What she aims at is substantive knowledge of the many philosophical, psychoanalytical and linguistic schools which have either influenced Lacan or allow an adequate evaluation of Lacan's achievements in philosophy, linguistics and psychoanalysis. Similarly, she does not merely mention some of Lacan's major concepts or texts, such as the mirror stage, or metonymy and metaphor, the name-of-the-father or female sexuality or what have you. In fact, she flatly denies that the tyranny of the signifier, the endless drift of signifier to signified without ever fixing meaning between the signifier and the signified, is where Lacan is at, although that notion has proven to be so fruitful for literary scholars and film critics alike. Her study is a patient exegesis of the many difficult documents of Lacan's intellectual activity, including unpublished material of his many seminars. She travels the phantasmagoric shapes of the Lacanian landscape with ease, precision, and coherent know-how, confers and argues with challenging thinkers on her way, disagrees with literate and illiterate positions alike, points to the unscholarly sloppiness of some of his critics: in short, she has produced a startling book. Whether she discusses Lacan's topology of the subject, his four fundamental concepts, his theory of cognition, his understanding of language or his notion of the phallus—to follow her ordering of the material—her discussion is without exception lucid and extremely useful.

Ragland-Sullivan begins her study of *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* with the following sentence: 'Lacan may well be the most important thinker in Europe since Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud.' And half way through her study she states: 'In offering a theory on how "matter" enters or creates "mind", Lacan implicitly answers Descartes and Kant' (p. 147). The thinker who is absent in this parade of philosophical prominence, who had quite a bit to say about the matter/mind problem, is, of course, Karl Marx. This is rather curious, since she ascribes to Lacan a solution of the mind/body problem in the context of Western Idealist philosophy, which *a priori* privileges the mind over the body in the cognitive process. And what is also perplexing is that the exclusion of the Marxian traditions appears in a volume that reflects much literacy otherwise. Yet Ragland-Sullivan has made it clear from the start that a notion of materialism that goes beyond Nietzsche and Freud, that goes beyond the ontologization of biology, is not necessary for her discussion. With Freud's biologism being 'as dialectical as Marx's dialectical materialism' (p. 97), with Freud being as good as Marx, that is, it is sufficient to stick with the former and ignore the latter when staking out the roots of Lacan's apparent amalgamation of idealism and materialism. And the floor is quite abruptly closed to discussion on that issue. This is unfortunate, since a dialogue between Marxist theories of knowledge, the Frankfurt School for instance, or Habermas perhaps, and Lacan's materialism might have opened up a most interesting debate on the problematics of Lacan's exclusive insistence on the primacy of perception at the foundation of the cognitive process—an insistence which makes Lacan not a radical usurper of subjectivism, as has been univocally claimed, but very much an heir to the most subjective of subjectivist traditions. Lacan's mathematization of the unconscious, with which he assumes a monumental position in the history of objectifications, shares with the system of his most relevant predecessors, with Galileo's mathematization of nature, and with Husserl's mathematization of consciousness, a very fundamental element indeed: the exclusion of secondary senses in the cognitive process. The eye in Galileo and Husserl, or the 'seeing ear' (my term) in Lacan are the controlling bodily organs, the alpha and omega of all experience, the functions which assure the amalgamation of the material with the ideal. All lip-service to Lacan's marginalization of Descartes and Kant, or even to a Lacanian 'quantum theory' notwithstanding, has not good old Plato come back in Lacan with a vengeance? Are we not again, with Lacan, finding ourselves in the confines of a Platonic theory of perception, of knowledge, and thus of truth?

In his endeavour to get at the true foundation of logic, of the production of knowledge, of intentionality and ethics, Lacan investigated, according to Ragland-Sullivan, the constitution of the human subject and he found that this subject undergoes a tripartite development. It begins with the pre-mirror-stage (day 0 or 1 of the child's life to 6 months), is followed by the mirror stage (6 months to 18 months) and is completed with the post-mirror stage (18 months to about 5 years). In all three phases, the subject is in a complex relationship with

the outside world, and in all three phases all aspects of the subject's constitution play a role. That constitution does not only include the spheres of a consciousness and an unconscious, but above all a set of intelligent structures embedded in both spheres. These structures are not innate, as Descartes, Kant, and (of late) Chomsky have argued, but come to be in the unconscious via a dynamic process which is apparently contingent on two sensory organs, the eye (perception) and the ear (language). That is to say: the new-born baby is born into a world of images and sounds to which it is subjected. It is born into that world very much like a Cartesian *tabula rasa*, since 'there is no innate "self" that evolves logically in terms of genetic, developmental, archetypal, narcissistic, or cognitive material' (p. 13). So whatever is to be found in the unconscious and the mind has its origins either in objects outside the subject or in relations with objects outside the subject. These objects outside the human subject are of various kinds, and can be humans as well as structures. Naming this complex sphere the Other (A), Lacan then shows how various forces in that Other contribute to the formation of the unconscious, which in turn contributes to the functioning of consciousness. One of the forces is the primary caretaker, in Lacan's discourse the mother, who structures the primary unconscious, and another force is the symbolic order, which structures the secondary unconscious which apparently comes into being around the mirror stage. In the pre-mirror stage the infant is subjected to the outside world in such a way that it experiences the visual-verbal impact in a corporeal sense, leading to the formation of corporeal, fragmented images or symbolizations which the infant projects onto the world, while simultaneously moving towards a position in which the mother is introjected not as a part but as a whole. At the moment of the mirror stage, the child experiences itself as a whole while simultaneously differentiating itself from the mother with whom it had identified before. This discovery of difference marks the beginning of the post-mirror stage, and the difference itself, pending on the image of a whole body, and the primordial image-fixations extending from the fragmented body, form a subjective rigid structure, which marks the subject's entire mental development. The fixation by the mother's imago and the imago fixations accumulated in the unconscious during the first few years of life determine humans as already alienated from other beings in all later endeavours (p. 30). 'Lacan views secondary identifications with others as a replay of primary identification with the mother' (p. 39). The 'moi', then, as subject of the unconscious, is formed by experiences in the pre-mirror and mirror stage, experiences which are usually described as 'identifications', but which seem to stand for the experiences of relations. Since the 'moi' is formed by outside forces, which include the desires of the outside forces imposed on the 'moi', the 'moi' is, as object of the unconscious, also the place of the desire of the Other. The 'moi', coming into being at the juncture of pre-mirror to mirror-stage, links fragmentation and unity. And since it incorporates previous experiences of fragmentation and unity in its relation with the outside world, interacting with

the 'je', or the 'I', the field in which the symbolic order or language is being reproduced, the 'moi' stands somewhere between relation and language.

Now it seems to me the important question is this: In what way is Lacan's epistemological model, purportedly an amalgamation of the idealist and materialist position, and a solution of the mind/body problem, an advance over traditional theories of cognition, if we consider (1) that the structures of knowing are irreparably sedimented in the mind and the unconscious at the age of 5 at the latest, and (2) that the means of knowing are reduced to visual perception and the ear? Although the basic stuff of cognitive structure, separation, alienation and desire, are not innate structures, and although they are implanted in the subject of the unconscious via a process which appears to be a reaction to the effects of the outer world, once these dimensions are implanted, they function as if they were innate. These dimensions are then as foundational as Plato's ideas or Kant's categories. These dimensions determining the functioning of consciousness and the production of knowledge are, moreover, not more material than Plato's or Kant's. If anything, they are as ideal. For Lacan's text is quite hazy when it comes to describing the body/mind relation in the infant of the pre-mirror stage. While the infant experiences the impact of the outside world, this mirage of images and sounds, apparently in a corporeal language, in its body, the important thing for Lacan seems to be the formation of registers of images based on the relations the infant has with the outside. Where Lacan is not hazy is in his depiction of these relations: while these relations are usually called relations with an object or object relations in psychoanalytic terminologies, that is relations with primary caretaker in the human world, for Lacan these relations are relations not with an object but with language. Thus it is no coincidence that the concept of perception, of visual perception, will have to take a back seat behind the ear in Lacan's system once the infant enters the mirror stage. From then on, the child continues to perceive visually of course, but these perceptions have to pass through the filter made of language and primordial fixations (images). The ear takes the place of the eye. It becomes a seeing ear. And, moreover: since Lacan focuses on the child, and since his concept of the object is a relation to another human subject or the product of humans, such as language, his notion of the relationship of the subject to the object excludes a relationship which very much exists: that of the subject with nature. This seems to be an important point, since the problem of the subject-object relation, of the relation of the subject to nature as an object, is very much at the centre of any philosophical account of materialism and idealism. One might argue here that Lacan's insistence on perception, at least in the early stages of human development, represents a coming to terms with that relation, just as the various traditional theories of perception have attempted to approach the problematics of that relationship by positing a subject that observes or perceives nature, and by investigating the epistemic conditions of that perception. And moreover, one might argue that for Lacan perception does not only lead to the incorporation of the symbols nature furnishes, but also, and more importantly, that this relation is a subject-object and

object-subject interaction, owing to his insistence on the dynamics of these processes in these relationships. In this he would supersede Plato's theory of perception. However, since the imagistic and linguistic structure of the unconscious, though informed by perception and dynamic processes, is completed at a certain point in the subject's mind, subsequent experience is contingent on a set of 'fixations' in the unconscious, inherent and rigid 'fixations' which we might call subjective universals, where nature figures no more. That is to say, in Lacan's system, at the very moment in which the young human subject gets ready to enter into a more complex interaction with the 'object' or with social nature, an interaction which finds its most profound expression in work, and in the psyche and the intellect of the working subject, and in the cognition it produces—at that moment the subject is, if we follow Lacan, not also hand, and body, and soul and mind, producing new experiences, new forms of knowledge, and perhaps new forms of ethics, but only fixated and fixed, a gazed and gazing ear.

I suggest, therefore, that the universal multidimensional stasis of Lacan's subject is an impoverished candidate to the solution of the mind/ body problem. But it might be an excellent candidate to assume the power of a nihilistic body politics. So if Lacan does not advance much over Plato and Kant when it comes to epistemology, he might leave these two behind when it comes to ethics. I understand that this is not the way the four critics under consideration here would like to see their claims to Lacan's radicality understood. Yet how are we to understand the consequences of a philosophy which by formalizing and by mathematizing the structures informing cognition, knowledge, and the spheres of the will, celebrates alienation, separation, desire and the will and needs to be recognized by the other as the universal conditions of all existence? Certainly, perhaps not so much Felman, who professes uninterest when it comes to feminism, but the pages of Gallop, MacCannell and Ragland-Sullivan reflect an uneasiness when it comes to the ethics inscribed in Lacan's work, when it comes to squaring Lacan's existentialist ethics with feminist theory. Whereas Gallop acts as if she is still working out the problems, MacCannell seems to await the miracle of a metonymic black hole unrelentingly pulling all non-metonymies into its profound spiral. Ragland-Sullivan, with her intelligence and courage to think problems through, takes sides:

Not by overthrowing patriarchy-cum-capitalism will human beings gain freedom of Desire.... Nor will feminists eradicate phallocratic, that is power-based, values, even if they live in exclusively female groups. Marxism and feminism would simply evolve their own phallocracies, because recognition and power needs inhere in the structure of the subject.
(p. 308)

One wonders how the militant priest, the jew, the leftist, the gay, the person with a conscience incarcerated in the concentration camps of the Third Reich would

respond to the insight that recognition and power needs inhere in life, that this is what life is all about. They cannot respond, they are dead. One wonders how the many underprivileged and exploited people who experience the recognition and power need of the ones in privilege and power would see the geometrics of Lacan's quadrilateral radicalism as seen by the four critics here. Simply another way of interpreting the world, and not a way to change it? Perhaps future books on Lacan will pick up this theme and in the spirit of a critical theory will tell us of differences and hierarchies in power and recognition needs, will tell us of what is radical and what is not in Lacan's text (including from which point of view), and perhaps will free us from this spectre—not all that inconvenient in a thoroughly conservative era—of ascribing so much radical universality to so little universal radicality. Or are we indeed all sitting in the same boat?

