

## Book Reviews

*Candyman*. By Simone Poirier-Bures. Ottawa: Oberon, 1994. Pp. 157. \$25.95. Paper, \$12.95.

Cities inhabit us as we inhabit them. In ways we likely cannot even imagine they shape our lives, providing us with a place that we can either escape to or escape from. The city in which we grow up forms the bedrock of our experience. Subsequent dwelling places are regarded in comparison with it, assessed in terms of the home town's luxuries and limitations. In many respects we never leave our original home. It remains with us all our lives, a presence that informs our dreams and our imaginations.

In *Candyman*, the first novel by Halifax native Simone Poirier-Bures, the city of Halifax in the 1950s is as much a tangible presence as any of the characters. The story of Charles and Claire LeBlanc and their young family would have been very different had it taken place elsewhere. Poirier-Bures convincingly evokes the innocence of that decade of postwar expansion and optimism, a time when relationships were built freely on trust, when single-person businesses thrived, and when neighborhood mischief-makers set off firecrackers and climbed fences, but caused little real or lasting damage.

When Charles LeBlanc loses his government desk job, he is in his late fifties. His wife Claire, younger than him by 24 years, is pregnant and they have three small children. His search for employment has yielded no results because, despite his vast experience, nobody wants to hire someone his age. Worry sets in. However, an answer to his dilemma is provided by his children, who create a clamor whenever he makes fudge for them.

Everyone enjoyed candy, he thought. The candy counters in all the corner groceries were always busy. He remembered being at Dan's corner store once when the wholesaler of confectionery arrived. What was it the

children had called him? The Candyman. Here comes the Candyman, they'd said.

The story of Charles LeBlanc, the Candyman, is played out against the backdrop of a growing family and changing times. Initially meeting with modest success, Charles's desire to expand his business is frustrated by limited storage space and by neighborhood burglars. These obstacles are eventually overcome, but life as an independent businessman never leads to prosperity for his family. Instead, achievements are tempered by setbacks: an accident, a heart attack. As his health deteriorates and he grows old, large retailers move in to claim his customers and the business falls into disarray.

His advanced age brings with it other problems. Claire LeBlanc, an intelligent and passionate woman, finds life with a young family and an aging husband severely confining. She yearns for intellectual stimulation, for romantic encounters, things that Charles is manifestly ill-equipped to provide. Her frustration grows and she becomes irritable with her husband, leaving him at home while she goes out dancing at the Jubilee on Saturday nights. As the business flounders and the debts accumulate, she resumes teaching in order to support her family.

In the later chapters, the voice of Poirier-Bures's third-person narrative is provided by the LeBlanc's second daughter, Nicole. It is through her eyes that we witness the final stages of her father's disintegration and her mother's harried pursuit of a better life. And, finally, her own escape from a family, and a city, she finds stifling.

Poirier-Bures's unadorned prose style is an appropriate vehicle with which to re-create these ordinary lives. The story has its basis in the everyday; it is realistic, sometimes painfully so. There is much raw emotion on display here. But the prose is tight and controlled, the descriptive passages related with a crisp economy. Poirier-Bures allows her characters to speak for themselves and to draw us into their story. From the opening pages we hear them articulate longings and ambitions with which we can easily identify. The struggle of the LeBlanc family to overcome financial exigency and persevere in the face of hardship—and to remain a cohesive unit—is absorbing and persuasively depicted.

Poirier-Bures, a fiction writer and essayist who grew up in Halifax but who now teaches English in Blacksburg, Virginia, is adept in her use of setting as well. The streets of the city's north end are described with a

warm and nostalgic eye for the details—the sights and sounds and smells—of life in that part of the world in the 1950s and early 1960s. However, it is a demonstration of her proficiency as a novelist that she retains control of her material and does not allow this to dominate. The story of Charles LeBlanc and his family is universal. We feel the city as a governing presence in the background, feel its pulse and rhythms—we see its development over time and witness the impact of these changes on the LeBlanc family.

*Candyman* is an accomplished piece of work by a writer who has avoided the pitfalls to which many first novelists fall prey. Poirier-Bures possesses a firm grasp of the novelist's art. Her characters are people we can care about, whose fates matter. The writing is lucid and never descends into sentimentality. And you do not have to be from Halifax in order to appreciate what this book has to offer.

