
REVIEWS

Simon Swift. *Romanticism, Literature and Philosophy: Expressive Rationality in Rousseau, Kant, Wollstonecraft and Contemporary Theory*. London: Continuum, 2006. 181p.

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Swift's book is a synthesis of some of the prominent contemporary scholarship reevaluating Enlightenment philosophy. Though he believes this synthesis will be of significance for literary theory in its continual reworking of Romanticism, this does not receive much attention here. Rather, Swift's focus is to provide the audience with a survey of new critical perspectives of the three philosophers. His contention is that these perspectives are in tension with much of Romantic criticism of the recent past. Swift perceives a much needed shift in the critical perspective on Enlightenment philosophy's interrelationship with Romantic Literature.

The problem, as Swift sees it, with much of the scholarship on Enlightenment philosophy over the past few decades has been the New Historicist and Deconstructionist tendency to perceive an ethnocentric absolutism both in the tropes of the Romantic writers and in the principles of the Enlightenment philosophers who preceded and enabled them. Swift charges that New Historicism has "formulated a critical conflict with the literary works that it investigates ... by resisting their impulse to transcend the local contexts of their production" (2). This is a familiar post-structuralist methodology, but one that is inapt when applied to the philosophical foundations of Romanticism. Swift here attempts to synthesize and illuminate the recent scholarship rectifying some basic misinterpretations along these lines.

Kant is the key figure in all of this. For Swift, Kant is too often ill-received by post-structuralist scholars because he is seen as a formalist—a forerunner of and foundation for the Romantic aesthetic of transcendence and universality. This of course raises the ire of these scholars and leads to charges of social and ethical unconcern, ethnocentrism, and a deceptive obfuscation of the material ground of literature's creation. Swift cites recent Kantian scholarship by Howard Caygill, Onora O'Neill, Allen Wood, and others to elucidate the emerging trend challenging that view of Kant. The reappraisal that Swift hopes to facilitate and further also involves engaging with and countering some weighty and well-known scholarship. Jerome McGann, Gayatri Spivak, and Paul de Man are all brought

forth as examples of the fallacious interpretation of Kantian thought as abstraction at the expense of anthropology.

If Kant is the key figure, the other two eponymous philosophers are analyzed in relation to him. Rousseau is examined for the influence his thought had on Kant, particularly how Rousseau's nascent anthropology informs Kant, hence countering the charge of dry abstraction from modern critics. In Swift's words, "This argument challenges significantly the popular view of both Kant and Rousseau as ahistorical and idealistic" (18). Wollstonecraft, in turn, is examined for how her reading of Rousseau overlaps with Kant's, and how this in turn seemingly contradicts the charges of abstract rationalism and formalism that have come over the past few decades. Swift sees "an intuitive link between them," and calls this heretofore underappreciated social concern a "shared anthropological awareness, which derives from their common reading of Rousseau" (19).

Swift's study demands a degree of philosophical expertise on the part of the reader, and its philosophic complexity suggests an audience of philosophers. But his stated intention is to uncover implications that are primarily of interest to literary theorists. The weakness here is an uncertain audience, for the work is perhaps too technical and jargon-heavy for literary scholars, yet at the same time perhaps too summative to be of use to philosophers. The few who exist at the intersection of the three fields mentioned in the title comprise a narrow audience indeed. But for those individuals, there is real value here. For everyone else, the implications are so foundational as to be of interest across many disciplines, even if some in those disciplines lack the expertise to understand Swift's prose and every nuance of his argument. ✱

H.J. Jackson. *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. 366p.

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In her 2001 book, *Marginalia*, H.J. Jackson surveyed the general topic of the history and psychology of "readers writing in books." Narrowing her focus, in *Romantic Readers* she attempts to reconstruct the reading experiences of readers during one historical period in Britain, based on an examination of some 1800 books containing marginalia by anonymous readers and by minor and major writers. The result is a useful study for Romanticists, literary scholars interested in reader reception and reader response, and students of books.

As Jackson's earlier book makes clear, the practice of writing in books did not originate—or end—during the Romantic era (ca. 1790–1830). It is older than the birth of print; it extends back in time to manuscript culture and forward into the present.

This broader history aside, Jackson presents the Romantic period as a unique moment in the history of marginalia and reading in Britain. Literacy was rising dramatically, increasing (by one estimate) by as much as five times between 1780 and 1830. At the same time, books remained relatively expensive. This meant that books and other reading materials had to be shared, and reading assumed a highly *social* character. The practice of writing personal and editorial comments in books was encouraged in schools and the general culture to promote personal comprehension of books as well as literary and other conversation. Readers of all classes and varieties wrote, read, and exchanged marginalia as a means of sharing information and ideas as well as their own personalities, tastes, and opinions. During the Victorian period and after, as books became cheaper and more plentiful, book-sharing declined, and along with it the social incentive for writing marginalia. As books came to be viewed as more exclusively “private” property, librarians, educators, and other cultural arbiters discouraged and condemned marginalia as unwelcome and unmannerly defacements—an outlook that prevails to this day.

Chapter one examines the marginalia of educators, lawyers, and publishers in books of a technical nature such as law books, travel books, and scientific books. These readers used annotating mainly to serve the utilitarian purposes of facilitating memory and consolidating information for later retrieval, modification, and sharing.