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DAVID RODEN

• **J.N.Mohanty, *Transcendental***

Phenomenology: An Analytic Account

(Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), viii+176

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Despite its supposedly antithetical ‘house style’, phenomenology, like the analytical philosophy of Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein, was born of an eminently Cartesian anxiety over the objectivity of mathematical knowledge. Its founder, Edmund Husserl, saw the late nineteenth-century philosophies of logic and mathematics as being trapped in an intolerable double bind; either providing an account of the psychological genesis of mathematical concepts or, as with Frege, deriving the arithmetic of natural numbers from allegedly self-evident axioms. The former approach, which Husserl, following Frege, christened ‘psychologism’, failed to account for the mind-independence of formal truths; while the latter employed concepts (e.g. that of a concept, or ‘unsaturated function’)¹ whose relationship to the acts of consciousness in which they are ‘grasped’ was simply presupposed.² The promise held out by phenomenology was of a method which would obviate this dialectical impasse, returning, in Husserl’s pregnant phrase, ‘to the things themselves’. The rhetoric of subjective access and objective validity was to be subjected to a wholesale critique, its terms explicated by seeking their sources of meaning in constitutive acts of consciousness. To the charge of psychologism Husserl could reply that the aporias congregating around the subject/object divide derive from an impoverished account of subjectivity which equates the mental with the private. In the *Logische Untersuchungen* (*Logical Investigations*), published in 1900, and in his subsequent writings, Husserl consistently advocates a rigorous distinction between the mental act (e.g. that of perception or imagination) and its content (whatever is perceived or imagined). The former may be regarded as a discrete psychological occurrence, but the content is objective to the extent that we can say of more than one person that they perceive the same tree, or of an audience that its members are anticipating the arrival of the performer.

Left as it is, the act/content distinction might seem an elaborated form of commonsensical realism. The nature of the ‘things themselves’ becomes more problematic, though, as soon as we enquire after the ontological status of the content. It cannot simply be identified with the object perceived, thought, wished for, etc., since an experience retains its sense (*Sinn*) even where the purported object does not exist. Moreover, experiences are, with a few exceptions, perspectival: I perceive a tree always from a particular vantage, grasping it as a

series of aspects each of which incorporates a nimbus of retensions and protensions with the 'lived present'. In the case of the 'unobservables' of physics, 'the square root of minus one' or 'Falstaff' there must be, according to Husserl, intrinsic properties which qualify the mental acts in which such (non)entities are posited and ideal laws, applying to experience as such, which characterize the movement from a merely formal to an adequate cognition. Thus what is to be made amenable to phenomenological analysis is neither object, representation nor Platonic essence, but a presentation of sense: a meaning whose structuring principles are 'transcendental' in so far as they are prior to any formal logics or discursive categories. This last stipulation inevitably introduces an aporetic note, for the phenomenologist can have no access to the transcendental via a 'metaphysical deduction' from some logically transparent language. Yet if, prior to this critical undertaking, all idioms are to be regarded as equally suspect, how is the parousia to be expressed? How, at the level of discourse, are we to distinguish the results of phenomenological analysis from those of premature speculation?³ Husserl attempts to get round this problem by advocating a form of methodological solipsism known variously as 'bracketing', 'reduction' or 'epochē'. The phenomenologist is exhorted to 'screen out' the assumptions that might occlude our reflections upon the immanent data of consciousness—a process described in ringingly imperious terms in the second section of *Ideas*:

We put out of action the general thesis which belongs to the natural standpoint, we place in brackets whatever it includes respecting the nature of Being: this entire natural world therefore, which is continually 'there for us', 'present to our hand' and will ever remain there, is a 'fact world' of which we continue to be conscious, even though it pleases me to put it in brackets.⁴

The reduction affects not merely the 'natural world' but must be extended to the social and historical context (bracketing, for example, the 'thesis' that the phenomenological 'I' is part of a community of non-phenomenologizable conscious subjects). Similarly, any logical or categorical concept articulated in terms of 'transcendent' as opposed to 'immanent' being is 'put out of play'.⁵ The purpose of the reduction is not, however, the elimination of the reduced. It is, rather, a means of sublimating a residue of meaning that is 'bodily given' from the mediating structures of language and custom.⁶

One of the virtues of J.N. Mohanty's energetically polemical exposition, *Transcendental Phenomenology: An Analytic Account*, is its articulation of the textual and programmatic nature of the epochē. While Husserl's rhetoric may give the impression of an act of solitary diktat, Mohanty sees it as an 'endless task' of refinement:

[The epochē] is not an instantaneous act of suspending belief in the world or of directing one's glance towards the phenomena as phenomena, but

involves a strenuous effort at recognising preconceptions as preconceptions, at unravelling sedimented interpretations, at getting at presuppositions which may pretend to be self-evident truths, and through such processes aiming asymptotically at the prereflective experience.⁷

An asymptote is a line approached by a mathematically defined curve through progressively smaller increments: the limit at which the phenomenological text 'brushes' the prereflective experience is represented by an ideal of perspicuous description. Description is distinguished from interpretation by its fidelity to appearances. Phenomenology *as a descriptive project* does not seek to smoothe out heterogeneous elements with a speculative synthesis but to preserve difference in as far as it is given in intuition. The role of interpretation in such a programme is supplementary: some interpretations, no doubt, can be 'unravelling', cashed in as descriptions. Others may be strictly non-convertible in that they can only be restituted as descriptions of interpretative acts. This 'arm's length' approach is to be made via a form of 'semantic accent' whereby talk of recalcitrant entities is 'disinterpreted' into talk of the inscriptions which purportedly refer to them.⁸ Where Mohanty differs crucially from Quine (or, for that matter, Derrida) is that such talk would involve not the role of such terms within a text or discourse but as the impedimenta of interpretative acts.

In the final chapter Mohanty employs this explicated sense of 'description' as a foil to deflect the various 'End of philosophy' scenarios advanced by Rorty, Lyotard and their coevals. Mohanty argues that even an account of history which pretends to disclaim any transcendental viewpoint, that privileges instead 'rupture' and 'discontinuity', must presuppose an activity of consciousness in which historicity takes on a determined aspect. This prior level, which he takes to be coterminous with the temporality of experience, cannot itself be relative to an interpretation but can only be more or less adequately described.⁹ Mohanty is thus in the enviable position of one who can claim to be both Absolutist and Liberal. Phenomenology may be the royal road to transcendental subjectivity but 'instead of being committed to a favoured representation of the world, [it] shall respect limitless varieties of interpretation'.¹⁰ By making description constitutive of the phenomenological project, Mohanty suggests a possible route out of the 'de-legitimation crisis' painted by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*. Philosophy as a descriptive project would submit to criteria of validation wholly distinct from physics or literary studies, while the latter would be absolved of direct philosophical responsibility. The sort of problems that de Man raises with regard to the metaphoricity of philosophical concepts would threaten its 'constitutive claim to rigor' only if the scope for tropic drift was not restricted by the descriptive 'itinerary'.¹¹ The process of description would not, however, preserve philosophy only as a narrow and inert specialism; a certain narrative of philosophical progress, more or less explicit in Husserl's texts, could be retained.

Mohanty states that phenomenology must isolate 'presuppositions which may pretend to be self-evident truths'—i.e. that would vitiate its descriptive fidelity.

However, in his essay, 'Form and meaning: A note on the phenomenology of language', Derrida suggests that the 'principle of freedom from presuppositions'—which supposedly gives phenomenology its radical, anti-metaphysical edge—is itself inscribed within an unreflected-upon metaphysical tradition.¹² The centrepiece of 'Form and meaning' is the reading of a passage in *Ideas* in which Husserl tries to describe the coincidence of linguistic meaning (in this case, that of a simple predicative statement) and the prelinguistic meaning implicit in the content of a perceptual experience. The problem—for Husserl—is that in the ideal case of a 'perfect fit' between the statement and the categorical structure of the supporting intuition the statement seems to have the role of an 'unproductive productivity': it can add nothing that is not already 'contained' in the perceptual content. How, then, does the phenomenologist describe the original structure of this disappearing act? Derrida observes that Husserl's account falters at this point. The predicative statement behaves somewhat like a faithful copy (*Abbildung*), yet there is something chimerical about the way in which it colours the experience. Other tropic movements threaten to lead the description astray. Husserl employs figures of mirroring and stratification in order to articulate this strangely indissoluble unity—always with the effect that the predicative act takes the place of something that has not really preceded it.¹³

For Derrida, the point at issue is not the metaphorical character of philosophical concepts, but that these tropic movements are commanded by a formalist (rather than a descriptive) project; an intuitionist semantics that predestines meaning (*Bedeutung*) as recoverable from the data of conscious experience. The phenomenologist is thus in the invidious position of having to describe as distinct strata what was 'always already' a unitary field. The 'closure' of this field is determined by a metaphysics of form which maintains a simulacrum of description precisely by 'smoothing over' diremptive elements.¹⁴ Derrida's reading of Husserl does not, of course, demonstrate that there is no prelinguistic meaning, or that *something like* phenomenology is not possible. It does suggest that the problems Husserl experienced with regard to the predicative act were not such that they could be eliminated in later, more perspicuous descriptions. Derrida's reading makes of Mohanty's confidently ascending asymptote an altogether more disconcerting function.

A variant (or should we say a 'displacement'?) of this closure is to be found in a conception of absolute difference and the categorical account of being that it implies. In the first chapter of *Transcendental Phenomenology* Mohanty asserts that, in contrast to the speculative philosopher, 'a descriptive philosopher... would remain satisfied with a conception of being which is analogical and not generic.' The phenomenologist, *qua* descriptive philosopher, should be unconcerned with the merely qualitative determinations implied in such statements as 'Plato and Aristotle are different men', with the differentia subsumed under a predicate significantly applicable to both. Descriptive philosophy is concerned with what is 'radically different':

Material bodies and minds are not only different real entities, but are *as real* different. Acts and noema (mental contents) are not only different entities, but are *as entities* different. In such cases the search for generic concepts is futile and the imposition of one a speculative construction.¹⁵

As exemplars of difference ‘material bodies and minds’ occupy a comfortably familiar, if still hotly contested, metaphysical terrain—as, to a lesser degree, do ‘acts and noema’. They would seem to accord with the Husserlian conception of a search for the invariant features of constituted objectivity. However, the necessity of examining the presuppositions behind ‘the division of the world into various regions such as matter, organic life, mind and spirit’—to which we might add, the activities of ‘description’ and ‘interpretation’—implies that its field cannot be restricted to ‘ontologically grounded essences’. The distinction between ‘analogical’ and ‘generic’ concepts cannot be taken as part of the furniture of the world if it is to be employed in descriptions of ontologies. Recognizing this difficulty, Mohanty makes clear his desire to relieve phenomenology of its essentialist ballast:

Even if one discounts such an historicist perspective, one cannot avoid the other pertinent objection against essentialism: namely, that essences are not *de re*, but *de dicto*. To recall Quine’s famed example, if rationality belongs to the essence of a person (while being a biped does not) when regarded as a mathematician, it is being a biped... that belongs to the essence of the same person when regarded as a bicyclist.¹⁶