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Ian Colford

*Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse.* By Susan Purdie. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993. Pp. 186. \$17.95.

In her book, Susan Purdie undertakes a difficult, but recently an increasingly popular, assignment: to define the relationship between comedy and discourse. There have been several similar attempts made in the theoretical discussion of comedy in the last twenty years, from G. B. Milner's article, in which the author bases his concept of the "collision of universes of discourse" (1972: 16) on an earlier D. H. Monro's study (1951), to Keir Elam's semiotic investigation of Shakespeare's comedies (1984) where comic discourse is said to depend on five types of rhetorical language-games, and finally to Michael Issacharoff's theory which suggests that discourse becomes comic when it is "liberated . . . from referential constraints" (1989: 100). Yet none of these theories is as ambitious and comprehensive as Purdie's own inquiry. Not only should the author be commended for having the courage to approach comedy from a psychoanalytic perspective, a task that even ninety years after *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (Freud 1905) most scholars

carefully avoid; Purdie should also be admired for the integrity and aspired inclusiveness of her hypotheses.

The starting point for Purdie's theory of comedy, in accord with classical Freudian tradition, is the concept of joking. Yet she resists the temptation to reduce comic discourse to a schematic and simplistic model, and instead organically incorporates in her understanding of joking the notion of "solo laughing" which at the same time "involves constructing oneself as Teller [of the joke] and as Audience" (14). The second crucial innovation on this level is in her insistence that joking is a linguistic operation. Here Purdie mostly follows the theoretical investigations of Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, and very early in her book defines joking as a process which threatens the basic principles of language by generating more than one signified for every signifier. Joking, she writes, by "marking" linguistic transgressions from the Symbolic Law "confirms us strongly as able to keep the rule of 'same and different', as well as to break it" (30).

There are then two fundamental principles that determine joking as a distinct usage of language: first, joking is always an "ab-use" of language; and secondly, this ab-use indicates our control over, or as she calls it, "mastery" of language. At this point Purdie again follows her famous predecessor; just as Freud argued in his essay on humor (1927) that joking serves to confirm our sense of self, so she claims that joking is "a necessary exercise for all language-users to test and confirm their control in the Symbolic Order" (54), or, in other words, that joking is some kind of everyday micro-ritual whose main purpose is to re-establish us as rational beings.

Less convincing is Purdie's definition of comedy itself. While she does suggest that comedy is more than just a sequence of jokes (73-4), that is, she argues for comedy as a joking "text," her definition nevertheless relies on a relatively vague premise according to which comedy is a text that is not meant to be taken seriously. This claim, which in the context of, say, reception theory, might have seemed quite interesting, is, as it appears in Purdie's study, strangely isolated and probably needs to be developed a bit further. A similar objection could also be raised in connection with her classification of different types of comic dramaturgy. Whereas the idea of applying Lévi-Strauss's notion of "exchange" to comic plots is more than intriguing—she distinguishes between the romance, satirical and verbal plots (exchange of women, goods and

services, and exchange of information)—Purdie again does not venture into more detail. In distinction to her theory of joking that is perfectly coherent and seems to be almost unassailable, her theory of comedy is, particularly in the chapter on the Definitions of Comedy, rather sketchy.

Perhaps the most interesting element in Purdie's theory is, however, an inherent paradox that is present throughout her book: I think here of the question concerning the ethical dimension of laughter. Though the author understands the mastery of language and the whole notion of linguistic competence as a typically masculine attribute of discourse (128-9)—which is certainly not meant as a compliment—and though she in several places very eloquently suggests that by definition both joking and comedy take advantage of the under-privileged (125-26), and should be treated with caution if not entirely dismissed, she never goes as far as to suggest that laughter is a morally unacceptable reaction. Instead, Purdie repeatedly tries to prove that joking is, despite everything, not all bad. "Because subjective empowerment is involved in all joking" (130), she says, in certain circumstances joking can even be considered desirable. Yet, when it comes to comedy, such a view still indicates an underlying value judgment; it implies that there is acceptable and unacceptable laughter, that there are groups of people who have the right to construct their identity, and groups of people who already have one and should therefore have it de-constructed. Here lies a catch-22: as soon as one makes this kind of exclusive statement, a bias—which this same assertion is trying to eliminate—resurfaces with even greater strength. There is nothing more harmful to the sense of humor than tolerance and tact.