Chapter two moves to the heart of Jackson's focus on annotating as a *social* activity. Readers treated books as “companions,” as either “substitutes for or as contributions to human socializing.” In their annotations, they addressed books familiarly, often in the second-person, as though the authors were personally present; and they annotated with an awareness that their words would be read and enjoyed by friends and other people. The annotations of Hester Thrale Piozzi—personal, anecdotal, and idiosyncratic—are in many ways representative: they simulate good conversation and suggest (in Jackson's opinion) how people may have talked when they discussed books and ideas face-to-face. Piozzi “cultivated friendship by sharing books, as women of her class often did.” Of special interest are the “social” annotation practices of Blake and Keats. Both poets used their annotations to help define their poetic values and beliefs, first for themselves, and then for friends and posterity. Blake's marginalia in the works of intellectual allies (such as Johann Lavatar) and foes (Francis Bacon, Sir Joshua Reynolds) helped

spur his own thought and creativity. Keats' practices exemplified other social uses of marginalia, including as a means of courtship, by sharing one's "mind," as Keats did when he gave his personally annotated copies of Spenser and Shakespeare to Fanny Brawne. Keats' marginal notes in his Shakespeare and Milton often rival his letters for astonishing moral and aesthetic insights.

Chapter three examines the marginalia of private collectors, who annotated books in their personal libraries in such a way as to "display their ... taste or knowledge" to posterity. The annotations of these readers (Horace Walpole, John Mitford, and Keats' friend Richard Woodhouse, among others) were systematic, even to the point of fanaticism; they strove to be comprehensive and clearly aimed their work at "the unknown future reader."

Jackson ends her book by addressing the question, "What can be learned about reading in the Romantic period ... from marginalia of the time?" In some ways, not surprisingly, the Romantics were like readers of any time. For instance, from their marginalia and from comments they made about reading, we know that they tended to view reading as an experience of "double consciousness," in which they seemed to inhabit, simultaneously, both their own and the authors' minds. They experienced reading as a complex blend of passivity (surrender to the text) and activity (marking it, bringing their own intelligence to bear on it); and in these respects they corroborate accounts of the reading process elaborated by Holland, Iser, and other reception theorists and scholars of reading. That said, the readers examined in his study also stand apart. In general, Romantic readers drew less of a distinction between *reading* and *writing* than we do today. They tended to regard books as composite assemblies of parts that could be disassembled by the reader, with the reader's own markings having the potential to "supplant the words of the original text." The finest illustration of this point is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the most avid and famous of all British annotators of the period. Coleridge used annotation as a bridge between reading and writing—for example, culling much of the material for his lectures on Shakespeare from annotations he had written in one of his sets of the plays; he worked seamlessly from annotations to notebooks to finished texts. With Coleridge being an outstanding example, Romantic readers asserted themselves as not only consumers of texts but as producers.

Romantic Readers enables us to view a key period in British literary history through a unique lens. What we see is an age of impassioned readers and talkers whose intellectual excitement spilled irrespressibly into the margins and onto the flyleaves of their (and their friends') books. If we cannot recreate the actual flow of the literary talk of Keats and Coleridge, of Blake and Francis Burney and Jane Austen, we can enjoy the nearest approximation of it in their marginalia. ✱

Joseph Joubert. *The Notebooks of Joseph Joubert: A Selection*. Translated and edited by Paul Auster. New York: New York Review Books, 2005. 159p.

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The facts of Joseph Joubert's uneventful life are easily told. Born in Montignac (Dordogne), France, in 1754, the second of eight surviving children, in his twenties he moved to Paris, where he became a secretary to Denis Diderot and a member of French literary and artistic circles. He served a term as a rural justice of the peace but withdrew from politics in the bloody wake of the French Revolution, which he had initially welcomed. During his fifties he returned to public service as an education inspector. Living in the small town of Villeneuve in Burgundy, the family home of his wife (a member of the moneyed middle class), he died in 1824, at the age of 69.

A born writer, Joubert had several literary projects he meant to undertake—among them an appreciation of sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, an essay on Captain James Cook, and a book of philosophy; but he never realized any of them. What he wrote, instead, were voluminous quantities of notes, passing thoughts, and observations. From the late 1780s on these notebooks were his absorbing passion. As he wrote, “These thoughts form not only the foundation of my work, but of my life.”

Even these notebooks, however, did not reach a wider public until after Joubert's death. Joubert's friends knew him as a stimulating friend and thinker, and encouraged him to publish; but, for reasons known only to himself, Joubert refused. After his death his widow found his notes—many of them scribbled on the backs of envelopes or on fragments of scrap paper held together by pins—inside a large trunk he had used for storing papers.

The first selection of notes was assembled and published by Joubert's friend, Chateaubriand, in 1838. Other more complete editions followed, including a two-volume collection of *Pensees, essais, maximes et correspondance* published by Joubert's nephew in 1842. The present selection, edited and translated into English by novelist Paul Auster, includes some 10% of all Joubert's surviving notebooks. Entries are arranged chronologically by year, omitting dates.

Auster aptly describes Joubert as a most unusual writer: “Neither a poet nor a novelist, neither a philosopher nor an essayist, Joubert was a man of letters without portfolio whose work consists of a vast series of notebooks in which he wrote down his thoughts every day for more than forty years.”

He wrote on whatever topic caught his interest at the moment: botany, religion, politics, weather, music, the nature of memory, silence and sound, parenting and

children. “The thoughts that come to us are worth more than the ones we seek,” he writes. His observations are typically no longer than a sentence or two:

The imagination has made more discoveries than the eye.
Children. Need models more than critics.
It is not through the head that men touch each other.
Everything that has wings is beyond the reach of the laws.
The good is worth more than the best.
Close your eyes and you will see.
The weather strikes me on the head. I feel it rattle my teeth.
Debts shorten life.
The voice is an aid to intelligence.
Genius is the aptitude for seeing invisible things....
The breath of the mind is attention.
In raising a child, we must think of his old age.

What makes this collection compelling is that Joubert’s notes embody the pleasures of thought as an end-in-itself: seeing for the sake of seeing, thinking for the sake of thinking. For Joubert the poetry of a thing is that you don’t have to do anything with it. The poetry of an idea is the idea itself, a thing to be recorded and contemplated without necessarily turning it to public use. The poetry of a rose or a river is what you get by perceiving it—looking, listening, smelling, touching. Trees are poetic not as building materials or as a shelter against rain, both valuable functions of trees, but because you enjoy being in their presence.