This concession to the anti-essentialist makes the proportionality between phenomenological description and (realistically construed) perceptual description that is implied in such figures as ‘unravelling’, ‘aiming’, ‘arriving’, ‘exhibiting (discontinuity)’ untenable. If distinctions of essence are no longer to be pictured as inherent in ‘the things themselves’ then these verbs of spatiality and occularity cannot be regarded as the innocent adjuncts of properly philosophical language. What, on the intuitive plane, is a rendering into visibility, is enacted on the discursive level as the uncritical hypostasis diagnosed by Derrida. As descriptive philosophy phenomenology must invoke the space dividing these strata—one which, as a transcendental/critical enterprise, it is too vigilant to maintain. This double movement is at work in a ‘transcendental liberalism’ which, while singing the praises of diversity, always risks eliding terms whose relationship to its data is problematic or ‘undecidable’. Thus Mohanty is able to set up interpretation as ‘different’ from and supplemental to description by construing the former as a positional consciousness uniting interpreter and interpreted: here, the text is bounded as the pre-interpretative given of a species of mental act. The interpreter ‘cannot keep the door open for other equally fitting interpretations. He is committed to the idea of “the meaning” which he claims to have laid bare.’¹⁷ Such a hermeneutic a priori recognizes the specificity of interpretation only to

appropriate it for a rational psychology of the text: writing, 'that oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost' becomes an act of perverse dissimulation.¹⁸

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NOTES

- 1 See 'On concept and object' in *The Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).
- 2 See 'On sense and reference', *ibid.*
- 3 For a useful discussion of this issue see R.Harrison, 'The concept of prepredicative experience', in *Phenomenology and Philosophical Understanding*, ed. Edo Pivcevic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
- 4 *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 110–11.
- 5 *ibid.*, pp. 177–9.
- 6 The 'given' can be understood as the unthought horizon which contextualizes particular cultural productions. See Husserl's essay, 'The origin of geometry', in *Phenomenology and Sociology: Selected Readings*, ed. Thomas Luckmann (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).
- 7 *Transcendental Phenomenology*, p. 13.
- 8 *ibid.*, pp. 56–7.
- 9 *ibid.*, pp. 122–3.
- 10 *ibid.*, p. 143.
- 11 See Paul de Man, 'The epistemology of metaphor', *Critical Enquiry*, 5, 1 (1978).
- 12 Jacques Derrida, 'Form and meaning: A note on the phenomenology of language', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester, 1986).
- 13 *ibid.*, p. 160.
- 14 *ibid.*, p. 172.
- 15 *Transcendental Phenomenology*, pp. 16–17.
- 16 *ibid.*, p. 56.
- 17 *ibid.*, p. 128.
- 18 Roland Barthes, 'The death of the author', in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Fontana, 1977).

EDMOND WRIGHT

- **Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), xxviii +232 pp., £35.00 (hardback), £11.99 (paperback)**
- **Robert C.Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), xii+210 pp. £30.00 (hardback), £9.99 (paperback)**
- **David M.Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas. Bibliography by René Görtzen* (Oxford, and Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), vii+ 146 pp. £37.50 (hardback), £11.95 (paperback)**
- **Stephen K.White, *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), xi+ 190 pp., £27.50 (hardback), £10.95 (paperback)**

The thought of Jürgen Habermas bears centrally upon the problem of the present crisis of the democratic process. For a democracy to operate successfully there must be an open and flexible system of communication, in which all voices can argue for what they believe is the best outcome. Today Habermas is pre-eminent as an intellectual in Germany, not only as a theoretician of democracy, but also a practitioner, in that he is himself an active contributor to urgent political debates, such as that of the student movement in the late sixties, the rethinking of recent German history, and the interpretation of the unification of East and West. Robert C.Holub's book is an indispensable guide to a clear understanding of these debates.

As a thinker Habermas is particularly engaged with the need to counter the inroads made into social life by the demands of an increasingly rationalized market economy. Paradoxically, to oppose this misuse of reason he revives the project of modernity with a notion of reason that would escape the Enlightenment contradictions. Attacking what he regards as the postmodern erosion of reason as much as the neo-conservative nostalgia for tradition, Habermas seeks from a new

science of human communicative action a premiss for 'emancipation', a critical freedom that will permit the development of human life untrammelled by the threat of 'colonization' from a rationalized system out of control. That there are many who share such a concern is obvious at many levels, sociological, cultural and philosophical, and it is tempting to take up the hope that is offered. But as a 'hermeneutics of suspicion', as Paul Ricoeur would call it, his project has met with suspicion in return, even meeting with the accusation that, in endeavouring to find such a premiss, Habermas is regressing to a kind of foundationalism, one which might blindly assist the invasions of that very system it was set up to resist. Habermas has roundly defended himself against such accusations. Indeed, the argument is not as simple as many may believe: anyone who can discern weaknesses both in Gadamer's advocacy of the security of tradition and in Lyotard's of the novelty of the aesthetic, is not to be underestimated. Surely it is more (de-)constructive to give a dialectical turn to what he is saying, to seek an alliance with those theoretical and practical energies in order to mount an effective counter-attack on the misdirections of systematic rationalization. Far too often the forces of emancipation have exhausted themselves in internecine quarrels. It is the contention of this review that the appearance of foundationalism has an explanation that retains something of the force of the original argument, even after all the opposing voices have been heard and any attachment to foundationalism has had to be dismissed.

It is not surprising that a number of books are now available which try to assess Habermas's present position. In support of his theory he has produced something that has all the marks of a *magnum opus*—the two volumes of *The Theory of Communicative Action*—and these require serious critical analysis. Holub's history of the practice of Habermas's debates can be read along with the two theoretical works of David Rasmussen and Stephen K. White, both of which consider the central question of the basis of his theory of communicative action, and, further, the 'discourse ethics' that he has derived from it. This triad of work furnishes a solid perspective on Habermas's most recent arguments.

White, more sympathetic to Habermas than Rasmussen, connects his approval centrally to Habermas's stress upon intersubjectivity, arguing that, while the key Enlightenment flaw was the belief in a sovereign subject able to make independent judgements on a given ordered and objective world, the opening to a future philosophy can only come about through an account of how arguments, moral, political and social, are settled intersubjectively. He also approves of Habermas's claim to have avoided foundationalism because the theoretical principles of intersubjective communicative action and discourse ethics are fallible in the scientific sense, which allows the formation of a research programme in the social sciences. White believes that such a programme would have both confirmatory and practical outcomes and would be free from the old Marxist teleology that hindered earlier critical theory from mounting a correct analysis of late capitalism. Furthermore, it would be upheld by a normative analysis of discourse not immediately bound to social context, a universalist claim that is

traceable to Habermas's determination to avoid the relativist dangers realized in fascism and Stalinism. Such normativity lies particularly in the 'intersubjective recognition' and the 'equal respect' derivable from the principles of communicative action. Precisely because of the universality of the linguistic performances lying in the essentially dialogic nature of communication, 'good reasons' can be called in as evidence that apply without regard to the form of life. Habermas aligns himself with the impulse of the early Hegel in seeking in the social for the right definition of rationality. What surfaces here is his profound conviction that in this 'reconstructive science' of dialogic communication there is something that affects human sociation whatever the local form it may take, in fact, some kind of guarantee of the human as we know it. He has reiterated that his goal is the finding of 'empirical theories with strong universalistic claims', which, if it is not to be dismissed as paradoxical, can be interpreted as the search for some common pattern in communication that operates regardless of the form of life. What is in question is whether and how this would sustain his further moral and political claims.

Rasmussen, admiring but unconvinced, gives opposing voices more extended treatment. Where White spends much of his space making clear the structure of Habermas's analyses of the ideal speech situation and the relation of system and lifeworld, Rasmussen gives the core of the arguments and then sets out the responses they have met with. This is not to say that White does not consider objections, but they are largely produced in order to be refuted or at least muted, even when, as with the feminist criticism made by Carol Gilligan, such criticism has to be acknowledged as justified. Habermas himself has noted of White's monograph that it centres 'more on description than critique'.¹ The conversation Rasmussen provides is thus ironically nearer to Habermas's own ideal of a dialogue in which all participants have an equal share of attention. Both books, however, provide a clear and ordered account of Habermas's theories, with Rasmussen saying more on law and White more on systems theory.

Habermas's claim to scientific status for his theory is taken at face value by Rasmussen who poses a key question, whether 'the dilemmas of modernity can be reformulated under the rubrics of a philosophy of language which is centred on a theory of communication' (p. 4). The affirmative answer would be optimistic, cancelling the pessimism of the older generation of critical theorists, who had seen instrumental reason as entrapping the subject, having taken seriously Weber's warning of the 'iron cage' of an over-rationalized system closing about the free agent. By finding a defence in language itself, such an answer would indeed address the task which Horkheimer gave to critical theory, that of resisting this entrapment. Language being a universal criterion of the human, Habermas has been drawn by its universality in seeking for a restoration of critical reason. Rasmussen links Habermas to Karl-Otto Apel in taking linguistic communication as a 'first philosophy', that which, if not a foundation, can be shown to have moral and political implications that a renewed critical theory could valuably explore. Apel follows Wittgenstein in seeing the notion of the

language-game as the key to resolving philosophical problems (though differing from him in making the postulation of an 'ideal language community' the source of language use), a turn which appeals to Habermas because it seems to avoid the relativism of Wittgenstein's position, in which the state of the language is bound to the form of life. However, they both agree with Wittgenstein in banishing the idea of a private language, which for Habermas would be a postmodernist retreat to wild subjectivity.

Habermas, in order to strengthen the universalist claim, has taken from J.L. Austin the illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction, believing that what we do in speaking connects directly through to the validity claims implicit in language-structure. 'Illocutionary' defines the general nature of the act one performs in an utterance (promising, asserting, confirming, etc.); 'perlocutionary' the particular purposes one aims at in a concrete situation (encouraging, persuading, entertaining, etc.). By so borrowing this linguistic division of the universal from the particular, Habermas believes that, without any appeal to use or consequence, he can link communication by means of the illocutionary to a commitment to truth, sincerity and normative legitimacy. White is more thorough here in giving the details of Habermas's adaptation of Austin, but Rasmussen is again better at summarizing objections: for example, he goes over Jonathan Culler's attack on Habermas for trying to keep perlocutionary separate from illocutionary: Culler points out that it is impossible to define language without appeal to a context of purposes—Rasmussen quotes Culler's neat illustration that 'Could you close the window?' could not be understood as a request unless one already knew that it was not an inquiry about someone's practical abilities with regard to windows. This is an example in little of the general problem Habermas faces of meeting contextualist criticisms of his universalist position.

The problem intensifies when the language argument is used as the basis for a 'discourse ethics'. Learning from George Herbert Mead of the symbolic interaction that characterizes intersubjectivity and from Durkheim of the 'higher principles of the collective forces', Habermas moves to tracing the source of normativity to the evolution of communicative action. The social consensus that was once transmuted into religious forms has now evolved in the West into a 'postconventional morality'. There has been a 'linguistification of the sacred'. Habermas has bonded together C.S. Peirce's notion of the consensus of the ideal scientific community (the 'inspired hope', never to be realized, that scientific endeavours will lead to an agreement throughout that community) with the developmental ethics of Lawrence Kohlberg (the advance from the morality of the child—an egoistic avoidance of punishment—through increasingly altruistic modes of behaviour to a fully independent moral autonomy in which one can imagine and sympathetically take account of the roles of others).