Fortunately, the ambivalent attitude that Purdie occasionally exhibits is not always a sign of weakness. Rather it is frequently a proof of the struggle between a genuine insight into the mechanisms of comedy and the methodological prejudice dictated by her ideological constraints. Where, on the other hand, some critics did accuse Purdie of inconsistency (Luc Morgan Douthit in *Theatre Research International*), she is actually strong enough to overcome the limitations of a distinctly post-structuralist approach and remain original. In general, her study is a well thought-out and boldly comprehensive theory of comedy whose only true flaw—previously raised objections were of purely subjective nature—is the author's language, which is often excessively complicated.

*Swift's Politics: A Study in Disaffection.* By Ian Higgins. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Pp. xiii, 232. \$54.95.

Near the beginning of this excellent book, Higgins quotes the critic Christopher Hill's remark that literary historians, in trying to understand texts, "do not always bear sufficiently in mind the subterfuges which writers necessarily had to adopt in order not to expose themselves to danger." In the case of Jonathan Swift, by nature an ironist, one inclined to adopt subterfuges and indirections even in personal relations, the case is perhaps doubly hard. After the death of Queen Anne in 1714, he found himself, not just out of favor with the new Whig court of the Elector of Hanover, but in mortal danger because of his close previous association with now-outlawed political figures. It was a perilous time to be considered a disaffected ally of traitors. Swift's mail was opened; his pamphlets were scrutinized for signs of Jacobitism. "Every day," he told Pope in 1723, "a Dagger is at my Throat, a halter about my Neck, or Chains at my Feet, all prepared by those in Power." In the circumstances, while he was too much of a politician to withdraw altogether from combat, it is not surprising that in both letters and printed texts, he adopted elaborate strategies of evasion and obfuscation, for self-protection—always a paramount concern for Swift. While he might claim to be a Whig in letters and elsewhere, and while he never called himself a Jacobite or even a Tory, Swift's political innuendo,

consonant as it is with an understood Jacobite political language, has the effect of suggesting not an anachronistic Old or True Whig political stance as is supposed in Swift studies, but the Jacobite vellicities of a disaffected High Churchman whose loyalty . . . could be radically ambiguous.

Higgins finds in him "a flirtation with proscribed, extremist political ideas." In his view, Swift was a crypto-Jacobite.

When we read a work like *Gulliver's Travels* out of polemical context (which is different from the literary context, sufficiently explored by literary historians) we understand the words on the page but too often miss the totemic signposts and subtleties of contemporary partisan debate. We get the words, but often miss the tune. Higgins exhaustively explores the political literature of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century

to identify the signs and themes of Jacobitism and other partisan stances. He then notes the "congruence" between Swiftian and Jacobite writing.

The effect is illuminating. In pt. III of *Gulliver's Travels*, for instance, Gulliver goes to Glubbdubdrib, the island of sorcerers, and has the opportunity of conversing with heroes from antiquity. Gulliver asks that the Senate of Rome be brought before him; then Brutus and Caesar step forward. "I was struck with a profound Veneration at the Sight of *Brutus*," says Gulliver, "and could easily discover the most consummate Virtue, the greatest Intrepidity, and Firmness of Mind, the truest Love of his Country, and general Benevolence for Mankind in every Lineament of his Countenance." For his part, Caesar told Gulliver that "the greatest Actions of his own Life were not equal by many Degrees to the Glory of taking it away."

The incident may seem on first glance to be merely a diverting episode. It certainly gives pleasure in itself. But Higgins, in his painstaking scholarly fashion, notes that Brutus, along with Cato—"icons of Roman virtue"—had been appropriated in Jacobite rhetoric and would have had "topical political resonance" for readers of the 1720s. In effect, the incident involving Brutus and Caesar shows "Swift's vicarious entertainment of tyrannicide." He convincingly demonstrates "startling analogues" between it and Jacobite polemical literature of the period. (This is not the only section of pt. III in which tyrannicide and rebellion seem to be endorsed: the account of the Lindalinian revolt, which as Higgins points out was not included in any edition of *Gulliver's Travels* in Swift's lifetime, can be read as a similarly incendiary text.)

