

## Book Reviews

***Apartment Seven: Essays Selected and New.* By Miriam Waddington. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1989. Pp. 214. Paper, \$16.95.**

Miriam Waddington's prose has much in common with her poetry. The language is direct and lucid; the voice, open and personal. The style stems from her conviction that literature has the power to communicate in an immediate way, that it can change lives. The prose collected in *Apartment Seven* differs, however, from her poetry in one significant aspect—it is charged with a polemic, one which informs practically each of the various essays, critiques and reminiscences that comprise this book and which raises it from being merely good to being important.

Waddington's polemic comes out of her belief that there is a suppressed tradition of writing in Canada. Her essay, "Canadian Tradition and Canadian Literature" is central to an understanding of her argument. In it she outlines the history of our literary attitudes and points to the ongoing attempt by critics to describe what they have perceived as a dualism in our literature. Waddington admits it is difficult to pinpoint what that dualism is though she seems certain of what it is not. She dismisses, for example, A. J. M. Smith's division of our writers into "native" and "cosmopolitan." There is, of course, something reductive about any such division for genuine writers and writing in general resist such simplifications. Waddington seems aware of this. Yet for argument's sake she provides her own dichotomy, dividing our critical attitudes into the mythopoeic-apocalyptic (i.e., Northrop Frye) on the one hand, and the historical socio-economic (i.e., E. K. Brown) on the other. This dichotomy permits Waddington to make her point: namely, that the mythopoeic school has held the upper hand in defining our tastes and as a result the literature of our poor, native and ethnic populations has not had the reception it deserves. Her claim is that the real and specific events of our past are denied by a patterned, mythic approach to literature. She concludes her essay by questioning the very notion of a Canadian tradition and in so doing, provides what I believe is a true and telling account of our literary situation:

There is, in fact, no real Canadian literary tradition but only a social matrix, an accumulation of historical events, full of contradictions, forces and counter-forces; we live in a sort of vast cultural chaos upon which all are free to draw. We possess a promiscuous history, which contains not just abstract patterns, but specific items. (98)

What Waddington is engaged in here is not merely an academic debate to be carried on by professors at a conference. She is attempting to talk about how our culture and society operate at the deepest levels, and what lends her argument weight is the fact that it is born out of her personal experience. From childhood, Waddington has felt herself an outsider in Canadian society, estranged because she is both a woman and a Jew. In her memoir pieces she describes her roots in the secular Jewish immigrant culture, a culture strongly socialist and humanistic. This genesis accounts for her sensitivity to those artists, groups and works which have been disenfranchised or considered *déclassé* by our commissars of culture. Those essays in *Apartment Seven* which are most significant are so because they perform the act of reclaiming forgotten or unknown works, of reaching out to what Waddington so eloquently terms, "the denied realities."

There is, for instance, the persuasive essay on the early radical poems of A. M. Klein which have been ignored or dismissed by critics as being immature, without literary value, representing a "troubling episode in an otherwise virtuous literary life." Waddington argues convincingly that these political poems are organically connected to Klein's later work and are not an aberration; they are, rather, a fascinating record of how a Canadian poet responded to the revolutionary thirties and moreover, are "still fresh, interesting, and alive."

The piece on Rachel Korn, the Montreal Yiddish poet whom Waddington has translated over the years, is particularly valuable for it will serve, for the majority of Canadian readers, as an introduction to a dynamic and major poet. (As proof for such a claim, one has only to read Korn's "The Beginning of a Poem," quoted in full in Waddington's essay. I can think of no other work that speaks so well to Akhmatova's notion of "pre-lyrical anxiety," the terrifying nature of the creative surge.)

Two of the most fascinating essays are "The Heroes of Misfortune," a study of the central figures in three different narratives by I. L. Peretz, Lu Hsun and V. S. Naipaul, and "Moshe Nadir: The Yiddish Stephen Leacock." In these, Waddington examines the relationship between authors/characters and the societies they lived in. The essays point to the complex relationship between the writer and his/her culture and help us to appreciate the tensions, motives and aspirations of those on the margins of society.

I found only one of Waddington's acts of reclamation unconvincing and that was her piece on the poetry of John Sutherland. To me his

language seems static, bulky and somehow oppressive, and I left the essay feeling that Irving Layton had been right in dissuading him from the poet's vocation. Also, Waddington's "feminist" essays, "Bias" and "Women and Writing" are tepid; their ideas, old hat. She is much better on women's issues when she writes about specific women writers. The pieces on Simone de Beauvoir and Mary Wollstonecraft are inclusive and thought-provoking.

Waddington's contention of a suppressed literature is nowhere better expressed than in her essay on Hugh Garner's *Cabbagetown* and in her "Memoirs of a Jewish Farmer: Edenbridge." The latter deals with Michael Usishkin's recollections of the turn-of-the-century socialist pioneering settlement in Saskatchewan. It is apparent from the lengthy passages Waddington quotes that Usishkin's book is as fascinating and well written as, say, Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It In the Bush*. Though Waddington does not pose the question, one is tempted to ask: on how many CanLit courses will you find Usishkin's book? Which leads to a more pressing question. For if we indeed see ourselves in and through our literature, then what effects have we suffered by ignoring or denying parts of that literature?

Waddington sees Hugh Garner's *Cabbagetown* as another neglected book, which critics have condemned as didactic and aesthetically weak. Through an examination of Garner's use of language, Waddington proves otherwise. Here the suppressed minority is not an ethnic group but the desperately poor. Turning back to her polemic, Waddington wonders how placing this novel in a larger mythic framework would "enlarge our experience?" She concludes the essay by referring to the hardwon hopefulness of *Cabbagetown's* protagonist, then goes on to expose what she sees as the underlying politics of the mythopoeic school:

What's important, and what our conservative cultural critics and tastemakers want us to lose in a welter of mythic translation, is the particular, the specific past. To make of myth such a weighty influential criterion is not only to undervalue the specific past, but it is also to deny the present, and to fear the future. Although the term future is an abstract concept, its equivalent in psychological terms is hope . . . hope is dangerous: inciting it in others may lead them to act . . . No wonder realism is out of fashion. (106)

Not only realism, but humanism as well. For that is what other poets in this tradition have attempted to do—humanize Canadian culture. That is why Irving Layton has often condemned our literature as "saurian," as cold, reserved, genteel. A. M. Klein might have put it this way—pay attention to people, not paysage.