From this he argues that out of an idealized argumentation emerges a consensus of generalized interest: because of the freedom of negotiation, the reciprocity of individuals may be cemented into a guiding moral agreement. If

all have had the right to state their claims and criticize others, and if no one is excluded from the process of decision, then this formal ethic will elicit the regulation of common interests. Habermas is insistent that what he is outlining is a procedure, a universal structure that does not specify any particular moral requirement, and yet which by its very nature, as having emerged from real dialogue, is concretized in the ethical life of a community. He thus believes he has escaped the charge of being a Kantian in moral philosophy, for nowhere in Kant can be found the idea that one can argue about one's moral duty. For Habermas, engagement in speech acts commits one to 'reciprocal accountability'; the validity-claims are 'immanent' in communication so that any divergence from them—given that the rules of the ideal speech situation are in place—can only produce a 'performative contradiction'. These rules are the inescapable presuppositions of communication. To ignore them is to leave oneself no way of detecting the manipulations of power, the workings of that 'strategic rationality' that neglects and suppresses the utterances of others. White seconds Habermas on this point, for, while admitting that Habermas's scheme cannot guard against all clashes of interest, he believes that it does foreground the fact that the needful reciprocity is not imposed. On this topic of discourse ethics, Rasmussen, on the other hand, gives space to contextualist criticisms of Habermas, for example, to that of Seyla Benhabib, who argues that Habermas is already assuming a reconciled intersubjectivity in order to extract the normativity he desires. Discourse, she says, arises precisely when intersubjectivity is endangered. Other contextualists insist that the ethical struggles are embedded in the concrete situations of social life from which communicative action cannot be dissociated. Habermas's reply returns to the need for an Archimedean point from which comparisons may be made: we cannot 'abandon the chance of a penetrating moral criticism of exploitative and repressive social structures'.² Rasmussen's response to this is the argument that discourse ethics cannot be as abstract as it claims if 'right answers' to moral questions have to be tested out against practical experience, suggesting that Habermas has himself committed the fault of which he has accused others, namely, of having selected a particular tradition (universalization being typical of modern cultures) from which to sustain his own point of view.

Both books make clear that the argument between the universalist Habermas and his contextualist opponents has reached a moment of stalemate. The nub of the argument is obviously the point of intersection between the subject and the structure, or, in philosophical terms, the particular and the universal, the referent and the concept. Anthony Giddens suggests that there can be no movement in the structure-and-agency problem until there is an explanation of the 'duality of structure',³ the fact that the action of a socialized agent can always be looked at from two points of view: under a given definition commonly accepted across a group, and from the viewpoint of the individual subject. It is possible to argue that the failure to analyse this duality is directly attributable, not only to the

Enlightenment prejudice for precise logical agreement, but to a misunderstanding of the part that agreement has to play in communication.

Agreement is the ostensible aim of rhetoric, a word that, surprisingly, is not even in the index of *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Were Habermas to look at the current American discussion of 'epistemic rhetoric',⁴ he would find a view of rhetoric as a mutual negotiation about versions of the world, in which the individual and the social are conceived of as interacting in a manner in which language's 'stabilizing actions' are not solely reducible to the reasonable or the rational but involve their apparent opposites, fantasy and illusion.⁵ When he comes up against such ideas as humour, fiction or irony, he tends, like his mentor Austin, to regard these as parasitic upon standard speech, describing them as 'intentionally confusing modalities of being': once a child has sorted out, on the one hand, the 'unwilling confusion between his own subjectivity', and, on the other, the 'domains of the objective, the normative and the intersubjective', he can play with these 'deceptive phenomena'.⁶ What Habermas does not allow, is that irony could invade the ideal speech situation—indeed, how could it, if it be taken to be ideal? Yet elsewhere, in reply to his critics, he quotes Wilhelm von Humboldt with approval ('nobody conceives in a given word exactly what his neighbour does')⁷ for making clear that all participants to a dialogue, all speakers of a language, come to it with their own differing interpretations of the words and utterances they hear.

Habermas seems not to have considered the implications of this commitment. If it is true that all the participants, in order to 'enter into dialogue', must 'make the counterfactual supposition that all the participants involved use the same expressions in a semantically identical manner' while, nevertheless, speakers 'invariably deviate from the standard meanings of the expressions used', then the result is a *systematically ironic* one. He does not seem to be understanding his own insistence that the speech situation is only *taken* to be ideal within the real circumstance of everyone in fact knowing it not to be ideal at all. He openly says that consensus achieved through communication 'depends both on the idealizing supposition that an identity in linguistic meanings already prevails and on the power of negation and the autonomy of unique, nonsubstitutable subjects—from whom intersubjective consent to criticizable validity-claims has to be obtained anew in each case'.⁸ The correct conclusion to draw from his own premisses is that a perfect mutual agreement does not 'already prevail', is never achieved, but is only a pragmatic one, accepted *pro tempore* by the parties involved. Habermas's emphasis upon consensus misses the point that no mutual correction can take place unless the differences within that consensus are taken account of. Subjects are making differing perceptual selections from differing sensory fields, the consequences of which may not immediately show themselves to the participants, but which may already have led to differing intentional expectations. When a mismatch does become suddenly salient to one or both parties, then, as was noted with Benhabib above, 'intersubjectivity is endangered', whereupon discourse becomes necessary to improve the failing convergence of

understanding. But the mismatch is sometimes not regarded as a straightforward correction: it may look for all the world like a negation of validity-claims—insincerity, lack of truthfulness, or a ‘performative contradiction’. Habermas does not consider the possibility of such *innocent* ‘deception’ or ‘self-deception’. Validity-claims are not so easily secured. Certainly both parties are involved in an act of faith, but moral outcomes are guaranteed through a rational understanding of misunderstanding, rather than through the application of logical agreement alone. If participants have to go in for ‘idealizing suppositions’, clearly what they must never do is wholly believe them, but rather bear in mind always, as they commit themselves to the faith of the ‘ideal speech situation’, that it is only played.

One of the encounters that Holub traces out displays the same tension between agreement and difference. He argues that Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard, though engaged in controversy, are actually much closer than they seem to appear to each other. Lyotard, for example, criticizes Habermas for placing consensus as the goal of language, seeing consensus only as ‘a peculiar state of discussion, not its end’,⁹ and preferring to regard the end of discourse as ‘parology’—paradoxes, discontinuities, undecipherabilities. Habermas retorts that one cannot escape the universal and formal aspect of discourse, where every utterance is made on the assumption of one’s being accountable according to the validity-claims of truth, appropriateness and sincerity. In the light of the preceding discussion, *both* these assertions can be acknowledged as theoretically sound: Lyotard’s since it is a reminder that ‘nobody conceives in a given word what his neighbour does’; Habermas’s because communicating agents must proceed on the *assumption* of common understanding, that their agreement ‘always already prevails’. But there is a further question that Holub does not ask. Why is Habermas, having asserted that the idealized agreement is a necessary presupposition, unable to accept that it is never a certainty? For this is one hypothesis that must be maintained in the knowledge that it cannot be achieved: rather, it is kept *in play* as a method by which coincidence of interest might be achieved, but not only without any guarantee whatsoever of a logically perfect consensus in the future, but also with the full realization of that inevitable failure. Indeed it demands a peculiar kind of faith, providing the only chance of emancipation. So one might say that it has to be with the appearance of a foundation that subjects are able to achieve limited convictions about the world.

Read in this way, in allowing for an ironic intersection of understandings, Habermas is thus postmodern despite himself. Indeed, according to Zygmunt Bauman, the postmodern need not be seen as a threat. In Bauman’s view Habermas’s error is his interpretation of the crisis under late capitalism as one of a withdrawal of legitimation from society, whereas it is rather that legitimation of a whole society is becoming less significant. This, he argues, implies that Habermas has not yet rid himself of the same nostalgia that grips neo-conservatives who, seeing what they regard as an autonomous hedonist culture around them, would hark back to a mythical traditional unity. In contrast,

Bauman welcomes postmodern heterogeneity, a continuing theme throughout his essays, which successfully relate postmodernity to a wide range of topics—sociology, philosophy, hyperreality, and the collapse of Stalinism among them. Instead of a nation-wide myth to sustain the production and reproduction of some global entity, he would rather encourage what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have characterized as ‘rhizome-like’ developments, a variety of unexpected and original ‘imagined communities’. Although he does not mention Castoriadis, he supports the notion that a more conscious application of the play of hypothesis that has sustained societies in the past could be engaged in imaginarily. Hence he argues that in a world where nationalism and regionalism are moving to the forefront of the political, here is a saving way in which these might be redirected. A conclusion here can be that the democratic process is thus likely to be healthier if it is conceived of as a numerous variety of ‘speech situations’, none of which claims to be ideal for all—except as a needful and patently unrealizable hypothesis.

Cambridge

NOTES

- 1 Jürgen Habermas, ‘A Reply’, in Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (eds), *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas’s ‘The Theory of Communicative Action’* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 214–62 (see p. 217).
- 2 Habermas, ‘Kohlberg and Neo-Aristotelians’, 1988, p. 16. From the manuscript to be published in *New Directions for Child Development* (quoted by Rasmussen, p. 70n).
- 3 Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 69.
- 4 See particularly: Jeffrey L. Bineham, ‘The Cartesian anxiety in epistemic rhetoric’, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 23, 1 (1990), pp. 43–62; Richard Harvey Brown, *Society as Text: Essays on Rhetoric, Reason and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Barry Brummett, ‘Some implications of “process” or “intersubjectivity”: Postmodern rhetoric’, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 9, 1 (1976), pp. 21–51; Richard B. Gregg, *Symbolic Inducement and Knowing: A Study in the Foundations of Rhetoric* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1984); Robert L. Scott, ‘On viewing rhetoric as epistemic’, *Central States Speech Journal*, 18 (February 1967), pp. 9–16; Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986).
- 5 Gregg, p. 91.
- 6 Habermas, ‘A reply to my critics’, in John B. Thompson and David Held (eds), *Habermas: Critical Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 219–83 (see pp. 270–1).
- 7 Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development*, trans. George C. Buck and Frithjof A. Raven (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), p. 43.

- 8 Habermas, 'Reply' in Honneth and Joas (eds), pp. 216–22.
- 9 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 65.

ELIZABETH WRIGHT

- **Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton,**
Women said Fashion: A New Look (London:
Quartet Books, 1989), xv+184 pp., £15.00
- **Kathleen Woodward,** *Aging and Its
Discontents* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana
University Press, 1991), 244 pp., £22.50
(hardback), £8.99 (paperback)

At a time when the media constantly remind us of the unstemmable tide of the increase in the aged population, Kathleen Woodward's persuasive analyses of our phobic attitudes to aging and old age are both timely and pertinent. In western culture, she argues, aging is represented primarily in negative terms. Through selected literary and psychoanalytical texts she provides readings of Freudian psychoanalysis and twentieth-century literature which reveal a certain collusiveness in their negative evaluation of aging. Old age generates *angst* and this leads to denial and to repression of the processes of aging: Germaine Greer's recent book, *The Change*, has amply borne out how aging is not only seen as a general catastrophe but also how it is particularly associated with women. In the West, as Woodward shows, representations of old age reflect a dominant 'gerontophobia'; in particular aggression is directed at the aging female body, regarded as bad, and split off from the youthful female body, regarded as good. However, in her choice of examples (Proust with Lacan, Woolf with Winnicott and Kohut, Figs with Balint and Mahler, for instance), Woodward is not interested in collecting stereotypes, but in what certain literary texts reveal when read in conjunction with key concepts in psychoanalysis (for instance, castration, narcissism, melancholia). Nor is Freud put on trial in any sense, for, although Freudian psychoanalysis is shown to collude with western culture's images of aging, it is nevertheless also shown as addressing social experience and fantasy in a non-reductive and compassionate mode. Psychoanalysis provides a theory and method for excavating the past, working 'in a prospective as well as a retrospective mode' (p. 12), playing through a greater range of identifications than we can consciously remember. Reading literature with an ear towards unconscious meanings might open up 'that largely unexplored realm of our cultural imagination—old age' (p. 14). This is all the more necessary since Woodward argues that repression of aging is connected to the visible oppression of old people in our society. She distinguishes between 'gerontophobia' and 'ageism' in that she takes the former as an individual response to anxiety, the latter as a political response to the same: the two responses to the old, the personal and the political, seem to converge in crimes of assault and battery and in lack of medical provision. But Woodward is not as pessimistic as Freud in his *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (which centres more on the woes of that generic

creature, man) from which her title derives. She sees hope in that certain of the arts (literature, performance theatre, photography) are changing faster than society and provide an arena where aging women can operate unabashed by the ravages of time.