The anti-Dutch satire in *Gulliver's Travels* is, as Higgins remarks, sometimes seen by modern readers as "gratuitous." It will be recalled that in pt. III Gulliver declines, when in Japan, to engage in "*trampling upon the crucifix*," as Dutchmen do, and when the Emperor learns this "he began to doubt whether I were a real *Hollander* or no; but rather suspected I must be a Christian." (Gulliver is pretending to be Dutch at this point in the story.) In a lengthy analysis, Higgins links this sentiment with vitriolic Jacobite hatred of the Dutch after the Revolution brought William of Orange to England. He notes especially the "intertextuality" between pt. III and Henry Stubbe's Jacobite *Justification of the Present War Against the United Netherlands* (1673), in which Stubbe alleges that the Japanese believe the Dutch "*are as perfect Heathens as themselves*" (and so are willing to trade with them). Higgins also brings into this

discussion Don Pedro de Mendez, the sympathetic Portuguese captain who saves Gulliver in pt. IV, noting that the Portuguese "appear positively in the anti-Dutch literature which the Jacobites and Tories culled." (*The Portugueses refused to trade there* [i.e., Japan]," Stubbe wrote.) And most ingeniously, he says that the "jabbering" Dutchman of pt. III prefigures the Yahoos of pt. IV. Looking back from his experience in the land of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver says the only difference he saw between the yahoos there and human yahoos is that the latter "use a Sort of Jabber, and do not go naked."

The connections Higgins finds between Swift's works and those of Jacobite contemporaries add a new dimension to Swift scholarship. Yet as he is well aware, there is more to Swift than topical satire. I would add to this that minutely hooking Swift's writing to contemporary movements and events—while carried out brilliantly here—can on occasion lead to questionable readings or, more precisely, to readings that violate the authority of the text itself. Towards the end of his book, Higgins notes that despite "the violence of Swift's satire on Hanoverian Court Whiggism and vicarious entertainment of revolt," what is really exemplified in *Gulliver's Travels* is "the Church Tory doctrine of non-resistance and passive obedience." He illustrates this by saying that "Gulliver in his travels goes through [the] routines of a loyal subject," as when, in pt. I, "he petitions to be excused from complying with the Emperor's commands which would have forced the consciences and destroyed the liberties and lives of innocent people." This seems to me to overlook the obvious point that Gulliver at this point in pt. I has *already* virtually "destroyed the liberties" of the Blefuscudians by stealing their entire fleet and dragging it over to the Lilliputian king. His protest, alluded to by Higgins, that he would never be "an instrument of bringing a free and brave people into slavery" is, to my mind, an example of latter-day hypocritical mouthing of high-sounding principle by a subject who, deep inside, without his knowing it, is locked into destructive habits of obedience to a petty (in fact, six-inch) tyrant.

When it comes to reading Swift, there's more than one way to get the tune.



*French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture.* By David Carroll. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995. Pp. 299. \$29.95.

Though I began reading about this difficult subject with some trepidation, David Carroll's deliberate and insightful study quickly absorbed me. Like many others, Carroll believes that fascism, rather than representing a reactionary movement away from the Enlightenment, is deeply rooted in the classical humanist tradition which associates Reason with Truth and Beauty. His controversial assertion is borne out particularly when applied to the authors who often attempted to reinvigorate stereotypic "French" *raison* and *mesure* while espousing extreme nationalist or anti-semitic ideologies. The strength of Carroll's analysis rests on the aesthetic perspective on politics he inherits from Walter Benjamin, and on the complex articulations the aesthetic point of view reveal.