Waddington has paid close attention to people. A poet leaves her biological family and adopts a literary one. Waddington provides us with a loving portrait of her literary mother, the poet Ida Maza. As already

mentioned, she writes with feeling and depth on the works of her literary father, A. M. Klein. There are fine recollections of Dorothy Livesay and Raymond Souster and a touching portrait of the spinster sisters, Birdie and Angela with whom Waddington boarded as a university student.

In a decade where strident feminist rhetoric and scientific argot pass for poetry, where post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories (variations of an effete art-for-art's sake—in this case, text-for-text's sake—aesthetic) abound, Waddington's humanism and commitment to experience seem salutary. By reclaiming outcast writing, she has extended our collective memories and broadened the gamut of voices we may hear.

*Downsview, Ont.*

*Kenneth Sherman*

***A Purer Taste: The Writing and Reading of Fiction in English in Nineteenth-Century Canada.* By Carole Gerson. Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto P, 1989. Pp. xiv, 210. \$30.00. Paper, \$16.95.**

Carole Gerson's *A Purer Taste* marks the welcome movement of Canadian studies into the realm of New Historicist criticism. "To understand the relationship between the readers and writers of fiction in English Canada during the nineteenth century," she writes, "we must first attempt to reconstruct their prevailing frame of mind." Drawing upon an impressive array of novels, periodicals, letters and speeches from the "detritus of our cultural history," Gerson is able to accomplish the difficult task of shifting our critical parameters, allowing us to reread the fiction of the nineteenth century through Victorian eyes. In so doing, she renders a number of important services to our understanding of the literary past, not least of which is the deconstruction of an established canon. If for no other reason, *A Purer Taste* is an important work in its challenge to the disabling notion of canonicity.

It is not without cost, however, that Gerson accomplishes the project of reinscribing texts in their original contexts. The cultural world of Victorian Canada which emerges from *A Purer Taste* is one whose intellectual horizons are as restricted as its geographical horizons are vast. Gerson would seem to have absorbed some of these limitations in her own critical approach, insofar as she rarely traces the genealogy of an idea further back than its moment of importation to Canada. For example, while documenting the pervasive influence of Sir Walter Scott on the Canadian novel, and noting the popularity of Carlyle, she takes no account of the role played by both writers in preaching the doctrines of German romantic nationalism to the English-speaking world. Surely a study which focusses on the role played by literature in the creation of national identity

should make some reference to Herder, Hegel or Goethe—particularly in a nineteenth-century context. Similarly, while basing several important points on remarks by Thomas D'Arcy McGee, she makes no reference to his transformation from an anti-imperialist Irish nationalist to a pro-imperialist Canadian nationalist. Again, if the term "Canadian nationalism" is to have any meaning in the context of Victorian colonial culture, it must take some cognizance of such questions.

Gerson's refusal to locate her work in a broader theoretical framework is aggravated by her side-stepping of much illuminating recent work in related areas. Although the novel in Victorian Canada as described in *A Purer Taste* is undoubtedly part of the discourse of minor literature, there is no reference to work by David Lloyd (*Nationalism and Minor Literature*, 1987), Louis Renza ("*A White Heron*" and the *Question of Minor Literature*, 1984) or Deleuze and Guattari's seminal essay, "What is Minor Literature?" (1983). The result of this unwillingness to engage directly with questions of nationalism, imperialism and minor literature is an occasionally top-heavy quality to Gerson's study, in which the weight of her historical material presses too heavily upon the text's theoretical infrastructure.

Nonetheless, *A Purer Taste* suggests the direction of a new departure in the study of early Canadian fiction. If, as L. P. Hartley once noted, "the past is a foreign country," the occasional blindnesses of Gerson's work might be understood as the result of an explorer having, in the colonialist jargon of the last century, "gone native." Nor is this necessarily a debilitating condition. Indeed, it can provide a useful corrective to the seductive critical hubris which would consign the past to a condition of necessary inferiority. In overcoming this temptation, Gerson reclaims writers such as John Richardson, Marshall Saunders and William Kirby from the undergrowth of the past, significantly reducing the areas of *terra incognita* on our map of Canada's cultural history.

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Christopher Morash

***Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850.* By Dianne Dugaw. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. Pp. xvi, 233. \$39.50.**

Glancing at the title of Dugaw's study, one naturally wonders to what extent does the analysis go beyond the ballads themselves, to what extent does it involve the larger issues of gender depiction and popular culture? The answer is that readers who are not particularly interested in female warriors but who do concern themselves with these larger issues will find much of value in this book. *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry*,

1650-1850 is divided into two parts: Part 1 focusses on “the ballads themselves and the streetsong world which produced them”; Part 2 considers “their larger meaning, both for their time and for us, several centuries later” (10).

Dugaw painstakingly traces the Female Warrior ballad from its beginnings in the early seventeenth century with *Mary Ambree*—“the equivalent in her time of *Ain't She Sweet* in the 1920s, *Blowin' in the Wind* in the 1960s” (43) to its demise in the nineteenth century when such ballads took on “museum” status or were burlesqued. *Mary Ambree* “contains the necessary—and eventually conventionalized—ingredients: the twin heroic polestars of Love and Glory; the separation of lovers which prompts the heroine's valor; proofs in action of her ‘womanly’ love and ‘manly’ courage; a final courtship episode; and a celebratory ending” (35). Readers can learn much from Dugaw about the producers and consumers of broadsides and chapbooks, especially during the golden age of the female warrior—the eighteenth century. Dugaw's expertise in music and the folksong meshes nicely with her scholarly approach, the latter of which includes very impressive archival research. In the final chapter of Part 1, Dugaw analyzes the female warrior motif as a concept and provides a number of useful diagrams showing the patterns of narrative movement between the poles of Venus and Mars.