Women and Fashion can be read both as a co-text and a counter-text to *Aging and its Discontents*. Its argument is that the relation of women to fashion is not a given one, either in theory or practice, and it questions the identification of fashion with women and with femininity. In setting the perspectives of feminist cultural analysis upon fashion as a field of cultural activity, Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton attempt to establish a basis on which such an analysis of women's fashion could be combined with a sexual and cultural politics. Because of fashion's emphasis on the primacy of the body the authors turn to psychoanalytic and feminist theory to discuss how representations of the female body construct femininity. The Women's Liberation Movement specifically rejected the girlish constructions of the sixties—the emphasis on 'the waif-like immature body' manifesting itself in the Jean Shrimpton-Twiggy look and the mini-skirt, 'as impractical in its way as tight lacing', and as antimaternal (p. 2). The book provides a witty and trenchant analysis of fashion's ideological appropriations from the sixties through to the eighties. The story is one of women excluded from the power to represent themselves outside the images of popular culture. Like Woodward, Evans and Thornton avail themselves of psychoanalysis for its theory of the construction of a gendered identity, and its view that the representation of femininity is nothing but a masquerade. The feminine is constructed through a system of adornment, as the authors brilliantly demonstrate via examples from high fashion, linking, for instance, Schiaparelli and Surrealism. Both *Aging and Its Discontents* and *Women and Fashion*, one focusing on old age, the other on youth, emphasize the degree to which women's oppression connects with a stereotyped view of the female body as sexual object. Both books should be recommended reading on Women's Studies courses.

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KEVIN MILLS

• **David Lawton, *Faith, Text and History: The Bible in English* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), x+203 pp., £35.00 (hardback)**

The central observation of Lawton's book, that 'different people have different Bibles' is not just a claim about the radical subjectivity of reading or the impossibility of finally fixing meaning; it is also an historical narrative. As the subtitle (*The Bible in English*) might suggest, a great deal of space is devoted to translation: its political dimensions and its symbiotic relationship with interpretation. The Bible (whatever that might be!) is an increasingly popular text upon which to rehearse modern reading techniques, and *Faith, Text and History* goes some way to explaining why this should be. The Biblical text is self-allusive, manyauthored, contradictory, self-authorizing, multi-valent and frequently obscure. It is a text in need of interpretation, itself representing manifold interpretation, and a source of interpretation theory. There is no authoritative originary text for its many versions; it exists, as Stephen Prickett has pointed out, always already in translation.¹ It has no common language. It is language, Lawton affirms, and as such it carries the condition of its own possibility in its accounts of creation by the word, Adamic naming, the fall of language at Babel and its renewal at Pentecost. There is also a traditional division, a breach, a cleavage, or hinge that separates/ joins the Jewish and Christian scriptures. What then can be called 'The Bible'?

Lawton draws on diverse strains of contemporary theory as he sets out to explore this question. The book of Job is seen as a kind of precursor to Foucault in its equation of power and knowledge. Derrida and Barthes make occasional appearances; the former, in unfamiliar guise, is characterized as 'a new Origen': an unexplained claim which involves placing him as 'a lineal descendant from early allegorists'. A more telling point in his use of Derrida is made by a long overdue question:

Christianity is *par excellence* the religion of the book: so much so that one wonders how Derrida can be right to claim that the GraecoChristian tradition privileges speech over writing.

(p. 187)

This question is a crucial one for deconstruction, not in the way that it is framed here, but in the way that it might be framed if a term like 'the Graeco-Christian

tradition' were to be explored rather than swallowed whole. The point can be made against the question as Lawton writes it, that Christianity is the religion of the book and not of the text. There is a commitment to an other-than-text, to a beyond-text that canonizes and institutes texts into the Bible. It is this that Derridean deconstruction sets its face against, and it is the vicissitudes of this process of canonization and institution that Lawton traces here. The focus of the study is an attempt 'to read the text as the history of its possible readings'. Treating of the history of interpretation alerts the reader to this as an interpretation of that history, and Lawton, aware of the implication, seeks to declare his interest (albeit somewhat negatively):

The question of the Bible's truth is a crucial one, but it requires a book to deal with it, not a paragraph. If I had an easily labelled position on the question—as militant atheist, say, or fundamentalist Christian—I should now declare it.

(p. 2)

He goes on to disavow any such position, 'militant atheist' and 'fundamentalist Christian' posing two extremes between which he takes his stand. This is slightly disquieting in the light of other assertions about reading position, for example, the insistence that 'the history of reading is the history of parties'. The politics of reading plays a crucial role here, not only because the Bible itself, particularly the Bible in English, has a history that is shot through with political determinations, but also because writing such a history must also be a political act given the material under scrutiny. There is a broad sweep of interpretative positions in view:

Ways of reading such as semiotics, structuralism, deconstruction, reader-response theory and other forms of hermeneutics belong to our age and will contribute to subsequent histories of interpretation.

(p. 3)

The careful negative that defined Lawton's position as *neither* militant atheist *nor* fundamentalist Christian is replaced by a veiled positive as the paradigm shifts from religious categories to interpretative practices. All ways of reading are named as sub-species of hermeneutics: that most Bible-oriented of approaches. Reading is directed back towards the Bible (and the history of its interpretation in the reading being offered).

Naming theory in the interests of hermeneutics is not the full extent of this work as an act of synthesis. In his discussions of style in prose and poetry Lawton draws on a knowledge of structural linguistics. His comparison of the King James Bible's 'still, small voice' with the 'small, still voice' of the Geneva Bible in their respective renderings of I Kings 19:12 is a good example:

Why is a 'still, small voice' better than a 'small, still voice'? Because lexical properties of stillness and smallness are better served by having a shorter vowel of 'still' precede the longer vowel of 'small', and the quieter dental/st/of 'still' before the labial/sm/of small. The phonetic qualities assist the sense.

(p. 65)

In reading Ruth, Job and the gospels he evinces an acquaintance with narratology and semiotic analysis. A synchronic perspective is thus allowed to interpret the diachronic survey of translation, interpretation and canon-formation. The links that this fusion of history, theory and critical practice is able to establish present an interpretative imperative based on the momentum of a continuing history, and the political forces that it uncovers at work around the Biblical text. Such forces are of particular moment with regard to a text that has been so authoritatively read and held in such regulatory regard. The conflict of interpretations, which is the history of the English translations of the Bible, demonstrates how interpretation, translation, and canon-formation interweave. The institutional demands that informed the production of translations, from their complete ban (sustained by a death penalty in the fifteenth century) to the royal authorizing of a version in 1611, are exposed. The observation that there is very little distance, at times, between political opposition and reading, seems entirely justified in context (p. 57). Lawton sees the pressure for English translations of the Bible growing when the burgeoning middle classes of the late fourteenth century, largely illiterate as far as Latin was concerned, wanted an increased political say and a literature in their own language. The Church opposed it because its institutional authority was threatened by a greatly extended access to the closely guarded text which legitimated its power. John Wycliff's followers ('Lollards') were branded heretics by a statute passed in 1401, and were to be burned at the stake. Proof of guilt, Lawton says, was possession of the English Wycliffite Bible.

The harsh politics of reading outlined in this history run out in Lawton's own predilections about current attitudes to the way that the Bible is to be read. In the final chapter, under the subheading 'Apocalypse and closure', he shapes a response to the latter-day apocalypticism that purports to interpret events of our own age in terms of the books of Daniel and Revelation. Commenting on a pamphlet pushed into his letter-box he writes against its claim of Biblical authority:

'No, actually, it is *not* in my own Bible. It is in your own minds.' I hope too that this book may help to foster a real respect for that maligned and traduced Bible through knowledge, by seeing it again as new.

(p. 188)

But different people have different Bibles. Lawton has insisted on this and made it a central tenet of the book. Further, interpretation is preceded, in the historical

narrative of the development of the Bible in English, by faith. This is faith, text and history, with faith coming first. Canon formation, dependent as it was upon interpretative concerns, was a process governed by faith:

Such readers begin not with the Book, but with the Faith, and admit into that book only what strengthens the faith. That is what the early Christians did, quite self-consciously.

(p. 17)

There is no Book prior to the act of faith, only texts. Faith is in place, underpinning the canon, as a tradition of belief that is potent enough to be normative for interpretation and provide criteria for entry into that canon. With this historical given in mind it is hard to understand Lawton's closing pages. The historical process that led to the unitary existence of the Bible was authorized by an appeal to faith as something more fundamental than the texts which it engenders (and by which it is engendered) so that it seems problematical to read the Bible without acknowledging that it exists only by an act of faith, an act inconsistent with reading it as 'the history of its possible readings'. To do so simply begs the same question as the refutation of apocalyptic Armageddon rhetoric: what Bible is being read? Or, more precisely, whose Bible? The religious positions (from militant atheism to Christian fundamentalism) are not calibrated with the theoretical (from reader-response theory to deconstruction), yet the hermeneutic at work here is seen as prior to both, and, since interpretation and its discourses descend from Biblical models, is faith-engendered. This faith-interpretation is the difference between the book and the text: between the Word and words. Despite this historical precedence of faith Lawton's own interpretation wants to be outside of faith: to posit a hermeneutic of hermeneutics: a place of suspicion opened up by the simple rejection of extremes. His position is never asserted in terms of meaning but only of possibility. This possibility is encoded in the Apocalypse as two possible futures: Armageddon or the New Jerusalem. A choice of reading. But to make this relevant Lawton has to forgo the hermeneutic of suspicion and re-enter the discourse of faith:

Are fundamentalist readers of the Bible then entirely wrong? Is the Bible no longer to be valued, a text without the power of prophecy? On the contrary, the Bible is intensely relevant to our reading of our past and our possible futures. As a book radically at odds with itself, the Bible is one of the greatest aids we possess to understanding the extremes, the moral obscenity and the idealism, of our subjectivity and our time.

(pp. 188–9)

In a discussion that ranges generously from words from the mouth of God in Genesis to the Book of Life in Revelation Lawton would have done well to heed the letter that is a citation of the Word in Revelation 3:15–16:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.

Bearing this in mind might have prevented the tepidity of the closing paragraph:

One thing is sure. It will need all manner of people to produce careful readings of all manner of texts if we are to avoid destruction. I should argue that one of those texts should be the Bible, provided only that we are able to read it.

(P. 190)

Anybody (except militant atheists and fundamentalist Christians!) should read anything so long as they are able to do it carefully.

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NOTE

- 1 Stephen Prickett, *Words and the Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 213–14.

ANDREW BELSEY

• **Paul K.Feyerabend, *Three Dialogues on Knowledge* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 167 pp., £35.00 (hardback), £11.95 (paperback)**

Z: Plato did it. Berkeley and Hume did it.

X: And many others have done it.

Z: Even Karl Popper occasionally did it.

X: So there's no reason why Paul Feyerabend shouldn't do it.

Y: Write philosophy in the form of dialogues, you mean?

X: Yes. After all, the philosophical monograph is an abomination. One of Feyerabend's dialogues refers to Peter Medawar's famous essay 'Is the scientific paper a fraud?' Well, it is really a rhetorical question, inviting the answer 'Yes', and the same should be said about the philosophical monograph. Only it's worse than a fraud, it's a cruel deception, a betrayal of the spirit of philosophy.

Z: If you mean the twentieth-century philosophical monograph, especially the sort that became prominent after the Second World War, then I agree with you. Dry, abstract, boring, over-technical, full of symbols that most people found incomprehensible—no wonder philosophy got a bad name. No wonder Feyerabend despises it.