Defining fascism less as a political platform—the book reminds us that Hitler wanted to avoid the organized debate of party politics—but as a totalitarianism, i.e. a non-pluralism of form and function, Carroll shows that among these writers and critics it was precisely the totalizing aesthetic appeal of Nazism which inspired such vigorous passion. The specific doctrines of literary criticism associated with a totalitarian philosophy are not elaborated in this study, nor does Carroll allow himself to speculate about the way in which postmodern aesthetics might subvert totalitarian tendencies. However, Carroll's approach enables him to perceive the logical coherence between the widely appreciated, "good" literary output of prominent writers and their political rhetoric. Had he chosen to generalize by abstract principles, this book might have been more entertaining, it would have been more concise, but it would certainly not have been as persuasive. What distinguishes the varied approaches of the nationalist writers from each other emerges as a highly differentiated picture of literary and political interactions.

In order to comprehend the attraction of the "new fascist man" to great numbers of French intellectuals of the 1930's, Carroll finds it necessary to refer back to the authors at the turn of the century who provided the link between classic French culture and an anti-democratic form of politics. Like other critics, he shows how the "fathers" of French fascism, Barrès and Maurras, provided the categories whereby later thinkers developed their world views. To his credit, Carroll also lucidly explains

the fundamental ideological connection with the populist poet Péguy, a militant Dreyfusard, republican, Catholic, and "socialist," whose qualifications seem at first glance to put him in the opposite political camp. Contemporary attempts to exorcise the fascist world view by sorting the good from the bad on the basis of some tell-tale characteristic are shown to be just as inept as any similar manoeuvre to define a "racial" identity and by that criterion to create a totally homogeneous, spiritual collective organism.

While Carroll makes no claim to offer a general theory of fascism, he has reason to expect that his analysis will demonstrate why a critical reading of fascist authors should not take the form of a simple rejection of their art. Instead he proposes a serious re-examination of the time-honored cultural bias which allows politics to be aestheticized and art to be politicized. Carroll refuses to either defend fascist writers for their otherwise valuable contributions to literature, or to indict literary figures for their fascist political leanings. The frequently idealized form that fascism took when supported by art is still fascism, and it is the totalizing act itself Carroll warns us against. At a time when literary criticism is often linked to sociological considerations, it is instructive to be reminded that historical events do not determine the peculiar charm of the written word.

*Halifax*

*Anja Pearre*

*Nietzsche and the Modern Crisis of the Humanities.* By Peter Levine. Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1995. Pp. xxi, 279. \$18.95.

This book has critical things to say about Nietzsche and his influence on European and American conceptions of culture and education. Peter Levine finds in Nietzsche's position at once a positive attitude to everything human and a nihilistic critique of truth. Nietzsche, it is argued, was right to think that timeless standards of truth are illusory, but wrong to maintain that there is no way to determine the truth or falsity of different points of view. Nietzsche's insistence that every statement is completely contingent on a particular culture and language is now commonplace. But Levine sees this kind of relativism as only the flip

side of the "naïve view" that all claims to truth are irrational unless they can be "grounded absolutely" (93).

A sceptical intellect is the goal of education, and to this end freedom from cultural norms is necessary. But there is a difficulty. While Nietzsche's "overman" (*Übermensch*) lives "beyond culture," he knows that "he must show no resentment or resistance against cultural norms, for this would reveal his continued embroilment in the web of history" (143). The overman seeks to transcend given cultural formations, but acknowledges that history is necessary to lead up to, and make possible, his own transcendence. He is torn between his sense that he is already free and the fact that his freedom is mediated through other people and the movement of history.

Levine criticizes this Nietzschean freedom for forcing us to choose between "herd morality" and the "abyss of nihilism" (167). The ideal of the overman is supposed to transcend any conflict between freedom and the broad sweep of history. But Nietzsche celebrated an original pagan freedom. So far as the overman identifies with this original condition he can only stand opposed to the subsequent course of events. Nietzsche's ideal is therefore not the completion of history, as he assumed, but rather the rejection of it.

A related criticism concerns the contempt which Nietzsche—and latter-day Nietzscheans such as Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom—had for the gradual "consensus" of "humanistic scholarship" (211-12). Nietzsche had some sense of the positive truth of history, on which was built both the humanities and the European tradition. But he denied that there was a cumulative wisdom to history. Levine sees in this a false view of scholarship. He maintains that every perspective on tradition stands in relation to other perspectives. The Nietzschean philosopher, or cultural critic, is not original or self-sufficient, but the demand made on the humanities by scholars who have forgotten their history and the way in which truth emerges from diverse perspectives on the past.