In Part 2 Dugaw looks at the connection between the female warrior ballads and the larger subjects of gender and heroism. According to Dugaw, lower-class women in the eighteenth century were expected to have a physical toughness and energy that would make a woman's participation in combat less incredulous than it is today. Moreover, Dugaw argues that the age was obsessed with masquerade and cross-dressing—a contention that is supported by the recent work of Terry Castle. With their depictions of women in heroic combat roles and men in what are conventionally seen as “womanly” states, the female warrior ballads challenge the whole notion of gender distinction: “. . . gender traits in the ballads are ambidextrously free-floating” (160). In a chapter entitled “Hic-Mulier” (“hic” this, masculine; “mulier” woman, feminine), Dugaw delves into the seventeenth-century pamphlet war concerning the grammar of “gender costuming” (166) and then locates the female warrior ballad in the ensuing debate about “proper” gender roles.

Chapter 8 on Gay's *Polly* can perhaps be described as the hidden delight of Dugaw's book. Rereading the ballad opera in light of the female warrior analysis reveals that Gay condemns not only Whig imperialist aggression but, in his brilliant parody of Dryden's *All for Love*, the European gender idealizations of Venus and Mars: “Gay's satire links slavery in love to slavery in empire by parodying a discourse of conquest and trade taken directly from *All for Love*” (202).

There are only two weaknesses in *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650-1850*: the first is a certain amount of repetition that comes from the numerous ballads cited and the structure of the chapters; the second is technical and not at all the fault of the author—a section of my copy is unsewn. I recommend the book but make sure that you have pages 93-100.

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David McNeil

***Sara Coleridge, A Victorian Daughter: Her Life and Essays.* By Bradford Keyes Mudge. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1989. Pp. xvii, 287. \$30.00.**

Mudge's finely understated subtitle, "A Victorian Daughter," does not convey the range of her study or the importance of Sara Coleridge as an editor and Victorian intellectual. Sara, whose own fragmentary autobiography breaks off in mid-sentence, devoted most of her mature life to editing the fragmentary texts of her famous father. Through the ambitious editorial project she carried out until her death in 1852, she countered "De Quincey's charges of plagiarism and the widespread rumors of Coleridge's irresolute self-indulgence," and "sold 'Esteesee' in the image of the Victorian sage, not as the poet but as the theologian and political philosopher, the author of *Aids to Reflection*, *Lay Sermons*, and *On the Constitution of Church and State*." "The child is father of the man," Wordsworth said. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's case, there is some justification for saying that the daughter is the mother of the philosophical author revered by so many of the Victorians. But, as Mudge points out, "she pieced together his fragments at the price of her own."

One of the many virtues of Mudge's study is that it bridges the gap between Romantic and Victorian studies through its attention to the circumstances of cultural production. Another is its incisive combination of feminist analysis with attention to the conservative class ideology that Sara shared with her father. As Mudge demonstrates, Sara Coleridge's diverse activities "encourage us to reconsider the complexities of women's roles in the nineteenth-century publishing industry," and to recognize "the degree to which gender issues were defined by shifting class allegiances."

One of the principal arguments of *Sara Coleridge* is that "women's 'histories,' . . . were often written in the margins of the very texts they themselves helped to produce"—texts in which women are often conspicuous by their absence. Although she assisted her husband, Henry Nelson Coleridge, in the planning and publication of both *Table Talk* (1835) and the four volumes of *Literary Remains* (1836-39), Sara received no public

Mudge's references to this correspondence indicate that Sarah may have played an important role in "mothering the mind" of Maurice, to use Rucy Perry's term. This is only one of many possible avenues for further scholarly study suggested by Mudge's book.

For women's studies specialists, *Sara Coleridge, A Victorian Daughter* adds significantly to documentation of the conditions that constrained Victorian intellectual women, and of the means they found to subvert those conditions. Like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and later Virginia Woolf, Sara Coleridge watched her brothers sent away to acquire the formal education she was denied; like George Eliot she established her credentials as a translator before essaying the more ambitious task of editing. But unlike Eliot, she remained a figure in the margins of the texts she edited. Ironically, as Mudge perceptively notes, Sara's labors in establishing Coleridgean and Romantic literary values of "genius" and "taste" contributed to the institution of a literary criticism that relegated her to the ranks of "minor" authors. Her absence from the literary canon that she helped to shape is aptly foreshadowed in her ambiguous presence in the Coleridge family bible. Whereas STC inscribed the names of his sons with "some particularity" in the family bible, as Sara observed in her autobiographical fragment, her own birth was entered in her "dear mother's handwriting." The father's omission of the daughter who was to "mother" his texts prefigures the marginal status Sara sought to counteract through, in Mudge's words, "redefining the very patrimony to which she swore allegiance."

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*Marjorie Stone*

***Wordsworth: The Sense of History.* By Alan Liu. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989. Pp. 675. \$39.50.**

Almost twenty years ago, the well-known Canadian student newspaper I worked on was going through a dialectical materialist phase. Eager, or perhaps anxious, to display our Marxist leanings, we devised a special technique of reporting on speakers who came to campus, a technique which soon became a shtick. Whatever the content of the discussion, and whatever its ideological assumptions—and these were usually non-materialist—we rapidly moved from summarizing the speaker's position to an assessment of the points he or she had "omitted to discuss," "neglected to mention" and "failed to explain." We were, I suppose, proceeding like Marxist literary critics, in identifying hidden contradictions in a text, but these were so well hidden that we had first to bring them to light. For the special April 1 edition of the newspaper a student who had

relegated himself to the sports pages, which had escaped dialectical materialism, wrote a sports story in our style. I forget now the details of the story, which may have involved a loss, but in the report the players interviewed “neglected to mention,” the coach “omitted to discuss,” and everyone involved reprehensibly “failed to explain.”