Y: Is that fair? Most people can't expect to understand advanced mathematics or physics...

Z: Or literary theory!

Y: ...these days, so why should philosophy be any different? Why shouldn't it be able to claim legitimate technicalities? After all—and this is something we all agree on, I hope—philosophy is concerned with very important issues, so sometimes it is necessary to focus closely on a narrow point, just to get as clear about it as possible. Using abstract arguments with a lot of logical symbols—these are justifiable means to the desired end.

Z: Well, OK, so long as we don't confuse the means with the end. Which is what the philosophical monograph tends to do.

Y: I think things are moving away from that over-dry approach to philosophy these days. Philosophers are more aware of what philosophy is for.

X: But how can you suggest that philosophy is for something, as if it has some simple function or purpose? And as for the end of philosophy, it is above all open-ended, so it doesn't have an end.

- Z: In either sense. I agree with you, of course. Philosophy is simply a critical approach to important questions that concern us as human beings, fundamental questions. The problem with the monograph writers was that they thought it was concerned with narrow, technical questions, usually of an abstract nature. A bit like mathematics.
- X: Not that Feyerabend has anything against mathematicians. In fact, he prefers them to philosophers. He is contemptuous of philosophers, and even denies being one himself.
- Z: Not very plausible, though, is it? It's a self-consuming ploy: write philosophy and then deny being a philosopher. It's a bit like Wittgenstein and his ladder.
- X: At one point Feyerabend claims to admire Wittgenstein but not to be a Wittgensteinian.
- Y: I'd like to take you up on that last point, but first, could we go back to the beginning, please? Don't forget that I have not read the book yet but you two have. So could you start by giving me some idea of what it's about?
- X: Well, that's quite a tall order, because it's difficult to précis dialogues, which is of course their point, or one of their points, at least. Overall, there are three dialogues and a postscript. The second dialogue is oldest, dated 1976, whereas the first is 1990 and the third 1989. But it is the first that is really different, because the other two are just conversations between two speakers *A* and *B*, whereas the first is a little drama, a philosophy seminar peopled by a variety of characters.
- Z: Most of whom appear to come from central casting rather than any real philosophy seminar.
- X: Yes, and it's difficult to identify Feyerabend in the first dialogue. But in the other two he is clearly character *B*.
- Y: Ah, that's the point I wanted to take you up on when you said that Feyerabend claims to admire Wittgenstein. I take it you mean character *B* says this.
- X: But *B* is clearly Feyerabend.
- Y: We have to be careful about identifying a character in writing with the author. For evidence I refer you to my article on Boethius in *Ratio*, volume 5, 1991.
- X: But *B* is obviously Feyerabend! *B* has written *Against Method* and had all the experiences that Feyerabend has actually had!
- Y: Even so, there is always a gap, and it is unwise to assume an identity between author and character. If you want further argument you could also look at my article on William Morris in *Textual Practice*, volume 5, number 3, 1991.
- Z: Even I think that Feyerabend's own views come through in the dialogues. Otherwise why bother to write them?
- Y: I'm less interested in whose views they are and more interested in what views they are. You've described the overall structure of the book, but what about the content?
- X: Well, as I said, it's not easy, but there are various themes, I suppose.

- Z: Various suggestions, anyway, most of which will be widely regarded as outrageous. And you can hardly call them arguments. Feyerabend is a clever rhetorician, but not much of an arguer.
- Y: I'm sure he'd be delighted to hear you say that. However, you still haven't given me a clue.
- X: The first point is that there is no difference between epistemology and postmodern cooking.
- Y: ??
- X: That is to say, the dialogues offer a critique of what is usually called 'philosophy of science', as part of a polemic against science and philosophy which set themselves up as rational systems and ways of life—and indeed against rationality, because it is based on false, and indeed dangerous, claims about universal, ahistorical standards.
- Y: Is he mad or just bad? I mean, what happens to philosophy of science if we take these crazy ideas seriously?
- X: That's just what is asked in the second dialogue, and the answer is: 'It withers away and is replaced by history and a philosophically sophisticated science that can take care of itself' (p. 87). Mind you, there's a different answer later on, where extreme democracy appears to be the solution.
- Y: Let's come to that. Here I note that if there is to be philosophically sophisticated science there must be sophisticated philosophy, so not all philosophy can be rejected.
- Z: H'm, not sure about that, but the point is that Feyerabend wants to abolish subject boundaries almost completely. He preaches absolute tolerance for everything at the level of ideas, except, oddly, for such things as humanitarianism and ideals of virtue. What he is trying to say, I think, is this. There are many stories that can be told about things in general, about the world, about life, whether they are called science, philosophy, art, drama, poetry, myth, religion. Each makes sense as part of, and can only be appreciated from within, a way of life.
- Y: So Feyerabend is just a relativist?
- Z: He denies that he is *just* a relativist. Relativists believe in incommensurability, and in barriers between ways of life. For Feyerabend, each story only makes sense within a way of life, but these ways are not closed worlds: people can, and indeed should, learn to move on to new ways and new worlds, to get a new outlook, new perspectives on things. Otherwise they become boring and dangerous dogmatists. Each story, whether it's called science or myth, should be taken seriously as saying something about life, about the world, that is, should be taken realistically.
- Y: Is there any limit to the stories we can make up?
- Z: Well, yes, the world sometimes kicks back, so not all stories are acceptable to it, though the process here is not made very clear.
- Y: I find the whole project less than clear.

X: Well, I'd put it like this. Of all the many stories that can be told, none should be swallowed or rejected wholesale. Instead, see whether anything of value can be found in any story. Of course, in doing this, you can't compare the story with experience, because examining a story from another tradition might involve retuning our experience of the world, learning to see things in completely different ways, ways that escape from what Feyerabend regards as the restricting bounds of the 'western' tradition of critical rationalism.

Y: So tolerance is not extended to critical rationalism?

X: No, for someone who preaches tolerance Feyerabend is a mass of prejudices, especially against the Popperians. But why should he be consistent—he's not exactly a poststructuralist yet, but he has rejected the unified subject.

Y: Anything else?

Z: Oh yes, there's a big acknowledgement of multiculturalism. Feyerabend doesn't want to leave tolerance at the level of ideas; he extends it to the level of social practice within a society made up of various traditions (though this term is not very well explained). He says: 'A free society is a society in which all traditions should be given equal rights *no matter what other traditions think about them*' (p. 75).

X: And elsewhere he says: 'People have a right to live as they see fit which means that all traditions of a society have to be given equal rights and equal access to the power centres of a society. Traditions contain not only ethical rules and religions, they also contain a cosmology, medical lore, a view about the nature of man and so on. So each tradition should be permitted to practise its own medicine, to deduct the medical expenses so incurred from the taxes, to instruct its young in the basic myth' (p. 121).

Y: While I agree that e.g. western medicine is far too ready to dismiss alternative approaches, I can't accept Feyerabend's position in general. In fact his idea of freedom is absurd. Some traditions are militaristic and aggressive. Some are patriarchal and oppress women. Some are cruel to animals. Some practise slavery, even today. But according to Feyerabend's account of freedom, a society in which members of one tradition enslaved members of another tradition would be a free society. But in fact slavery is *intolerable*. There are many practices in the world—parts of traditions—which are abominable, evil. So absolute toleration, even if justifiable at the level of ideas, cannot possibly be extended to all social practices. In any society there must be a framework enabling people to live together, and in this framework universal human rights must have priority over particular traditions.

X: Quite a speech. How would you answer the point that 'universal human rights' are just another tradition?

Y: I don't believe that is correct, it's just playing with words. However, I do accept that human rights are insufficient. In today's world we need to develop some notion of universal ecological rights.

- X: That would take us back to scientific decision-making, and here Feyerabend has some further ideas. He says again that scientific medicine is both dogmatically imperialist and unsuccessful—it still kills people—and he goes on: *'this is one of my reasons for suggesting that we take fundamental problems—epistemological problems and problems of method included—out of the hands of experts (physicians, philosophers of science, etc., etc.) and hand them over to the citizens to solve*. Experts will play an advisory role, they will be consulted, but they will not have the final say. *Citizens' initiatives instead of epistemology—that is my slogan'* (p. 120).
- Z: He doesn't actually say here, in the second dialogue, that everything should be put to the democratic vote, but he has said it before, so I suppose that is what he's proposing again. It could certainly lead to some pretty strange results!
- X: But it's interesting that he put this emphasis on citizens as long ago as 1976. I wonder what he'd make of John Major and his citizens' charter?
- Y: He'd think it a sham, which it is. But I'd be more interested in what John Major thinks of Feyerabend.
- Z: He probably thinks it's a German thrash metal outfit.
- Y: Is that supposed to be a serious point? Well, never mind. Perhaps we ought to round things off now. My response to what I've gathered so far is that contrary to what was said at the beginning Feyerabend would deny that he's writing *philosophical* dialogues because he rejects philosophy. In which case, in addition to all the other difficulties, he's ethically self-consuming, because he goes on drawing the salary of a professor of philosophy while refusing to profess philosophy. And you can't get out of that just by denying the unity of the self. What do you two think about the whole project?
- X: I think that Feyerabend is an essentially serious maverick who has important things to say about reason and relativism, truth and knowledge, and the ancient philosophical question of the nature of a worthwhile life. And I don't agree with your 'ethical' point—of course Feyerabend accepts that he is doing philosophy, only it's a non-dogmatist type of philosophy.
- Z: My conclusion is that it's quite good fun and definitely worth reading, but Feyerabend is in the end a lightweight thinker who is out of his depth when trying to tackle really serious issues.
- Y: Well, at least we've demonstrated one thing, that the great advantage of the dialogue form is that it enables the author to celebrate both the plurality of the text and the plurality of the subject.

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• **Jonathan Crewe, *Trials of Authorship: Anterior Forms and Poetic Reconstruction from Wyatt to Shakespeare, The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics*, 9 (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 196 pp., \$25.00**

The strongly revisionist period constructions that have undergone a procrustean institutionalization as 'The New Historicism' are dominated by a recurrent political paradigm, the 'subversion' or 'containment' of 'power', and frequently grounded in an oppositional stance toward their own social situation.¹ Jonathan Crewe wishes to develop a theoretical and generic self-consciousness that he finds missing from most New Historicist constructs of 'the Renaissance' by questioning their interest and engagement in cultural political issues. This is very much a negation from within, published in Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicist series by a productive New Historicist critic, who, however, wants to restrain what he sees as the unreflective period-constructing excesses of this critical discourse. Sceptical of any claims to represent the Renaissance 'radically otherwise', Crewe argues that the New Historicism actually rests on an 'institutional conservatism': it repeatedly constructs a concept called 'the Renaissance' from the 'prolific terms' in which the period represented itself and from 'the terms of its foundational historians and critics: Michelet, Burckhardt, Cassirer, Kristeller, Panofsky, et al.' (pp. 1–3). Even if the dominant New Historicist construction of the Renaissance expresses 'a desire to capitalize on the most socially progressive elements in a powerful Renaissance culture and to rewrite the script advantageously', it still betrays 'a continuing, often unacknowledged investment in the archaic (not archetypal) forms, whether social, discursive, or representational, of Renaissance culture' (p. 3). Crewe dismisses the idea that the Renaissance can simply be abandoned as a period concept, or replaced by 'early modern', say, 'arguably the progressive rather than the conservative move at present' (p. 2); instead he prefers to focus attention on the forms in/of New Historicist representation, i.e. the cultural discourses specific to the Renaissance and the historiographical genres in which they are represented today. He thus makes plain his own institutional conservatism, which is also evident in his implementation of the genre he chooses for his literary history—satire—and in the narrative that history relates—the construction of masculinist ideologies of authorship in English sixteenth-century poetry and prose. Yet Crewe takes his project to such extreme lengths that his readers may well wonder just how to take it, whether or not they see themselves as New Historicists. I want to suggest that although this project is deeply conservative,

no, intentionally reactionary in its design and aims, it can redirect the cultural and political trajectory of the New Historicism in ways that are strategically useful to a radical agenda in cultural history.