It is not to Nietzsche but to Ludwig Wittgenstein and Clifford Geertz that Levine looks for a "positive" description of the "historical sense" (212). Linguistic philosophy and cultural anthropology free us of nihilistic critique not simply by opening up other perspectives, but by understanding and appropriating them. This is Levine's alternative to Nietzsche. That Nietzsche wanted not to reject but to affirm historical life is clear. But he imagined that he could affirm it immediately or all at once.

Levine is surely right to criticize this position. Nietzsche in the end could only grasp the negative or destructive aspects of history, because he was incapable of the mutuality and concrete rationality that animate the whole of it.

Faculty and students with an interest both in Nietzsche and in the future of the humanities will want to consult this book.

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*Kenneth Kierans*

*Austin C. Clarke: A Biography.* By Stella Algoo-Baksh. Toronto: ECW; Barbados: P of the U of the West Indies, 1994. Pp. 234. Paper, \$14.95.

Stella Algoo-Baksh's biography of Austin Clarke is the first book-length biography of a West Indian writer, apart from Carole Angier's massive study of the life of Jean Rhys. As such, it will not only help provide readers of Clarke with a context for his writing, but it will also give an insight into the kind of background from which other non-white West Indian writers have emerged. For Clarke's life as a writer is not atypical of those of other West Indian writers such as Lamming, Naipaul, Selvon, and Anthony, who are approximately of his generation.

Like them he was born in a colonial territory in which the overwhelming majority of the population was not white, but in which the values and attitudes of the British were vigorously imposed. Like them he received a colonial education which encouraged him to despise his humble origins; and like them he migrated to a white metropolis—they to London, he to Toronto—to prove himself in a stronghold of those who had inculcated in him a sense of his own intrinsic inferiority and of their superiority.

What is disappointing in Algoo-Baksh's account of Clarke's life is that she has devoted so little time and effort to placing Clarke in this context. Ironically, because Algoo-Baksh is herself a West Indian, the chapter on "Growing up in Barbados" is the least detailed and least persuasive in the book. It, in fact, demonstrates only a superficial understanding of Barbadian institutions and attitudes. This is unfortunate because the thesis of this book is that Clarke's struggle to assert himself as a person and as a writer in a white world is as much an internal one against values he had

absorbed in Barbados, as an external one against the racism he encountered in Toronto.

Algoo-Baksh's narrative grows in conviction and persuasiveness as she follows Clarke to Canada, and she seems much more at home detailing Clarke's immigrant experiences of racism in this country. In reconstructing this portion of the life, she makes extensive use of personal interviews with Clarke himself, of Clarke's papers at McMaster University, and of Clarke's own writing, so that one sometimes feels that the account is somewhat one-sided. Her discussion of his stories and novels, for example, concentrates on illustrating how incidents in the narratives correspond to issues in Clarke's own life. Not much attempt is made to discuss the work critically, or to distinguish what is first class in the writing from what is not so successful. The publication of each of Clarke's books is viewed as a literary triumph. Not enough questions are asked about what effect forays into such things as teaching and politics had on his writing. No doubt his productivity as a writer was affected, but was the writing, like the politics, just a way of attracting attention to himself? This account of Clarke's life raises many questions which it does not try hard enough to answer.

Nevertheless, this is an interesting and readable account of a life that is often turbulent, and of the strength and persistence it took to make a particular kind of Canadian writer. It will help Canadian readers understand the sources of an important body of new Canadian writing. For Clarke is a forerunner and his struggles and important work have undoubtedly helped prepare the way for such writers as Cyril Dabydeen, Dionne Brand, M. G. Vassanji, and Rohinton Mistry.

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*Anthony Boxill*

*Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature.* Edited by Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994. Pp. viii, 273. \$39.50 US. Paper, \$14.95 US.