As far as words are concerned, with the thought, *I could do something with this*, poetry recedes and rhetoric takes over. With his notes, unfinished and fragmentary, Joubert seems to say, *Why try to round or finish what isn’t? Effort lies.*

The Notebooks of Joseph Joubert is an important book for students and teachers, writers, and anyone who values the life of the mind. In his introduction Auster relates that a friend loaned a copy of the book to another friend who had been hospitalized. The book found a circle of admirers among the hospital patients, who passed it from hand to hand, met informally to discuss it, and wanted to keep it for themselves. One would not expect that the thoughts of a largely forgotten man who died nearly 200 years ago would still be of such interest to the modern reader; but Joubert thought, it seems, about practically every human concern, and his concerns are still ours today. ✱

Lauren Berlant. *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. 353p.

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The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture is Lauren Berlant's final book in a trilogy of texts on public and private lives and sentimentality within politics in the United States. The first text in the series, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life*, examines the public and personal association with politics when the United States was a young nation, specifically through an analysis of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. The second book, but the last in the trilogy, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, focuses on the more contemporary political sphere and how it has been usurped by private life.

In *The Female Complaint*, conceptually the middle book in the trilogy, Berlant examines the place of sentimentality, and complaint, in women's mass media. This is understood as an "intimate public" that emerges with the first mass media to directly address women's culture via popular novels and film during the early to mid-twentieth century in the United States. These commodified representations of intimacy take the shared beliefs and hopes of a group and work to reinforce and mold them via story lines that allow the individual woman watching or reading an opportunity to identify with the narratives presented while also feeling part of a greater whole. This identification with the emotional experience of another not only creates a connection for the viewers or readers with the promise of belonging, but also marks their real life experiences as having the potential to be more significant than they perhaps experience them to be in their daily lives. In other words, the difficulties of everyday life can be a little easier to handle if one's life can be just like hers, someday. Berlant also connects women's mass media and intimate publics to a strong lack of interest in the politics of the nation. Politics in these narratives are presented not as something relevant to women's daily lives, but as something out there and separate from lived experience.

Chapters One through Three explore sentimentality and stories about democracy in novels and their adaptations in which the narratives build a sense of intimacy with the reader/viewer through stories of "true" love. Chapter One begins with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and moves on to examine its use and adaptations in such works as *The King and I*, *Dimples*, with Shirley Temple, as well as the more recent texts such as *The Bridges of Madison County* and *Beloved*. This chapter's focus on sentimentality does involve a political element, as can be seen in the

plot of *The King and I* in which Siam moves into modernity, but the play and its forbears do not strictly focus on this political move. Instead the narrative moves forward not through the logical adaptation of Siam to democracy, but instead the need to come to understand the importance of sentiment and feeling. Ethics is a matter of *feeling* what is right. One particularly adept example of this comes with the examination of Margaret Landon's *Anna and the King of Siam*, which is the text Roger and Hammerstein's *The King and I* is based on. Berlant looks at the role of Son Klin, the king's highest-ranking wife, and her use of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Son Klin identifies with Stowe and wishes for an emotional understanding to develop that convinces the ruling class of the "social violences they have been perfectly willing to see as ordinary" (43), and in doing so also desires a way out of her own seclusion. Son Klin's desire is for a sympathetic association with others, and hers is a sentimental/compassionate appeal for a better life, or at least the possibility of a better life.

The previous chapters present sentimental utopian narratives about democracy and love. Chapter Four, the middle chapter in the text, is a transitional section that explores politics in part via Ida Clyde Clark's *Uncle Sam Needs a Wife*, as well as other civic texts. Berlant looks at how the fear of extreme change creates a need for control to mitigate more drastic alternation in the nation and society. This moves the focus of the text from the political sphere and sentimental utopia to individual happiness as a way of feeling part of a great whole.

Chapters Five through Seven explore sentimentality as a way of looking at what "normal" life is like via women's mass culture: a normal that is supposed to be accomplished and preserved with little explicit effort. One of the narratives presented in Chapter Seven, *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, by Fay Weldon, allows the reader to identify with a fantastical story of the search for femininity, an attempt to achieve "normality," in a world where "normal" is anything but. The story offers a look at the main character, Ruth's, great effort to become, or pass as, "feminine" in an economy that does not value, emotionally or monetarily, the body she has. As she gains the capital to make the transformation, via plastic surgery, to a normative "feminine" body she is acknowledged outwardly by an economy that now values her external appearance. She has money *and* she gets her man (or men), accepting and rejecting them at her pleasure. Yet, her pleasure, or desire, is really what is still in question. Although her body has been severely altered, Berlant argues that Ruth "remembers what her body cannot show, the visible life is anchored by a melancholic one" (262).

And so we see with Ruth, as with many of the other female characters that Berlant explores in *The Female Complaint*, the development of a women's

intimate public serves to maintain the status quo. Ruth protests her treatment by her husband, and the society and nation that have established expectations of femininity, and so she changes herself to fit those expectations, continuously striving for that just out of reach experience of “normal,” and the fantasy that it just might happen. Maybe. Someday.✱

Elizabeth Dill and Sheri Weinstein, eds. *Death Becomes Her: Cultural Narratives of Femininity and Death in Nineteenth-Century America*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2008. 190p.

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Dead women have long been an obsession in American culture, but perhaps no time more than during the nineteenth century. From lurid accounts of murdered prostitutes in newspapers, to tear-jerking glorifications of dying mothers in sentimental fiction, nineteenth-century Americans were surrounded by representations of female death. By attempting to show us how “death presents the perfect, albeit unstable, union of power and victimization in women” (xii), the eight essays in this collection address the multiple, strikingly gendered meanings that death is given during the era. Indeed, the female corpse is such a central and contradictory figure in nineteenth-century literature in particular, it is a wonder that she has not been studied more fully before now.