When I read a book like Alan Liu’s *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, which contains an impressive 500 pages of avowedly deconstructive materialist argument, and a demoralizing 200 pages of endnotes, I am reminded all over again of the reportorial technique we used. The study traces the evolution of a “denial of history” through Wordsworth’s early and middle work and includes detailed discussion of, among others, “An Evening Walk,” “Salisbury Plain,” “The Borderers,” “The Ruined Cottage” and parts of “The Prelude.” To reduce the argument to a sentence or two, Wordsworth’s poetic experiments with genre and his developing theory of imagination seem to affirm progressively a transcendent self which is in fact the representation of a refusal or denial of its own historical origins. Thus, Wordsworthian Romantic “Mind” should not be seen as a revolutionary and explosive event, analogous to the parentless, illegitimate French Revolution, but rather as a narrative whose socio-historical parentage must be denied before it can take its stand in an act of lyric transcendence which *mimics* the Revolutionary moment. Or more simply, Wordsworth’s lyricism and pastoralism, his theory of memory and in particular his spots of time, represent progressive acts of depoliticization and dehistoricization. Alan Liu’s contention is that the Wordsworthian text deconstructs so as to reveal the repressed narrative of history. The denial takes various and complicated forms, as does the history. For example, on the thematic level, nature is the screen of trees in which the self may find itself without reference to what is beyond the screen of trees, i.e., history; and, formally, lyric progressively contains the tragic narrative of history by transforming the violence of narrative, and of history, through a series of manoeuvres until it becomes the spiritually renovating spot of time. This is a sophisticated, difficult and sometimes ingenious discussion. It has its own screens. Nonetheless, I think it can be said that it shares its basic approach with my student newspaper: it concentrates at great length on what the poet “neglects to mention,” et cetera.

The tone Alan Liu adopts throughout is what I would call a postmodern one, worldly to the point of being otherworldly. His purpose is to depreciate, in order, he says, to reappraise, Wordsworth, but the edge of the criticism is veiled by that curiously impersonal, postmodern tone, which in extreme form make me think of an intellectual space alien looking down upon the latest ideological obfuscation on Planet Earth. In the case of this book, the worldly, debunking tone is occasionally fractured by an awkward, and perhaps charming, confessional moment, as when the author acknowledges in an epilogue that his wish to recover the

missing historical dimension in Wordsworth stems from a nostalgia for the true facts, in other words from a *belief* in history. The book ebbs and flows between large generalizations about history, nature, and time, which appear to be massive judgments in disguise, and an oddly traditional piling up of historical detail and critical opinion—"research." It's allegory and empirical demonstration combined. It never ceases to irritate and confuse me that critics whose very position denies the universality of knowledge and the impersonality of the knower nevertheless speak from the position of the totalizing intellectual. I suppose this "failure to explain" can be accounted for by the division in the loyalties of the postmodern critic, whose intellectual strategies may be at odds with a need—often acutely mundane—to sound like an orthodox scholar. Alan Liu alludes continually to the leading lights of Romantic criticism—Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller and Jerome McGann, among others; also to dozens and dozens—maybe hundreds—of currently important scholars from Claude Levi-Strauss to Lawrence Stone. The author's work piggybacks on theirs in no especially critical way. Authoritative erudition is not unusual in literary scholarship; I comment on it here because Liu takes the practice to what I would say are unusual lengths.

Certainly Wordsworth studies have gotten to be very macho; or so it seems to me, having strayed from my field—the nineteenth-century novel—to review this book. Chapter two, which contains something like a statement of purpose and an explanation of method, ends on a nakedly macho note. Quoting Cleanth Brooks, whose question is supposed to mirror indirectly Wordsworth's, and directly Liu's, concern, the latter asks: "What *is* the relation of literature to other things, the other things that men make and the other things that men do and think?" (51). It's surely striking that a new and rising Wordsworth critic can annex for critical purposes this statement, with its bland, old-fashioned sexism—indeed Liu calls it his "epigraph"—without apparent reflection on the nature of its language and of the project such language supports. There are a lot of ways to understand this question, besides as a statement of humanist concern. I see in it, for example, "Romanticism isn't sissy"; "Wordsworth's poetry *is* relevant to larger issues, for what could be larger than history"; "This is (I hope) a macho profession, because, like Wordsworth, it's relevant and legitimate"; and, of course, "I am a man." I don't want to psychoanalyze chapter two to death, but there's another strange moment in the chapter worth considering. Wishing to dissociate his approach from "Wordsworthianism," Liu states in italics as a kind of ironic religious principle, "There is no nature" (38). He goes on in a slightly clumsy, confessional passage to say that he has for a number of years lived in rural Connecticut, which is "not unlike" the Lake District, and although he has encountered reservoirs, brooks, grasslands, and woods, he has never yet seen "Nature." "What there *is*," he says, "is

history" (39). While I can understand and sympathize with the author's wish to offer a revisionist counterargument to a characterization of Wordsworth I will burlesque as "the poet who finds himself in a violet," I am less sympathetic to the persistent anxiety about legitimacy which pervades this book. For Liu it is as if Wordsworth the nature poet is illegitimate, as long as nature is acknowledged as his only parent; this being too much to bear, Liu must find or invent a father for the child. This father is history. It is almost a cliché about Romantic selfhood that in its revolutionary manifestation it defines itself as fatherless and even occasionally as motherless; a child of absence or desire, a triumphant mutation in the social order. This is, of course, political propaganda. All positions are in some sense authored. But why must the parent Liu reintroduces be explicitly paternal and require the denial of the mother? For this is what he does in a discussion of the repressed genealogy of Wordsworthian imagination. In a somewhat astonishing rewriting of fifteen lines of "The Prelude's" famous passage on imagination, Liu changes imagination from an "unfather'd" to a "father'd" vapor. History becomes the redeeming father Wordsworth's imagination "neglected to mention." There are a lot of people, myself included, who could think of ways of justifying the study of poetry other than by "legitimizing" it, other than by referring to its father.