Two questions might be posed at the outset about a collection of this kind. First, what is the ontological status of psychoanalytic criticism? Freud himself wrote about literature and art with something of the gifted

amateur's flair for making the surprising discovery; moreover, his ventures into the aesthetic field were always subordinate to his scientific agenda. In our day Freud has lost his standing as a scientist and has become a thinker instead. It follows from this relegation that Freud's scientific doctrines now have no more *prima facie* authority than the philologist theory of burning. Freud has become a text—an immensely valuable, beautifully articulated, ingeniously translated, and painstakingly edited text, but a text nonetheless and therefore subject to commentary, correction, and revision by Lacan and many others. So what exactly is going on when two fields of textuality—one psychoanalytic and the other literary—are brought into the kind of proximity implied in the subtitle of this book? One plausible answer would be to say that both fields are interested in mapping out the symbolic order, and therefore a problem arising in one field may find its solution in the other. But this move only raises my second question, namely, how can a completely secular and sceptical iconography of the symbolic order be superimposed on a society as devoted to (and tormented by) its various religious beliefs and controversies as the Renaissance was?

The contributors to this volume are doing practical criticism, and should therefore not be required to answer questions of the kind I've posed. But the finest essays in the collection are by authors who would know how to handle them. My favorite is "Through Optic Glass: Voyeurism and *Paradise Lost*", by Regina Schwartz. This is a subtle and lucid account of the many meanings of the gaze in Milton's poem: the predatory gaze of Satan as he loers enviously at the human pair, the longing gaze of Eve as she contemplates the fruit, the upward gaze of Galileo through his newly perfected telescope, the inward gaze of the blind narrator, and above all (at least in the technical sense) the providential gaze of God who qualifies as "the supreme voyeur, watching unseen, possessing all he sees, his all-seeing eye circumscribing the power of the other voyeurs" (156). There is real critical thinking going on in this essay, all of it based on an engagement with *Paradise Lost* that is both intimate and panoramic. Schwartz makes interesting and understated use of both Freud and Lacan, but hers is no mere application of their theories to Milton's text. Indeed, Schwartz is notably independent-minded in arguing that Milton's Eve is not a victim but an agent who chooses; she quotes Eve's defence of the need to test one's freedom and concludes that "Victims are not given such lines" (161).

There is much to admire in other essays too. Marjorie Garber's contribution, "The Insincerity of Women", draws on Nietzsche, Freud, *When Harry Met Sally*, and much else in between to explicate a paradox about Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling*: she's at her most authentic when she's faking it. This line of argument leads to a wonderful thought about the virginity test according to which a little drink of water from the glass marked M will cause a virgin to exhibit, seriatim, the symptoms of gaping, sneezing, laughing, and melancholy. Garber has an explanation for this odd and unprecedented sequence of symptoms: "They are not, in fact, the telltale signs of virginity, but rather of *orgasm*" (25). Juliana Schiesari, in "Machiavelli and Fortune's Rape", holds Machiavelli quite strictly accountable for the blatant misogyny with which he describes a revolting sexual encounter in a letter to Luigi Guicciardini dated 8 December 1509. Schiesari's reading of the letter is quite brilliant, even if she overstates the consequences that follow from it. David Lee Miller reads Ben Jonson a fairly stiff post-structuralist lecture in "Writing the Specular Son: Jonson, Freud, Lacan, and the (K)not of Masculinity". Miller does have sensitive and thoughtful things to say about father/son relationships in both Jonson and Freud, though the parallelism he claims to be discovering is largely manufactured.

There is one essay on Shakespeare: William Kerrigan's "Female Friends and Fraternal Enemies in *As You Like It*". There is one study of the "constructedness" (44) of aristocratic identity: Natasha Korda's "Mistaken Identities: Castiglio(ne)'s Practical Joke". There is one discussion of representations of the feminine in *Orlando Furioso*: Valeria Finucci's "The Female Masquerade: Ariosto and the Game of Desire". There are two evocations of the linkages between classical authorities and Renaissance authors: Lynn Enterline's "Petrarch Reading (Himself Reading) Ovid" and Elizabeth J. Bellamy's "From Virgil to Tasso: The Epic Topos as an Uncanny Return". Finally, there's a text by Harry Berger that may have been clever and witty in its oral version; in unforgiving print it never lives up to the promise of its title, "Actaeon at the Hinder Gate: The Stag Party in Spenser's Gardens of Adonis".