Dill and Weinstein’s volume aims to analyze the subjectivity and agency death may have allowed women, while extending earlier studies—such as those by Elisabeth Bronfen and Russ Castronovo—that address how the cultural fascination with death functioned to contain femininity. In their smart, though brief, introduction, Dill and Weinstein point to the sites where stereotypes of femininity converge with the “ambivalent authority that women wield over the culture of death” (xiv). A story about a dead woman who haunts her own home, for example, often teaches the reader that the “angel of the house” stereotype of women transcends death, while at the same time her haunting can allow a woman to maintain or gain control over domestic space. Another trope, the eroticized corpse of the ruined woman, illustrates how death can be a platform for the cultural contradictions of female sexuality. These figures pointedly show how “Death itself is often presented in such a way as to seem markedly if not problematically feminized” by the sentimental and sensationalized portrayals of “women’s abilities to die beautifully, to mourn properly, and to connect with the dead psychically” (xiii). It is a weighty and needed topic, as the ways in which

femininity is defined in terms of extreme passivity continue to be central to twenty-first-century representations of women.

Organized rather liberally into two sections on “texts” and “contexts,” the essays in this book lean more toward literary criticism than cultural analysis. The strongest essay is Dara Downey’s “‘The Dead Woman in the Wallpaper’: Interior Decorating and Domestic Disturbance in the American Ghost Story,” in which Downey astutely compares female ghost narratives in short stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emma Frances Dawson, and Mary Wilkins Freeman. Her intriguing and nuanced argument focuses on how these authors use the figure of the ghost woman to “bea[r] witness to the ways in which women, both as writers and as characters, can use and are used by the physical and ideological spaces of the home” (38). Downey’s analysis of Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” makes a convincing case for the ways in which domestic space and decorating can serve as a dialogue between women: in Gilman’s case, the horrid wallpaper brings forth women who “are neither merely supernatural nor merely material—they are both” (43). Combined with her analysis of Dawson’s “An Itinerant House”—in which a female narrator supernaturally controls a room’s wallpaper—and Freeman’s “The Southeast Chamber”—in which a ghostly woman controls decorative objects—Downey draws out the shared theme of agency through passivity. What these stories imply, Dawson argues, is that “so not to be *seen* as pure surface, the wife must herself *become* pure surface, by allowing the house to absorb her” and, in doing so, the wife both subverts and conforms to a feminine ideal (51).

However, not all of the essays directly explore the topic the introduction sets forth. The lead essay in the collection, Roxanne Harde’s “‘Scooping up the Dust’: Emily Dickinson’s Theology of the Crypt,” provides a thorough and shrewd discussion of the poet’s theologizing of the dead body. Harde’s distinction that Dickinson’s fascination with death is not morbid but rather reflects a religious crisis is a keen one to make; but the essay does not engage with the politics of femininity that frames the book. Likewise, Catherine Keyser’s chapter on Dorothy Parker’s wry, often macabre sense of humor—though an intelligent and sophisticated analysis of Parker eschewing twentieth-century feminine stereotypes by employing a masculine language of death and violence—would have been better served in a book concerned with modernism. There are so many representations of female corpses in nineteenth-century literature and culture, there’s no need to venture into the twentieth century for material.

Reading this collection drives home the immense complexity of forces at play in expectations of nineteenth-century women’s behavior. When confronted with the demands to be pure, moral, and passive, and surrounded by glorifications

of the sacrificial dying angel and the morbid cultural fascination with sexualized murdered prostitutes, woman authors gave their female characters agency by defying the passiveness of passivity. The authors of these essays show how dead women can speak, and how important it is that we should listen. ✱

Joseph Bristow, ed. *The Fin de Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture in the 1890s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005. 352p.

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W.B. Yeats and *The Norton Anthology English Literature* have a great deal to answer for, according to Joseph Bristow and eleven other heavily credentialed scholars of British poetry of the 1890s. The truth about that brief era has not made its way into the standard anthologies and therefore into the minds of undergraduates or even the generalist professoriate. For instance, though “Michael Field” (Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley) has made an appearance in *The Norton Anthology* for some time now, it is as a marginal rather than central presence. The general vision, guided by Yeats’ *Autobiography*, of the poets of the time is that they were mostly male, drunken, self-destructive, obsessive, and minor. The contributors to *The Fin de Siècle Poem* have a far more interesting and critically productive story to tell.

The book is a masterful collection of articles that seeks to freshen critical interest in this strange transition period between the apparent softnesses of Victorian poetry and deliberate hardness of the modernist poetry waiting around the century’s corner. I say “freshen” rather than “restore” or “resurrect” because the works of this mini-era has never enjoyed the wash of critical attention afforded the Romantic, Victorian, and Modern eras. A borderland like the 1890s has principally lured critics to its liminality, its relation to predecessors and successors, to what lingers from earlier forms and what emerges in anticipation of coming trends. Liminal studies have also given this brief period critical attention because the sexual and emotional transgressions of its poets appeal to critics for their use in exploring identity politics. In either case, most of the recent criticism has studied the 1890s poetry as a means rather than an end.