One of Crewe's most intriguing but debatable moves is to draw on Hayden White's poetics of historiography to construe romance as the genre that shapes the dominant New Historicist construction of the Renaissance:

Among the things that can be considered romantic about that, apart from sheer nostalgia for the Renaissance as the putative origin of the modern world, is recourse to the Renaissance as a reservoir of cultural power endlessly capable of being tapped either for revolutionary social change or for more effective modes of social control.

(p. 8)

Admitting the reductiveness of classifying diverse critical discourses in this genre but doing little to mitigate it, Crewe finds the New Historicist romance of the Renaissance to be a 'specular, identificatory, and perhaps narcissistic mode of representation', 'a remaking...that is at risk of becoming a radical denial of history and of the non-negotiable pastness of the past' (pp. 9, 8). And he stakes his own claim to restore the historicity of Renaissance culture on satire, a historiographical genre which, as White notes, treats romantic 'hopes, possibilities, and truths Ironically'.² In place of romantic narratives of social transformation, Crewe recommends satiric detachment, 'always opposing itself to cultural boosterism', 'constituting the destructured historico-cultural field as its object rather than attempting to remodel or master it' (pp. 11, 10). This generic choice remains fraught with theoretical and political problems, some of which the ever-circumspect Crewe articulates, but never really resolves, absorbed as he is in the highly elaborate textual analyses that constitute his own period construction.

The most problematic issues can be gathered around the claim of historicity: with the assumption that 'there is no historical reality or corresponding form of historical narrative absolutely *sui generis*' (p. 5), would not Crewe's historical method also enact a radical denial of history? Once the historian admits that historical representation is mediated by generic and ideological determinations, a shift in genre, however calculated it may be, will not permit the representation to be adequate to the historical object, to escape being a simulacrum of the past which reflects present contingencies. Although Crewe admits as much, he also seems to believe that satiric historiography can preserve the historical difference of the cultural materials it processes, that unlike romance it 'resists its own extravagant synthesizing impulses, its own wish-fulfillment, its own propensity for idealization (idolization)' (p. 10). Yet Crewe's idols are explicit enough: he makes clear that he is in fact rejecting one historian-idol for another, the Michelet tacitly favoured by romantic New Historicists for 'White's characterization of Burckhardt' (p. 10). Crewe's very choice of a

historiographical genre contains an identificatory element in so far as it supports his most cherished methodological assumptions. For Burckhardt's satiric construct of the Renaissance appears admirable to Crewe not least because he can assimilate it to his reliance on poststructuralism, specifically concepts of indeterminate textuality and destabilized subjectivity. Just as, in White's account, 'Burckhardt apprehended the world of historical objects as a literal "satura," stew or medley, ...figuring a host of different possible, and equally valid, meanings' but indicating 'no "point" toward which things in general tend, no epiphanies of law, no ultimate reconciliations, no transcendence' (pp. 250–1), so Crewe apprehends the Renaissance as a world of textual forms which 'may well predate' the period, but which are nevertheless 'strongly inflected' during it and characterized by a fundamental 'indeterminacy' that precludes 'any genealogical or evolutionary scenario' (pp. 3–4). Crewe's concept of 'anterior' forms is post-structuralist intertextuality turned into satiric historiography. And far from hindering Crewe's identification with his period construct, the genre he chooses actually facilitates it. He adopts the 'characteristic posture' of the satirist — 'discouragingly aloof, punitive, conservatively attached, and "stoically" egocentric' — in order 'to recall that a great deal of Renaissance writing invokes the figure of the Stoic' (pp. 11–12, 9). He also suggests that his satiric posture is 'possibly masculinist' because of its 'pseudoetymological connection...with the figure of the satyr' (p. 11). This is the stoic literary historian offering a 'possibly' masculinist construction of the stoic writer's masculinist self-construction, demonstrating that satire is not a mode of historical representation that is any less specular, or makes any less effort to remodel and master, than romance.

On the contrary, Crewe mediates the Renaissance with historiographical, theoretical, and critical categories that reflect his institutional conservatism, supporting current academic periodizations, expanding an existing New Historicist construction, writing the story of what are today seen as the most reactionary aspects of the period. His project is strongly motivated not so much by the non-negotiable pastness of the past as by a 'Renaissance' which romantic New Historicists don't negotiate: 'Not only resistance to radical change and dissolution (or merely to their hallucinatory representation), but a discounting of them, accompanied by a complex problematic of relative immobility, bondage, and pain, is as characteristic of the Renaissance as its quasi-revolutionary enterprises and representations' (p. 9). Crewe counters the New Historicist romance of the Renaissance with a period construct characterized by reaction, and it too is governed by extravagant synthesizing impulses. His story of masculine authorship in the sixteenth century is designed to extend Jonathan Goldberg's argument that 'the literary subject, implicitly masculine, is reconstructed during the Jacobean period within the huge analogical-centripetal structure centered on the figure of the ruler' (pp. 20–1).³ In Crewe's version, the lyric poems of Wyatt and Surrey and two biographies of Henrician officials, William Roper's *The Life of Sir Thomas More* and George Cavendish's *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, are viewed as 'phallomorphic forms',

masculinist constructions of authorship that figure unresolved oedipal competitions with literary predecessors, a father-in-law, patrons, the monarch. The oedipal is 'the putatively definitive instance of phallomorphic representation' for Crewe, but it unfolds in its "classic" 'form only when the monarch is male (pp. 121, 123). Hence, this "master" script' gets revised in the Elizabethan texts he considers, Gascoigne's prose and poetry and Shakespeare's *Lucrece*: 'the phase from Edward VI through Elizabeth I is an interregnum in which one boy and two women rule, distorting if not suspending the patriarchal construction of power. As soon as James is king, history begins to repeat itself' (pp. 135, 180 n13). Here it becomes clear that Crewe's satiric historiography rests on a conservative conception of the historical process: following Burckhardt, it imagines historical change as 'metastatic', occurring in abrupt displacements, and it deploys the 'mode of emplotment' White finds in 'historians who perceive behind or within the welter of events contained in the chronicle an ongoing structure of relationships or an eternal return of the Same in the Different' (pp. 247–9, 11). What stays the same in Crewe's Renaissance is that authorship is masculinist and constructed *vis-à-vis* a monarch-centred symbolic order through an oedipal competition—'one that can anticipate and contain at least some of its own most problematic features' (p. 135). The gender difference introduced by a female monarch doesn't really make an ideological cultural difference: it forces only 'a shift within rather than away from the paternal-patrilineal construction of culture', a 'displacement' to an 'antioedipal' or 'crossed-up oedipal' discourse of authorship which remains masculinist (p. 137).

Crewe's project is a state-of-the-art New Historicist narrative of containment in which power is not only monarchical, but patriarchal. It is also evidence that the New Historicist investment in the Renaissance as a period concept coincides with a continuing and somewhat obsessive fascination with masculinist ideologies, particularly of authorship, but also of monarchy and the family. This fascination is reflected in Crewe's 'canon-reformation', his 'intentional displacement of the center of gravity in the English sixteenth century from the Elizabethan (Spenserian, Shakespearean) to the early Tudor period' (p. 13). Crewe says that in doing this he is questioning the canon that underwrites the New Historicist romance of the Renaissance. But he is also shifting attention away from a period concept in which the patriarchal construction of power undergoes a 'distorting' transformation, to one in which it enjoys a 'classic' unfolding (p. 17). Given the specularity of Crewe's project, we may well wonder if his fascination with masculinist ideologies is not a compensatory 'displacement' or projection of the 'trials' that authorship endures today, whether because of the poststructuralist critique of the literary subject (which he mentions) or because of the marginality of the literary in postmodern culture (which he doesn't mention at all). Indeed, Crewe himself suggests, rather defensively, that a problematic of authorship 'is not merely historic', but 'patently remains more than just a juridical fiction to those of us who put our names to texts' (p. 15). If, as Alan Liu has argued, the political paradigm in the New Historicist romance of the

Renaissance 'is really a rear-guard action spurred by the postmodern fear that in the face of history, *literary* history or any such mere show of intellect is passé' (p. 722), then Crewe's satiric representation can be seen as a much more reactionary effort to repress that fear by reconstructing a 'classic' form of authorship and renewing literary appreciation through close readings.

Any such critique of Crewe's project, however, must be tempered by the fact that his fascination with masculinist ideologies is far from being an enthusiastic valorization; rather, it is morbid and utterly ambivalent. He believes that it is 'indefensible' to repeat, 'at the level of critical representation', the 'invidious class and gender exclusion' implied in terms like 'authorship' and 'author'; but he argues that 'justice can be done' only 'by acknowledging both the power and the invidious exclusiveness of "authorial" construction in the English sixteenth century' (pp. 13–14). Thus, in the story he tells masculine authorship exists in a 'precarious and generally self-conscious condition', 'subject to critical denial or self-erasure' (p. 15). Crewe 'see[s] in Wyatt's honesty an unplumbed capacity for dissimulation, for limitless pursuit of negative mastery in the guise of stoic limitation', contributing 'an openly sadomasochistic brutality' to Petrarchism, 'with pain becoming the man's "part" in relation to that of the silent/silenced Petrarchan woman as disciplinary mistress' (pp. 36, 33–4). Surrey is said to incorporate 'a process of aggressive-defensive self-construction' in 'a story of willfully embraced failure or defeat', where Petrarchism is 'death-wishing' and the aristocratic knight-squire relationship conceals a 'homosexual love' that 'is homicidal and suicidal at once' (pp. 51, 72, 67). The 'possibilities of the literary career and the textual self' emerge in Gascoigne only by default, because his represented vocational failures constitute *displacements* of successive careers and "selves" (p. 130). In *Lucrece*, Shakespeare is 'the male author as perpetual rapist-manqué' who identifies with Achilles 'as the fantasized hypermale warrior-rapist' (the signature line is 'for Achilles' image stood his spear'); at the same time, however, Shakespeare's dependence on aristocratic patronage, recorded in his dedication to the Earl of Southampton, makes his authorial position one where he can share in the 'particular form of impotence or emasculation' that is Achilles' class and homosexual domination of Patroclus and 'be more than a little interested in the violated, shamed, and incipiently silenced woman, who is also the "property" of another' (pp. 152, 159–60). Shakespeare, in Crewe's view, both authors a text of phallic brutality (he is 'the biggest prick in history' (p. 159)) and is dispersed in an intertextual network of gender cross-representations, androgynous and bisexual.

These capsule summaries don't begin to capture the provocative accumulation of nuances in Crewe's readings, but they do offer a glimpse of a progressive effect in his institutional conservatism. Not only is the romance narrative of social transformation his satiric object, but masculinist ideologies as well, which he interrogates with extraordinary subtlety and sophistication, exposing their most concealed and contradictory conditions—textual, sexual, ideological. What Peter Stallybrass remarked about Crewe's previous anti-romantic study of

sixteenth-century texts, *Hidden Designs: The Critical Profession and Renaissance Literature*, holds equally true here: Crewe's 'frequent ploy is to undo what he sees as the over-allegorical readings of some recent critics less by refuting them than by proliferating the allegorical possibilities'.⁴ The result is that the sheer exorbitance of Crewe's readings strains at the otherwise conservative scope of his project, effectively putting it at the service of an antipatriarchal agenda in cultural history by constantly undoing the patriarchal construction of power.