We could, for example, trace a bastard line between the pastoralism expressed by the likes of Wordsworth and today's environmentalism, which reinvents nature as a history to be read by those who care to read it, an indicting record of social behavior over time. In this holistic view, nature is no longer the exclusively non-human and history is no longer the exclusively human. Do I detect a note of orthodox Marxism—reliant upon the law of the father—in Liu's mutually exclusive categories of nature and history, even though the nineteenth-century Marxist position on the need for a coercive assault on nature is here transformed into an almost frightening negation of nature? At this point in time I would like to see the critical reexamination of Wordsworth as nature poet, for the purpose of understanding our own environmentalist agenda. But that would be my book on Wordsworth, my historical project.

In my favorite chapter of the book, "The Tragedy of the Family," Liu puts his anxiety about legitimacy—if I may call it that—to good use. An examination of "The Borderers," in the context of contemporary ideas about family and legitimacy, and contemporary practices relating to economically necessitated infanticide and the trade in children, the chapter makes an interesting case for the Romantic self as the child of the family, a family it denies on moral grounds but with which it shares a common origin in economic, or material, factors. Legitimacy—here construed as the moral fiction at the heart of the legal fiction of the family—is itself called into question. This is one instance where the

rematerialization and rehistoricization which are Alan Liu's purpose appear to have illuminating results. There are other sections of this book I found appealing, for example the discussion of the politics of the picturesque, and a rather daring analogy between the Wordsworthian self and the Napoleonic self, from which Liu argues that the Romantic self has its roots in empire and further, that it displaces the Napoleonic as *the* imperial self, in a rhetorical move which gives new meaning to the claim, "the pen is mightier than the sword."

The way I prefer to read a book like *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* is piecemeal, accepting parts of it while being sceptical as to its total claim. This reading practice should in theory at least reconcile me to Alan Liu's various omissions and neglects, as well as reconciling the reader to those of this review.

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*Anna Hayes Dowdall*

***Margaret Drabble: Symbolic Moralist.* By Nora Foster Stovel. Mercer Island, WA: Starmont House, 1989. Pp. vii, 224. \$19.95. Paper, \$10.95.**

Nora Foster Stovel's timely study capitalizes on the recent interest in Margaret Drabble's fiction generated by the appearance of *The Radiant Way* (1987) and *A Natural Curiosity* (1989). (The latter work, unfortunately, was published after the completion of Stovel's monograph.) Consisting of eleven novels of high distinction written over three decades, Drabble's *oeuvre* well rewards such critical attention as Stovel has bestowed on it. Part of Stovel's achievement has been to chart Drabble's metamorphosis from a novelist of private life to a chronicler of the more broadly social, political, and economic condition of England.

Stovel's stated intention is to complement criticism which focuses on realist and feminist issues by showing how Drabble's artistry serves her moral vision. What Stovel offers is an old-fashioned study of the relationship between symbolism and themes. Her rather unself-conscious methodology is virtually untouched by any of the diverse trends in contemporary criticism which come under the broad heading of theory. Her work consists of a general introduction followed by detailed explications of each of the novels in turn and a brief conclusion. Stovel supports the close readings by drawing usefully on details from Drabble's biography, on ideas expressed in her interviews and occasional prose, on the works of writers such as Wordsworth and Arnold Bennett who have influenced her, and on the works of other critics of her fiction.

Given her interests and aims, Stovel's unfashionable approach to Drabble's fiction is a virtue rather than a vice. While her method is not

particularly sensitive to the postmodernist qualities which Drabble characterizes in the biographical note to her edition of *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* as her progressively "ironic relationship with traditional narration," Stovel does ably reveal the intimate connection between symbolism and morality in the novels. Over the course of her study, she substantiates her claim that without an understanding of the symbolic vehicles through which the moral explorations of the novels are largely conducted the reader cannot begin to comprehend their full significance. For the most part, her analysis does justice to the subtlety and complexity of both the morality and the symbolism. She shows that for Drabble morality, rather than being something given which can be expounded didactically, is a tentative charting of new, unfamiliar areas in an atmosphere of relativism and confusing social changes. Her female characters confront the moral dilemmas as they seek fulfilment in roles which they have either inherited or chosen: those of sister, daughter, lover, wife, mother, and professional woman. The contexts for these quests for salvation, which Stovel identifies as broadly religious in nature, become increasingly wide with the novels of the 1970s and 1980s, in which the focus of attention is more public and social than private and psychological. Stovel shows how each novel embodies its main themes in central symbols such as a millstone or a waterfall or the concept of a golden age which supply the titles and supplement the protagonists' own limited moral understanding. Stovel argues that since they are prone to evade reality by embracing a world of artifice and illusion, the two basic sources of Drabble's symbolism are, appropriately, art and nature. Although Stovel fails to recognize fully the paradoxical character of the relationship between artifice and reality, she does show how central the dichotomy is in the struggles of Drabble's main characters to overcome solipsism and embrace the human community.

Anyone interested in Margaret Drabble's novels should be able to profit from reading Nora Stovel's insightful book. The informative end notes and ample bibliography are an extra inducement.

*Lakehead University*

*Frederick M. Holmes*

***I. A. Richards: His Life And Work.* By John Paul Russo. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989. Pp. xx, 843. \$39.95.**

Readers partial to the biographical style of Leon Edel, Michael Holroyd, or Humphrey Carpenter will be disappointed by this 843-page book. The product of nearly twenty-five years work, it is an impeccable piece of scholarship, offering countless insights into every aspect of Richards's

writings on semantics, literary criticism, philosophy, language teaching, etc. But Richards was profoundly sceptical of biography *as writing a life*, and seems, in the end, to have transmitted some of that scepticism to his biographer. Russo's perspective can be summarized by modifying the book's title: his work *was* his life. Evidence to the contrary (Richards's lifelong, passionate commitment to high mountaineering) is relegated like an afterthought to the second-last and shortest chapter.