This book, though a collection of independent essays, is described as having its contributors arranged in “chapters.” At first that description seems more of a hope than a fact, an unearned assertion of coherence over a range of critics with different poet-subjects and different critical perspectives. However, by a third

of the way through my reading, it became clear that the “chapter” designation was pleasingly justified. The chapters plot an arc of examination that takes us from problematizing the conventional Yeatsian view of narcissistically doomed male poets of precious verse to a radical opening of our conceptions of the era to include accomplished, canon-worthy female poets. That in itself would be a minor enterprise, for it has been tried before, and the Yeatsian reading of the era still prevails in the literary histories undergraduates are faced with. But the arc of thought is far more critically productive than simply the foregrounding of the work of women. Without foregrounding a political agenda, the chapters progressively distinguish between male and female poetic expression among poets of this era, suggesting that the male poets trap themselves in narcissistic self-publicizing, the women poets in liberating convolutions of identity. Essentially, the book frames the poetic expression of the male poets, those undermined by Yeats’ characterization—Dowson, Johnson, Gray, Davidson, and Wilde—as self-regarding performances requiring an admiring, pitying audience. And as the chapters explore the works of female poets, the self-staging of the speakers enacts a private exploration of identity, forging, in both senses of the word, ways of being that can thrive outside social and sexual conventions. It is a fleshing out, in both the literal and conventional sense of the term, of intense feeling and the delicate framings of mind that the poetry grants room to explore.

The Fin de Siècle Poem’s preface by the editor, Joseph Bristow, provides concise synoptic accounts of each of the twelve chapters to come. He follows it with a crisply written introductory chapter gracefully informed with historical background, insisting that “this much misrecognized literary decade” brought us “fresh poetic models that could engage with the modern before further shifts in poetics became identifiably modernist” (39). The next two chapters, by Jerusha McCormack and Holly Laird, lay out the opposing expressive paths that the male and female poets took. As McCormack argues, the male poets’ was toward the explicitly performative expression of their sensual and emotional torments, and the female toward less obtrusive, more private and controlled poetic speakers. Laird’s treatment of these choices dwells on the apparent lure of suicide for both, and nimbly problematizes the link between poets’ biographies and their poetic language of self-annihilation. Both critics, heroically I think, avoid the temptation to dismiss the men as narcissistic in their prominence, or to cast a victim’s shroud over the women.

Then Linda Hughes, in a chapter on Rosamund Marriott Watson (Graham R. Tomson), analyzes the interplay among her social and poetic masks and her range of verse forms as a way to discuss the liberation of sexual feeling in verse. Like

Laird, Hughes never lapses into biographical cause and effect. This phenomenon of dispersed poetic identities is then picked up by Nicholas Frankel's intriguing chapter on the Rhymers' Club and its members' efforts to publish two collections of their verse. Frankel makes two claims that are especially compelling given these poets' self-dramatizing personae: that the two collections avoid foregrounding the work of individuals, and that the effect of such poems as "The Lake Isle" is altered when read in the responsive context of his fellow Rhymers' work. This chapter is followed by the only anomalous contribution, Jerome McGann's discussion of Herbert Horne's *Diversi Colores*, which McGann argues is an integration of the language with the medium of its typographic presence. Yes, like Frankel, McGann is interested in the bookness of books, but this contribution seemed an unnecessary bump in the arc of mind projected by the other chapters.

The remaining six chapters focus exclusively on the poetry and evolving identities of the principal female poets of the era. While Julia Saville gives us a brilliant study of Bradley and Cooper's (Field's) "ekphrastic poems," verse descriptions of paintings from "detached" perspectives that are strikingly, idiosyncratically allusive and sexually playful. In the last chapter, Marion Thain returns us to Bradley and Cooper to examine their late post-conversion poetry, and feelingly establishes the link to their earlier, pagan work, displaying "the fluidity of a poetic identity that interlaces past and present, self and lover," private myth and contemporary culture (332).

The next two chapters explore the French symbolist influences on and the resulting innovations from Amy Levy and Mary F. Robinson. Linda Hunt Beckman demonstrates that Amy Levy, before her male contemporaries, responded to the modern urban experience poetically, the fragmentation of community providing images of "self-estrangement." Likewise, Ana Parejo Vadillo traces Robinson's symbolist presence in language of physical removal, a "negation of physical experience in favor of the disembodied soul" (252). And in the following chapter, Yopie Prins takes us into Alice Meynell's studies of metrical measure, where Meynell finds echoes of human experience in these rhythms, not so much in the beats as in the reflective pauses between. Then, Tricia Lootens pulls us out of 1890s, placing the experience of the time into the larger context of the empire, pairs Rudyard Kipling with Bengalese poet Tora Dutt (whose work was new to me). As Kipling brought India to England, so Dutt brought the British Romantic tradition, especially Wordsworth, to India, adapting his vision to a native Indian voice.

My brief descriptions of these intricate and elegant studies cannot hope to convey my sense of how remarkable is their reconsideration of an era most of us

have taken little time and pleasure in, even as we specialize in late Victorian or Modernist literature. This book, with its fine, lucid writing, its unembarrassed passion for neglected poets, brought me back to my graduate student days, when so much was new, so much to be discovered. For those sensations, I am grateful. ❄

Lee Oser. *The Return of Christian Humanism: Chesterton, Eliot, Tolkien, and the Romance of History*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. 208p.

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In *The Return of Christian Humanism: Chesterton, Eliot, Tolkien, and the Romance of History*, Lee Oser, a professor of literature at Holy Cross College, follows Chesterton's lead in taking on the heretics, decadents, and aesthetes within the postmodernist critical establishment, extolling Chesterton, Eliot, and Tolkien as defenders of reason and romance and vilifying influential late twentieth-century critics such as Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler, whose alleged attacks on the liberal humanist tradition Oser sees as having eroded not only literary scholarship but indeed the very underpinnings of democratic society. In his preface Oser asserts, "Without scruple or debate, our schools condone the blindest intellectual prejudice of the twentieth century, and maybe the key to its horrors, the idea that religion is the enemy of art and culture" (ix). But Chesterton, Eliot, and Tolkien, having written during a period when "the institutional arrangements of our own time were visible," Oser observes, "give us the chance for renewal and renaissance.... They were embattled but not wholly isolated figures, major writers in English who understood their art as an effort to keep the sacred wellsprings of culture open" (x). Oser—like Chesterton: a novelist, apologist, and critic combined—clearly understands his own art similarly, and this book as his own effort to keep these wellsprings open.