'Exorbitant' is a term that Crewe himself uses to describe his characteristic reading of Roper's *Life*. Opposing the Yale editor's deferential, humanist historicist view that Roper represents More as 'a figure of saintly constancy', Crewe locates conflicting generic determinations, Christian stoic hagiography negated by *encomium moriae*, which turn the text, at least partly, into an Erasmian satire of its subject (note the specular imprinting of Crewe's satiric historiography on the 'anterior forms' he constructs). This generic paradox precipitates various textual discontinuities which he reads as symptoms of Roper's unresolved oedipal competition with More. Initially a member of More's household and then his son-in-law through marriage to his eldest daughter, Roper goes so far as to imply an 'incestuousness' in his wife's relationship to her father, 'establishing the daughterly seduction and absolution scenario as one central to the patriarchal construction of power, a definitively triangular construction requiring the presence of the father, the willing and consenting daughter, and the displaced spectatorial son' (p. 98). Because this 'paradigm' is very important to Crewe's overall synthesis ('[the] type of the Renaissance author [is] the spectatorial dependent as privileged witness...profoundly complicit in the circulation and exchange of power and pleasure' (p. 116)), he is moved to do some special pleading in a note:

Making this strong—perhaps exorbitant—claim for Roper's very 'slight' text may seem implausible. What I would suggest, however, is that the text bears witness to a still imperfectly comprehended cultural moment, from which exorbitant consequences may indeed flow. It is characteristic of various slight, 'artless' Renaissance texts to produce just this excess: *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *The Prince*, *The Praise of Folly*, *Utopia* itself.

(p. 179n11)

The first use of 'exorbitant' makes obvious Crewe's anxious awareness that his reading is likely to be taken as the imposition of a very complicated meaning on an apparently simple text. The second use of 'exorbitant' seeks to justify this reading by suggesting that its 'excess' too is only apparent, a misunderstanding corrected when the 'cultural moment' is more perfectly understood. But this justification remains questionable: 'imperfectly comprehended' assumes that a historical representation can be adequate to the historical object and free of any interested mediations, striking a dissonant note in a literary history that admits to

'have already disclaimed any possibility of representational neutrality or "pure" historicity' (p. 14). Crewe should be saying that Renaissance texts produce 'exorbitant consequences' when *he* reads them, because he is mediating them with poststructuralist and psychoanalytical concepts of textuality and subjectivity and this mediation is overdetermined by the politicized cultural formation in which he is doing it. What is 'exorbitant' about his readings is that they supplement the texts with present cultural materials and reflect present cultural debates and ideological oppositions, especially among gender ideologies. It is really on the basis of this contemporary situation that Crewe's readings ought to be justified. In particular, he would need to make clear that his own recourse to the Renaissance in a containment narrative does not tap the cultural power this period concept retains today for more effective modes of social or institutional control.

Crewe's rationalization of his project, however, tends to be limited by his institutional conservatism. His readings are firmly focused on the texts, elaborating generic, psychoanalytic, and ideological determinations which regularly exceed any historical 'contextualization', occasionally a move he explicitly refuses to make. Yet the only contemporary contingency he summons to explain this recurrent ahistoricism is his opposition to the New Historicist romance of the Renaissance, an opposition usually phrased in formalist terms. Crewe observes, for instance, that Wyatt's 'figure of the crafty strongman', where the masculine subject is constructed by 'any crafted/crafty simulation of weakness, emasculation, or abjection,' 'is undoubtedly subject to various contextualizations', and he briefly mentions several 'specific historical ones' before setting them aside for 'my own interpretive concerns', i.e. that 'Wyatt's craft strongly resists the bracketing, effacement, or even repression of the craft issue in practically all contemporary interpretation' (pp. 28, 46). Crewe seeks to challenge the dominant period construction that devalues close readings of Wyatt's intricate lyric forms, his *poetic* craft. But he is doing more than this. Since Wyatt's 'craft' reveals a subjective 'doubleness', 'the nonidentity of identity' as 'the condition of any Renaissance self, or of the Renaissance itself', Crewe is also assuming a poststructuralist concept of textuality that critiques patriarchy by exploring the shaky grounds of phallomorphism, which, like all cultural forms, is 'always arbitrary, always limited, always preemptively constructed, always powerful only by assertion and default' (pp. 44, 47).

Similarly, Crewe asserts that he stopped short of 'attempting any sweeping authorization of the feminine and the countercultural in terms I have already criticized as those of romance' (p. 21), but the poststructuralist concept of textuality that animates his readings bears a close resemblance to the concept of *écriture féminine* put forth by French feminist theorists like Hélène Cixous.⁵ Hence, the distortion that transforms masculinist ideologies of authorship during the 'interregnum' of a boy and two female monarchs is described as a 'cultural feminization', which, among other things, 'apparently undermines fixed hierarchy and gender-identity, constituting the feminine and the androgynous as

powerful roles to be played' (pp. 119, 137). Just as Cixous envisions a feminist writing practice 'working (in) the in-between', pursuing 'a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which woman takes her forms (and man, in his turn; but that's his other history)' (p. 287), so Crewe argues that 'the "feminized" and somewhat liberalized conditions of Elizabethan culture' are characterized by 'anomalously self-deconstructing excess', 'a lack of integral identity and/or the splitting of the normative phallic subject into figments of so-called multiple personality' (pp. 116–20, 126). Crewe's satiric readings of phallomorphic forms can be called feminist or be put to a feminist use because he reads those forms against the grain, with attention to their gender exclusions. In his story, masculine authors are 'losers' (his term for Wyatt and Surrey (pp. 38, 76), their oedipal competitions are never resolved in their favour, and they never really succeed in their authorial self-construction. The very fact that these self-constructions are text-based means that they will be indeterminate, endlessly deferred.

There is thus a progressive effect in Crewe's exorbitant readings: they can be viewed/used as feminist ideological critiques of the patriarchal construction of power. (Whether the racial and homosexual themes in some of Crewe's other readings produce a similar effect is not at all clear.) What this effect shows, however, is that poststructuralism has no necessary ideological determination, it is about resisting determinations, not determining the resistance, so it can serve different, conflicting cultural politics, feminism as well as a 'possibly masculinist' institutional conservatism. The same is true of irony, the master trope of satiric historiography. As White indicates and Crewe is aware, 'Irony can be used *tactically* for defense of either Liberal or Conservative ideological positions, depending on whether the Ironist is speaking against established social forms or against "utopian" reformers seeking to change the status quo' (p. 38). Crewe's conservatism may well be crypto-liberal, then, since it criticizes the romantic utopianism of an institutionalized critical discourse. Yet irony also 'can be used offensively', observes White, 'by the Anarchist and the Radical, to pillory the ideals of their Liberal and Conservative opponents', a use that can perhaps be recognized in the satiric impulses of this review, but also in Crewe's sustained deconstruction of masculinist ideologies, which I am calling feminist *malgré lui*.

Unfortunately, Crewe doesn't examine this ideological indeterminacy in his historical method. Even though he agrees that 'each particular narrative of the past is additionally an interpretation of the present and a prophecy of the future' (p. 7), his conservatism prevents him both from rationalizing his historical narrative with a social diagnosis of the present and from engaging in a utopian theorization of the social model implied in his deconstructions of patriarchy, from attending, in other words, to what Ernst Bloch calls the not-yet-conscious social representation amid the other ideological possibilities figured in cultural forms.⁶ Crewe doesn't think or desire beyond the current situation: noting that 'the

Jacobean production of knowledge, insofar as it is represented by Francis Bacon', follows the same masculinist scenario as Jacobean authorship 'and depends on conspicuous symbolic repression of the feminine and the countercultural', Crewe adds that 'this is not a history that necessarily has to go on repeating itself, yet the conditions of fundamental change, which would include an unambiguous desire for fundamental change, are far from having been established yet in our criticism' (p. 21). There is in fact a utopianism here, but it manifests the inclination of conservatives who, in White's words, 'imagine historical evolution as a progressive elaboration of the institutional structure that *currently* prevails, which structure they regard as a "utopia"—that is, the best form of society that men can "realistically" hope for, or legitimately aspire to, for the time being' (p. 25). Crewe's poststructuralist irony underwrites this conservative social vision because it constructs historical narratives of containment on the basis of close readings that regularly go beyond historical contextualization, but fit comfortably within their own institutional context.

All the same, Crewe's project can teach a radical agenda in cultural history what it must do as well as avoid in its effort to establish the conditions of change. An increased self-consciousness about historiographical genres is crucial. White's schematization remains at once too monolithic and too general, as Crewe remarks, requiring revision to admit multi-generic and indeterminate forms and other kinds of ideological struggle, feminist, gay, postcolonial. Yet White does demonstrate that the form of history is ideologically determinate and must be figured into any cultural politics: admitting this ideological determination can force the historian to ground the historical representation in a reflection on the present. Whatever form this representation takes, moreover, it must be characterized by a thoroughgoing contextualization of cultural materials and practices. As Alan Sinfield has argued, 'a cultural history must address not only texts, but the institutions and formations that organize, and are organized by, textualities, inscribing in and through them the contests of ideologies, of subjectivities.'⁷ Crewe's decision to subordinate 'the circulation, accumulation, and social functioning of poetic and other manuscripts in the English Renaissance' to 'the question of forms' (p. 22), his unwillingness to examine the social situation of texts with the religio-political significance of Roper's and Cavendish's biographies, his too brief references to sixteenth-century audiences (Tottel's "self-gentrifying readers' (p. 24)) result in his questionable formalism, exorbitant readings that exceed the past but are not fully rationalized with reference to the present.

This is not to say that poststructuralism and its renewal of microscopic attention to textual features can be jettisoned at this time. Poststructuralist concepts of indeterminate textuality and destabilized subjectivity can enable thinking about the conditions of cultural and social change. And close reading is still so entrenched as a cultural pedagogy—especially in the United States—that suddenly to stop it or to do it without poststructuralism would mean virtual capitulation, a refusal to speak and transform a dominant critical language from

within, a withdrawal from the always ideological struggle for meaning in academic and other cultural institutions. Instead of abandoning close readings, it is important to contextualize them in historical narratives that challenge the poststructuralist destabilization of subjectivity with a historically specific concept of social agency. To think social change in the present, a radical cultural history must be able to think it in the past, but within the political and institutional constraints that house social practices. From this vantage point, the problem with Crewe's satiric historiography is not merely that it remains too corrosively ironic for any such active politicization, but that it discourages the sort of revaluation that could revise period concepts and other disciplinary divisions. No doubt, Crewe, like many others, has an interest in current institutional constraints. Even a shift from 'the Renaissance' to 'Early Modern' can threaten the job of anyone whose teaching and writing focuses exclusively on the sixteenth century. But it is also clear that institutional conservatism limits the efforts of cultural historians to understand the present as history, to work toward a knowledge of the past that illuminates and defamiliarizes the present, imaging a different future.

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NOTES

- 1 The most incisive consideration of the New Historicism to date is Alan Liu, 'The power of formalism: the new historicism', *ELH*, 56 (1989), pp. 721–71.
- 2 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 10.
- 3 Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).
- 4 Peter Stallybrass, review of Jonathan Crewe, *Hidden Designs: The Critical Profession and Renaissance Literature* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 42 (1989), pp. 130–3 (131).
- 5 Hélène Cixous, 'The laugh of the Medusa' (1976), trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in *The Signs Reader: Woman, Gender, and Scholarship*, ed. Elizabeth Abel and Emily Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 279–97.
- 6 See, for example, Ernst Bloch, 'The conscious and known activity within the not-yet-conscious, The Utopian function' (1959), in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 103–41.
- 7 Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'Culture and textuality: Debating cultural materialism', *Textual Practice*, 4, 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 91–100 (98–9).