Paradoxically, Russo received full cooperation and encouragement from Richards, living for a time with him and his wife after their return to England from 35 years in the United States. He recorded interviews over many years and enjoyed the benefit of access to unpublished manuscripts, diaries, notebooks, interviews, and correspondence with other family members. For all that, the character of the subject never emerges. We are *told* that Richards had tough-minded qualities tempered by extraordinary gentleness, that he had a puckish humor and an antic spirit, but these qualities are nowhere revealed.

As an intellectual biography and a comprehensive assessment of Richards's work, the book is excellent. Swinburnian themes in his criticism are traced to the effect of his first reading of the *Erectheus*: "For me it was the divine vision." Formative influences are analyzed exhaustively: the inclusion of what amounts to a 4000-word essay on G. E. Moore is certainly justified, given that Richards said, in 1968, that he was still reacting to Moore's influence after 50 years. Richards's thought is set accurately in the converging currents of antihistoricism of the early decades of the twentieth century and illuminated by an account of how he rejected Idealism, though reconciling the idealism of poets with the analytical empiricism of science.

Russo often summarizes topics such as this with pithy quotations from Richards. Here the synthesis of British empiricism and continental idealism is compressed into ten words, focussed, in the distinctive Richards style, on a semantically freighted preposition: "Everything is what it is *through* not being another thing" (53). Russo's own facility for summary by aphorism is in evidence just as frequently: "[Richards's] definition of definition led backward to a theory of signs and forward to a functional theory of language" (65); "He was lured not by the premise but the promise of behaviorism" (175).

Richards's relations with contemporaries in Cambridge and beyond, such as Mansfield Forbes, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and T. S. Eliot, are set out in fairly sparse detail, the exceptions being F. R. Leavis, William Empson, and the members of the American New Criticism school to whom a complete chapter is devoted. Similarly, there is detailed treatment of Richards's collaborator on *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), C. K. Ogden, the linguist, psychologist, and inventor of Basic

English, an international auxiliary language to the promotion of which Richards devoted as much of his life as did Ogden.

An analysis of *The Meaning of Meaning* occupies an early 50-page chapter, while substantial and consistently accurate references to Ogden and the Ogden-Richards relationship appear throughout. Predictably, Russo declines, even here where much archive material is available, to give a small portion of his text to a narrative of personal drama. Omitting all discussion of the vicious rift that ended Richards's 30-year friendship with Ogden, Russo notes simply that "they fell out sharply" (366). Without dwelling on the rift itself or venturing into the dangerous waters of psychological analysis, he might have commented, at least on the extraordinary number of parallels between the lives of Ogden and Richards and the extent to which Richards appears in the end to have identified with Ogden. (In his obituary of Ogden in 1957 he wrote: "Ogden suffered frequently from what he described as 'hand-to-mouth disease'"; in an interview with Russo in the 1970s he said: "I was suffering [1918-1925] from what Ogden used to call 'hand-to-mouth disease'" [48].)

Given Russo's long personal association with Richards, it is much to his credit that he successfully avoided the sort of involvement with his subject which turns a biographer into an apologist. In fact, he criticizes, by turns, Richards's writing style, his misreadings of other thinkers, his reasoning, the contradiction between his own antihistoricist bias and his condemnation of it in others, and his intellectual tactics: "He was always prepared to sail into the old haven of mentalism and introspection when the seas got too rough" (100).

Russo is at his analytic best and comes closest to offering interpretive narrative-pictorial biography in dealing with Basic English. It was an inevitable commitment for Richards, engaging virtually all of his strengths and interests: semantics, scientific rationalism, experimentation, educational reform, and world outlook. At the same time, it was a fatal attraction: "He knew he was crossing the railway tracks [from ivory-tower literary studies to language teaching] in a most sinister fashion" (365). Richards was teaching Basic English in China at the time of the Japanese invasion in 1937, and there is a dramatic account of his class carrying on to the accompaniment of gunfire. Forty-two years later, in China again at age 86 to promote world literacy through *Everyman's English* (Richards's revised version of *Basic*), he succumbed to the illness which took his life shortly after his return to England. It had been a mission, undertaken even though he had privately conceded some years before that Basic English was "the perpetual poison of my existence" (467).

This was a remark characteristic of the self-doubt and depression which marked much of Richards's life from 1950 onward. Yet he had an optimism "so deep it never wore thin" (14), deriving from a faith in human

possibility. The scope of that possibility is reflected in the scope of Richards's work, fully displayed and admirably analyzed by John Paul Russo.

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***Languages of Liberation: The Social Text in Contemporary American Poetry.* By Walter Kalaidjian. New York: Columbia UP, 1989. Pp. xxii, 263. \$27.50.**

As its title suggests, Walter Kalaidjian's *Languages of Liberation* discusses the possible relationships between poetry and social change. In its initial analysis of the interaction between publishing houses (with their allegiances to big business) and poetic careers, it probes the process by which several authors have been "domesticated," coopted, by big business. It then moves from a consideration of lyric poetry in the work of James Wright and W. S. Merwin, to a discussion of the long poem in Charles Olson and James Merrill, and ends with what Kalaidjian calls "the social text in contemporary American poetry" in the works of Robert Bly, Adrienne Rich, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Kalaidjian refreshingly avoids the tendency of critics of contemporary poetry to explicitly or implicitly create a canon, for he has other problems to consider, problems of the relations among literary production, marketing, form, and literature's social claims.