Oser situates liberal humanism in the cultural traditions inherited from Greece, Rome, and Catholic Europe and examines how those traditions were affected by developments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, culminating in Matthew Arnold. Arnold, says Oser, was a "liminal" figure, arriving at "the end of the tradition of Renaissance humanism that runs from Erasmus through Swift and Pope; and he wrote the prologue to the Christian humanism that begins anew with Chesterton" (12). Arnold's humanism is in the Renaissance tradition, Oser explains, because it is Aristotelian in nature, pivoting on the question, "*What are the grounds of human flourishing?*" Arnold also marks an end of the medieval and

Renaissance fusion of faith and art, however; in his attempt to replace religion, which he saw as outmoded by science, with poetry, he “estranged both the Christian and the aesthete, who found him neither inspiring nor credible. He was too heretical for one and too earnest for the other” (14). Oser identifies the 1873 publication of aesthete Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* as the beginning of the late Victorian backlash against Arnold that would remain in force through the much of twentieth century. (T.S. Eliot and Terry Eagleton are referenced as two prominent critics of Arnoldian humanism.) Even so, Oser writes, “the end of the nineteenth century did not witness the entire collapse of humanism, but it was a period touched by considerable anxiety in intellectual circles.” Oser cites the decline of empire, the continuing conflicts between science and faith, the flamboyant decadence exemplified by Oscar Wilde, the ability of the new press to create rapid shifts in public opinion, along with social instability generated by the rise of the working classes, as contributing factors to this *fin de siècle* anxiety that set the stage for the advent of Chesterton: “Somehow out of this smoke and fog emerged the most gifted defender of Christian humanism since Erasmus. I speak, of course, of Chesterton” (18).

Chapter 2 of Oser’s book is devoted to Chesterton, and the degree of Oser’s devotion is made clear immediately with such large claims as this: “The career of Chesterton stands as a victory for humankind. It represents the last major victory over cosmic despair, which menaces our own period in the form of anti-humanism” (21). It is not clear, however, why Oser considers Chesterton’s the “last major victory” over despair, since the following two chapters present Eliot and Tolkien as comrades-in-arms with Chesterton in the battle against despair. But Chesterton’s victory, according to Oser, lay in his “rebuilding of humanistic confidence on the orthodox planks of the Apostle’s Creed” (26). What most attracted Chesterton to orthodoxy was its ability to harmonize reason with romance, common sense with mysticism, and it was orthodoxy that enabled Chesterton to achieve a “synthesis of faith and reason” that occupied “a middle ground between two dogmatic epistemologies”: the “godless scientism” of Bertrand Russell and the “occult mysticism” of William Butler Yeats.

Although Chesterton was not the first to argue for a middle ground between scientism and mysticism, Oser admits, his triumph consisted in “approach[ing] these ideas with ordinary people in mind.” Chesterton took advantage of the Edwardian “enthusiasm for the field of debate,” a field that extended from the public lecture halls to the pages of the daily newspapers, and in this field “cultivated the Christian soil that was lying fallow” (22). And like so many previous commentators on Chesterton’s criticism, Oser locates its power in its deliberate provocation of its

readers: “There is a sense in Chesterton’s work that he is accusing his countrymen of sloth, the capital sin of *acedia*, a type of depression understood by Christian writers as lethargy, apathy and virtues left to drift. That is not bad way of describing England in the 1890s” (23). That is to say, decadent England, and Oser accounts for Chesterton’s passionate opposition to the decadents by portraying him as a renegade aesthete: “Chesterton reacted with a fierce apostasy against the aesthetic movement.” Oser then quotes Chesterton’s criticism of the *carpe diem* philosophy of the aesthetes and comments, “By isolating discrete moments in the flux of time, Pater attained a frozen perfection. But he robbed man of the continuity through time where his nature achieves its fullest expression. For Chesterton, our existence ‘is a story’” (24). Chesterton’s view of life as a narrative is one he shares with Oser, who further observes:

Chesterton’s appeal to narrative is philosophically profound; at the same time, it reminds us that he is a novelist.... Pater wrote a veiled genre of autobiography that he called “imaginary portraits”—finely woven reveries of impressions, memories, and desires. Chesterton wrote novels whose acrobatic heroes piece together their lives through moral acts which restore friendship and community. (24)

The relationship Oser sketches here between narrative, ethics, friendship, and community, is of course Aristotelian in origin, and is illustrated here with an examination of Chesterton’s novel *The Flying Inn*. Oser concludes that Chesterton’s protagonists “retain a physical wholeness of viewpoint that is increasingly rare. It is only the whole man who knows what ails the aesthetes, the therapists, and the governing class” (35). This atypical viewpoint, coupled with Chesterton’s love of Gothic architecture, leads Oser to address the question, “Was Chesterton’s mind medieval?” (a charge commonly leveled at him by “progressives” both in his own day and in ours). Oser’s response:

His medievalism operates in his belief in the unifying force of Christendom, in his sympathy for popular superstition, in his curious mingling of real piety and worldly wisdom. His economic theory of distributism does not fit the world we live in—with the possible exception of Vermont. But generally, Chesterton’s thinking is molded and tempered by a humanistic liberalism that engages modernity. (30)

Oser’s own thinking is equally molded by humanistic liberalism and equally eager to engage modernity (or perhaps post-modernity in Oser’s case), and it is just such an engagement that constitutes Chapter 6 of the book, “Artificial Taste.”