The study of literature has been so thoroughly professionalized that there's now only a slim chance that a volume like this one will fall into the wrong hands. The writers of these psychoanalytic studies will therefore be read by one another and by writers of other psychoanalytic studies. Only the exceptional piece (like that by Schwartz) will find

readers among the not-already-committed. That is a shame, because it means that obvious questions like the ones I asked at the outset are likely to be endlessly deferred.

*Dalhousie University*

*Ronald Huebert*

***Erotic Reckonings: Mastery and Apprenticeship in the Work of Poets and Lovers.* By Thomas Simmons. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1994. Pp xiii, 227. \$27.50.**

Thomas Simmons's study *Erotic Reckonings* explores the notions of "mastery and apprenticeship" in the lives and work of three pairs of twentieth-century poets: Ezra Pound and H. D., Yvor Winters and Janet Lewis, and Louise Bogan and Theodore Roethke.

In his introduction, Simmons discusses the origin of mentorship in the *Odyssey*—assuming the guise of Mentor, Athena supports Telemakhos in the search for his father, Odysseus—and cites the correspondence between Abelard and Heloise as founding "the overt equation of mentorship and eroticism in post-classical culture" (3). Simmons defines eros in Jungian terms, as the force of will which joins people in hierarchical relations; as the affective glue cementing the bonds of mentorship, eros manifests itself in "problems of dominance, submission, and defiance" (2). Thus eros relates to authority. The goal of any mentor-apprentice relationship ought to be "intersubjectivity" (the term is borrowed from Habermas): an alliance of subjects, rather than the unequal subject-object relation. But the obstacle to this is the existence of cultural authority, from which the master himself derives his status. Subjecting the apprentice to his own authority in the name of the tradition to which he subjugated himself, the typical mentor establishes a bond which frustrates the development of the "personhood" of apprentice and master alike.

Following psychologists such as Carol Gilligan and Jean Baker Miller, Simmons aligns self-centred and inter-subjective models of the self with male and female thinking respectively. His thesis, then, is not only that mentor-apprentice relationships play out common patterns of gender inequality, but that the instrument of such oppression is ultimately the tradition itself. Pound and Winters are diagnosed in this manner. H. D.



becomes a realized poet only by freeing herself from the confines of Pound's imagist poetics and achieving a self-expression unhindered by conventionality. In order to escape her husband's devotion to rationality as the criterion of poetic excellence, Janet Lewis is forced to escape into the genre of the novel, which Winters did not concern himself with professionally. Louise Bogan stands as the counter-example: encountering Roethke at a point in her life when she was already well on her way to achieving an "integrated personality" (186), she was able to act as a true mentor, offering guidance within a relationship of equals that did not damage the "authentic selfhood" (9) of either in the interests of tradition.

The interest of Simmons's book, as literary criticism, lies in its model of poetic development, one which might be seen as an alternative to a Bloomian, agonistic reading of influence. However, while his biographical arguments are generally compelling—the close connection Pound and Winters saw between poetics and morality undoubtedly rendered them inflexible as mentors—for the most part he fails to integrate them with the complex notions of tradition and authority that figure in modernist critical discourse. Pound and Winters were both prolific and forcefully prescriptive critics of poetry; the relation between the roles of mentor and teacher—think of the cranky, chatty pedagogy of Pound's *A. B. C. of Reading*—goes unexplored. And he gives surprisingly little attention to the role of mentorship in the actual practice of poetry, too often arguing by a sort of homology between psychic and poetic health and supplementing his psychological apparatus with cursory close readings. While potentially powerful, Simmons's feminist, developmental model seems simplistic in privileging the value of inter-subjectivity over that of a tradition. "Where knowing knowledge is raised above knowing self and other, some kind of subjugation of the self becomes inevitable" (55). Perhaps so—but poetry itself might be defined as a form of knowledge about self and other; it is in any case a craft, the learning of which cannot fully be explicated by a model of self-actualization.

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