For the most part, Kalaidjian considers these problems quite well. His eschewal of a generic approach in favor of an author-by-author approach has a distinct advantage, for it allows him to affix theory to practice, to discuss how specific issues surface in specific texts. Such a structure also has disadvantages, however, given the substantial issues he examines, the text could use more systematizing. In the light of this lack of systematizing, there are two problems that one can raise and be true to the purposes of this book. In his preface Kalaidjian promises to discuss "the ways in which academic criticism and other cultural industries routinely domesticate literature's powers of subversion." He also promises to discuss "the powers of *critique* offered by poetic form." In its discussion of literary domestication the first chapter could go much further than it does: *how* does big business shape what poetry has to say? What changes occur in the content and form of the poetry? How does a shift in a poet's marketing and publishing context (to a large publishing house) domesticate poetry? In discussing poetic domestication Kalaidjian also too quickly presents a model of innocent poets and guilty corporations. In discussing Bly, Kalaidjian posits that "cultural critiques, however, are frequently incor-

porated by the very institutions they challenge,” and that “his [Bly’s] anti-establishment polemic has been commodified by the very infrastructures he set out to contest” (18, 19). The use of passive voice too neatly removes responsibility from the poet, who presumably has had an active role in his publishing contracts. Further, there are more complicated and touchy examples than Bly. Like many other poets, W. S. Merwin has sold his manuscripts to libraries; writing poetry with a greater social impact than that of Bly, Adrienne Rich also publishes and is marketed by a major corporation. *Languages of Liberation* is the perfect text to explore the consequences of such actions, not just to claim that there are consequences.

I also have trouble with Kalaidjian’s analysis of the relationship between formalism and reactionary politics. Although he does have some excellent analyses of the problems of formalism, especially in his discussion of James Wright and the early poetry of Adrienne Rich, Kalaidjian eventually doesn’t pin down this relationship. While *Languages of Liberation* does a good job of exploring the relationship between Rich’s closed form and her “insulation” from reality, it doesn’t explore why this equation need not always apply. As Kalaidjian points out, Brooks uses both closed and open forms to critique society, and in Kalaidjian’s estimation Brooks succeeds more than Rich does. When Kalaidjian argues that “Brooks’ first lyrics, for all their indebtedness to traditional fixed forms, rage against American racism,” he implies that it is subject matter and rhetoric that are primary in a poem’s political stance. As this unacknowledged difference suggests, *Languages of Liberation* leaves some crucial questions unanswered: does a poem’s politics ultimately depend upon its rhetoric? Are questions of politics totally pragmatic, dependent upon a poem’s ability to effect social change? Or are such questions totally dependent upon context? Further, in his enthusiastic claim that the “errant textuality” of Merrill’s poetry opens the epic to contemporary pop culture (104), Kalaidjian argues that the mixture of discourses in *The Changing Light at Sandover* “plays out the present struggle of discursive voices contending for cultural hegemony.” What he does not acknowledge is the *difficulty* of Merrill’s appropriation of popular culture, and the relation of that difficulty to the likelihood of the poem effecting social change.

However, *Languages of Liberation* does have many notable successes. Both its choice to group together such differing poets and its substantial treatment of Gwendolyn Brooks allow for a complex discussion of the book’s major premises. Kalaidjian also gives a quite reasonable critique of the successes and failures of individual poets. For example, although he probably should have given a specific, extended example, Kalaidjian perceptively analyzes how Robert Bly uses the deep image to question public rhetoric. *Languages of Liberation* also is certainly on target in its critique of lyric poetry. Most important, however, is Kalaidjian’s ques-

tioning of whether poetry can be considered separately from its modes of production and its institutional existence. *Languages of Liberation* demonstrates the importance of this questioning for contemporary poetry, and it presents useful terms and a useful beginning for further discussion.

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***Lewis Percy*. By Anita Brookner. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1990. Pp. 261. \$24.95.**

Anita Brookner's graceful, trenchant novels explore the conflicting temptations of grand actions and domestic ceremonies in the lives of people at odds with their cultural and social surroundings, chiefly in contemporary England. *Lewis Percy*, her ninth novel, is thematically similar, but marks a stylistic departure. While this stage of her artistic development lets her treat her concerns in a more purely internalized, closely focussed manner than she has attempted, this novel is not completely successful.

*Lewis Percy* follows the fortunes of an introverted young Englishman through a series of disappointments: a term of doctoral research in Paris leads to a stifling job in a London research library; what he considers a well-intentioned marriage ends in desertion by his wife and child. Lewis simultaneously yearns to emulate the bold heroes of nineteenth-century French novels, and to be nurtured and fulfilled in an orderly, domestic, female environment. His confusion rests in his delusions about women, whom he sees as inherently capable of both caring for him and depending upon him. Hence, a warped chivalry underlies his decision to marry the agoraphobic Tissy Harper, whom he does not love, and rescue her from her overbearing mother; he is subsequently astonished at her capacity for control and self-awareness. His instinctive, irrational pursuit of his best friend's flamboyant sister Emmy, whom he does love, is hindered by her insistence that he throw out his notions of chivalry and make honest choices. Lewis eventually catches up with the twentieth century, learns to keep house for himself, and makes the bold move of quitting the library job for a teaching post in America. Then, like the good knight errant who has passed the test, he is rewarded by freedom from Tissy (who holds him not because she wants him but through his own sense of responsibility) and acceptance by Emmy.

The problems with *Lewis Percy* are chiefly formal. Brookner's style has generally been episodic rather than densely expository, concentrating her narratives on a significant event in the protagonist's life and demonstrating the weight of the past through reminiscences and contrasting perspectives. *Lewis Percy* covers roughly eighteen years chronologically, and

despite the unusual length of this book, not enough happens. The focus is too narrow and Lewis's meditations too repetitive for a novel which emphasizes them so much. As well, Lewis is as self-centred as self-aware, but the level of Brookner's satirical intention and ironic detachment is sometimes uncharacteristically unclear, so that Lewis is not always likable, but also not always interesting. Besides, despite the specific time (1960s and 1970s London), brief references to the women's liberation movement, trends in critical and political theory, and changes in skirt lengths do not define the period in the way that, for example, the Puseys' conspicuous consumption places *Hotel du Lac* amidst the brutal materialism of the Thatcher era.