Oser sees modernist cultural relativism as inimical to liberal humanism and to scholarship. Chapter 6 opens with a direct attack on recent trends in academia: “Over the past decades, a dogmatically relativist type of modernism has pushed

Christian humanism effectively out of the academy. At the same time, the study of literature has much declined” (85). Oser here conflates dogmatic modernist relativism with multiculturalism, engaging in some Chestertonian punning when he takes multiculturalism to mean “encompassing a multitude of cults”: “there are larger and irrational forces at play, in the form of burgeoning cults.” Among these Oser lists the cults of feminism, neo-Marxism, anti-humanism, technology, wellness, environmentalism, and the cult of the media, all of which, he argues, “hinges [sic], in the end, on unspoken religious beliefs. And if we acknowledge those beliefs, then the thesis of this chapter will not seem incendiary or absurd: a bias against Christianity has separated literary studies from the tradition and closed off the avenues to renewal” (85). Oser’s assertion that his thesis is neither incendiary nor absurd depends on his audience, however: readers who pick up the book out of an interest in Christian humanism, Chesterton, or Tolkien are likely to be predisposed to accept it outright, but readers who happen to be familiar with the work of either Harold Bloom or Helen Vendler might well find it incendiary and, if not absurd, at least questionable on several points.

One assertion that readers who share Oser’s assumptions about modern culture would be predisposed to accept, while others might well find incendiary, appears in the second paragraph of Chapter 2:

On the spiritual frontier, the vaguely Christian West is looking increasingly gnostic—the richest cults pull their floats in that direction. Technology, feminism, postmodernism, and the youth media tend to suppress the guidance of nature and reason. Literature, on the other hand, cannot wholly abandon the conditions of its birth. There is such civilized pleasure in opening a good book. It is a sensual and intellectual act that militates, like Chaucer’s pilgrims themselves, against gnostic alienation. But many recent critics are gnostic in spirit; agents of the times, they have done almost everything in their unconscious and irrational power to lay the literary tradition to rest. (86)

Gnosticism, let us remember, originally referred to the beliefs of early Christian sects deemed heretical by the established church, sects whose teachings derived from either private revelation, non-canonical scriptures, or some combination of the two. Eventually the meaning expanded to include any sort of religious beliefs that departed too far from Catholic or Protestant orthodoxy, and it is in this sense that Chesterton uses the term in discussing Blake (although many of Blake’s religious ideas bore affinities with some early Gnostic doctrines). But Oser and other present-day Roman Catholic commentators on literature and culture employ the term more loosely to describe not only ideas but attitudes that contradict Catholic orthodoxy or liberal humanism as Oser has defined it. Here, however,

Oser seems to be using “gnostic” as a synonym for “solipsistic”; thus gnostic critics would be those who advance a private, idiosyncratic view of literature and culture that not only divorces them from both nature and reason but also undermines the possibility of the communal experience of literature that perpetuates and is itself perpetuated by tradition and culture. But while Harold Bloom might not balk at being labeled as a gnostic, since he has written extensively on the relationship between gnosticism, literature, and criticism, others such as Helen Vendler might find such a characterization incendiary; and I find it questionable, if not absurd.

Oser bases his indictment of Bloom and Vendler on their attacks on T.S. Eliot, whom Oser lionizes earlier in the book as one of the three great hopes for the return of Christian humanism. (It should be noted that Oser previously published a well-reviewed critical analysis of Eliot’s work; so just as Chesterton did with Dickens, Browning, and Shaw, he is here employing the opportunity to defend one of his favorite writers against what he sees as misguided and misleading criticisms of his work.) Oser quotes a few “venomous” passages from essays by Bloom and Vendler in which the critics “skewer” Eliot and Matthew Arnold (86-93), and then indulges in a bit of skewering of his own. In comparing Bloom’s and Vendler’s attacks on Eliot, and thus implicitly on the entire liberal humanist tradition, Oser lampoons both: “Harold Bloom played opposite the diva’s [Vendler’s] glass-shattering soprano in that celebrated mock-opera of the late twentieth century, ‘The Triumph of Decadence,’ where everyone is madly in love with himself” (91). While the imagery and idea here are reminiscent of Chesterton’s caricatures of the decadents of his own day, the wit is markedly more acerbic than Chesterton’s: Chesterton’s skewering of his opponents (at least in his early writing) tended to be far more gentle in tone, though no less deadly.

After toppling Vendler and Bloom from their “bad eminence,” Oser returns to Walter Pater, noting that Bloom considers himself a “Liberal who ‘particularly loved’ Pater, who likewise turns all criticism into self-portraiture” (95). In his earlier chapter on Chesterton, Oser criticized Pater as having “robbed man of the continuity through time where his nature achieves its fullest expression” (24). Here, however, he sees in Pater “a kind of slender and beautiful bridge, a crumbling remnant of the high culture that Bloom and Vendler accidentally dynamited” (95). But Bloom resembles Pater, Oser contends, only that in both cases, “traditional loves and loyalties bow to the subjective glories of the self.” Ultimately, for Oser, the critical works of both Bloom and Vendler represent “prime examples of gnostic aestheticism” in their self-absorption and their repudiation of reason and nature. Oser quotes Bloom as writing (in *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Creative Minds*), that “Gnosticism has been indistinguishable from imaginary genius.... it is

pragmatically the religion of literature,” and concludes from this, “Here we in fact uncover the truth of Bloom’s splitting the tradition into Catholic and Protestant authors: it is really a split between Christians and Gnostics” (99). It is not at all clear to this reader, however, how “we” can uncover such a truth from the quoted passage, so Oser must be assuming that his readers are familiar with more of Bloom’s work than is represented here. This again raises the question of audience: is Oser writing for Christian readers interested in Chesterton, Eliot, and Tolkien, or for academicians under the spell of Bloom and Vendler? If the former, then Oser’s readers will likely accept his characterizations of these prominent critics without question, and the quotations he has selected as representative of their work; if the latter, such unquestioning acceptance is highly unlikely.