*Lewis Percy's* pleasures do exist and are subtle; Brookner's observations of social skills and errors, of the politics of dinner parties, are as brilliant as ever. She provides brief yet telling sketches of peripheral characters, from cousin Andrew's snobbish wife Susan with her tennis-racquet brooch, to the elderly library assistant Arthur Tooth with his barley sugar. However, the motivations of other central characters, especially Tissy, are often too vaguely drawn to engage much sympathy or interest, a lack which may indicate Lewis's limitations of understanding but also contributes to ours. This novel is an intriguing attempt by a female writer to explore gender and difference from a male perspective and treat the internal dislocation of anyone who aches for a life beyond the mundane: "Over and above the life of contingencies was the life of the spirit, the life that many would never know. Real life, dull life, would imprison them, foreclose on their possibilities." Nevertheless, Brookner's strength lies partly in her ability to place this dilemma in varied and detailed social contexts. This novel lacks both the eccentricity and passion of *Hotel du Lac* and the cultural scope of *Family and Friends* or *Latecomers*. *Lewis Percy's* style is one of impressionism and miniaturism, but Anita Brookner is capable of sharper detail and a bolder stroke, and I hope future stages of her artistic development will see a renaissance of these devices.

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Gisèle Marie Baxter

***Women and Writing in South Africa: a critical anthology.* Edited by Cherry Clayton. Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1989. Pp. viii, 307.**

This is a useful collection. The essays cover a wide range of topics and offer a variety of approaches. The volume does not set out to espouse any single approach or attitude and its editorial spirit is both catholic and eclectic.

The sole criterion for inclusion of the discrete essays is that they deal with women and writing in South Africa. Collectively they do not establish a point of view other than the implicit one that "women and writing in South Africa" is a vast topic, and that the variety of experience (both dealt with by women writers and lived by the women they write about) is complex. South Africa is the locus of such extraordinary tensions and power struggles and feuds and brutalities and harshnesses and kindnesses and betrayals and generosity and braveries that it is all too easy to oversimplify its writing to illustrate a thesis or political program. *Women and Writing in South Africa* is laudably free—as a collection—of any such overriding and oversimplifying purpose.

The contributions vary from the expository to the theoretical with some pieces occupying an in-between area: usually critical comment on an issue arising from an aspect of the writing by a woman or women. At the expository level there are: an article by Elizabeth Gunner on women as composers and performers of Zulu praise poetry, an introductory essay by Marcia Leveson on the work of Bertha Goudvis, and a description by Elsabe Brink of the committed writing (mainly published in Afrikaans in their official union mouthpiece, *Garment Worker/Klerewerker*) of the white garment workers on the Witwatersrand in the 1930s and 1940s.

The information on women and Zulu praise poetry as well as that on the women garment workers' belief in their union (to transform their powerlessness as newly-urbanized migrants from an impoverished rural life) is likely to be new to all but specialized readers. And that sense of novelty outweighs the stodginess that such clearly introductory pieces bring with them. Elizabeth Gunner's description of the ethos of the Zulu poetry she discusses is a good example of the sensible focus of the volume as a whole: "Women's praise poems are not composed by men in praise of women as desirable objects. They are for the most part composed by women themselves. The poems reflect the facets of life important to women, while displaying at the same time the sharp-eyed concern with individual identity that characterizes all Zulu praise poetry" (12-13).

In her lucid Introduction, Cherry Clayton explains the difficulty (folly?) of incorporating the experiences of all South African women into a comprehensive, theoretical, feminist position. In particular, the realities (and nuances) of South African socio-political life make the concept of a shared and sharing sisterhood impossible to sustain. Recognizing that many historians and sociologists have "scrutinised the links between different kinds of oppression and injustice in South African society and literature," Clayton continues: "South Africa's isolation from European and American cultural shifts, the enormous economic difficulties experienced by most black South African women, and the conservatism and passivity of many white South African women, have contributed to the silent and fractured nature of any feminist impulse" (1). In this regard, the

freeing of most white women from the worst consequences of quotidian domestic oppression and boredom—a common element in western feminist impulses—has been at the expense of black women: “White women’s liberation from domestic chores thus becomes paradoxically bound up with the complex yoke borne by black women who are forced to duplicate domestic servitude in white homes and become child minders to white children while their own families are sundered by the apartheid system” (3).

As a consequence of this situation, an overarching feminist position is difficult to achieve in South Africa:

Black and white South African women are thus forcibly separated and yet they meet most often in the complicit arena of the domestic power structure. This fact determines the South African variant of women’s struggle, and of feminist criticism. It is also often the substance of South African women’s writing, or an unconscious tension within it. To many black women, white women are experienced as, and often are, oppressors and not sisters. (4)

The nature of this domestic struggle, as depicted in Elsa Joubert’s *Poppie Nongena*, is the topic of David Schalkwyk’s essay, which is one of the more interesting in the volume. Even here, it is symptomatic of the silence of black female experience that it was a white (Afrikaans-speaking) woman who mediated between the domestic data (provided in taped discussions with the real “Poppie” and members of her family) and the written form in which those experiences were published. Schalkwyk’s comments are germane to the thesis implicit in so much of *Women and Writing in South Africa*:

The work is the result of an intimate collaboration between two women who at this level would normally be separated by the cultural and social dogmas of our society. It is an interpenetration of the perceptions and discourses of black proletarian and white bourgeois modes of experience, and, in a literary context, it suggests the possible forging of a common consciousness between these two classes of women in South Africa, although such a meeting, as exemplified by the narrative modes and circumstances of *Poppie Nongena*, is not without its ideological and literary complexities. (254)

There are three essays in *Women and Writing* dealing exclusively with writers who are not white: that on Zulu praise poetry, one on Bessie Head, and one on Miriam Tlali. There are sixteen essays in all, and many of them deal with the well-established figures prominent in any discussion of English-language fiction: Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Olive Schreiner. In the South African context, Pauline Smith (two essays) and Sarah Gertrude Millin (one essay) are also widely-known and discussed.

The difference in proportion (between black and white writers represented) is an issue underlying the analyses in many of the contributions to *Women and Writing in South Africa*. The collection is invaluable for this feature alone, and in its variety offers a useful introductory survey to a complex subject.

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