For Oser then proceeds to color Vendler as anti-Christian based on equally fragmentary quotations, writing, “Vendler proceeds from a dogmatic assertion: ‘Selves come with a history: souls are independent of time and space’” (99). Oser makes an enormous logical leap here in taking this to mean, “If poetry must do without history, that rules out Homer, Virgil, Dante, the *Beowulf* poet, Chaucer, the Gawain poet, Spenser, Shakespeare, Dryden, Johnson, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, Whitman, C. Rossetti, Dickinson, Hardy, Frost, Eliot, Marianne Moore, Auden, and Wilbur, to name a few” (99-100). It is at this point that I find Oser’s argument absurd. Vendler never claimed that “poetry must do without history,” at least not in the quoted passage, where she is merely drawing a distinction between “souls” and “selves” (a distinction which cannot be understood, as in the Bloom quote, without a knowledge of the rest of Vendler’s work). Nor, to my knowledge, does Vendler anywhere else assert or suggest that “poetry must do without history.” In fact, in *Poems, Poets, Poetry*, which I use as a textbook in my Studies in Poetry class, Vendler advises poets who wish to create credible lyric speakers that “The single most successful way is to give your speaker not only a present but a past, and often not just a yesterday, but the day before that, and the year before that, and five years before that. (See Wordsworth’s ‘Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey’ for a stunning lengthy version of this process)” (177). In the same book Vendler devotes an entire chapter to “History and Regionality,” beginning with the remark, “Poetry is always interested in time and space.... It is also interested in time specified—in history” (241). Therefore Oser is either unfamiliar with the larger body of Vendler’s work, or has deliberately distorted it to suit his polemical purposes (a question equally applicable to some of Chesterton’s attacks on his opponents). Oser delivers his *coup de grâce* to Bloom and Vendler as follows:

Where, one asks, are these critics coming from? A cynic might say their behavior is predictable. Having been rewarded for their anti-Christian posture over the years, they

have learned to express that position in what is heretically its purest form. Freed from the tradition of the great poet-critics from Dryden to Eliot, poetry according to Bloom and Vendler speaks for the soul's liberation from human nature and from God, the soul's discovery of its supremacy to the created order.

Here Oser most succinctly expresses his definition of Gnosticism—"the soul's discovery of its supremacy to the created order"—but it remains questionable whether such a view of literature accurately characterizes the criticism of either Bloom or Vendler, without a more thorough examination of their work as a whole.

Chapter 6 of *The Return of Christian Humanism* concludes with a reference to Eliot's comment in a 1933 lecture that "we are still in Arnold's period" and the suggestion that "By way of Chesterton, Eliot was able to connect Arnoldian liberal humanism to the spiritual decay of the academy" (101). And even Bloom and Vendler, Oser admits, "may owe something of their literary faith to Arnold, but they denied what is most lasting in this thought: his sense of tradition, his true pragmatism, his appeal to reason and nature." Thus while Oser's characterizations of contemporary academic culture and the critics who most prominently represent it may be distorted and overly shrill in places, the book as a whole convincingly identifies these most lasting elements of Arnold's thought as accounting for the durability of Oser's chosen subjects. ✱

Rebecca Beasley. *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound*. London: Routledge, 2007. 144p.

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This slim volume in the "Routledge Critical Thinkers" series concentrates not on one figure but on three. Students of modernism are less likely to discover much new about T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound as they are to be reminded of the enduring relevance of T.E. Hulme, whose thought here is properly contextualized amongst that of his more prolific contemporaries. In *Theorists of Modernist Poetry*, Rebecca Beasley argues not just that the theoretical writings of these three modernists framed the most important cultural questions of the twentieth century, but that Hulme's thought in its first decade was essential to the imagist movement and, hence, to the poetic development of Eliot and Pound themselves. As a result, the core of this book is organized around a half-dozen questions that trace disparate threads of the modern movement, each ending with a summary useful for classroom discussion.

Beasley's initial emphasis on *fin-de-siècle* culture succeeds both in stressing the rupture between Victorian and modern thought while also pondering what debt

the latter owes the former. She finds in modernism the resonance of nineteenth-century aestheticism, for example, but judges the symbolist desire for a new verse more influential, its legacy manifested in Hulme's "A Lecture on Modern Poetry." While no one could argue that Hulme was using the term "modern" to mean anything more than "contemporary," his essay effectively privileged verse over prose and suggested how innovations in poetry would help frame a new literature. Indeed, in its economy and directness, imagism shared many of the same values as Hulme's thought, though Pound would deny the influence years later. That Pound's poetry relied on the evocative sense of objects as much as those objects themselves reflects the same skepticism of linearity Eliot worked through in his "objective correlative," where a number of images can together evoke the response of the reader. Beasley shrewdly juxtaposes this fundamental emphasis on the smallest units of verse with poets' increasing fascination with longer forms, from Eliot's *Waste Land* and *Quartets* to Pound's *Mauberry* and *Cantos*.

Despite the legacy of aestheticism, utilitarian thought also lingered throughout the twentieth century in the modernist engagement with politics. So, while Beasley traces the influence of Henri Bergson on the poetic values of Eliot, Hulme, and Pound, she is obliged to explain how Bergson's view of time belied an emphasis on the so-called "classical" values that would, in time, manifest themselves in a political conservatism. Though the poetry returned to regular meter, Beasley stops just short of connecting form to the politicization of modern letters, granting only that artists' reaction to the First World War demanded a commitment to social change. That for Pound, and perhaps also Eliot, this sort of engagement with society led to anti-Semitism is the real tragedy of modernism, of course. But this study does not seek the roots of such narrow thinking in political involvement, not even in Pound's lamentable fascism.

Ultimately, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry* adds to the recent interest in the thought of T.E. Hulme, but this book seeks also to attribute both the rejection of close reading and a wider postmodernist skepticism of the whole modernist project to a reaction against the kind of poetry written by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. While Hulme's position here contributes to a more heterogeneous reading of modernism, his importance to the early work of two canonical modernists of such longstanding reputation and representative influence positions him as part of an old guard, even as his underappreciated contribution to the movement is thus revived. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of modernist thought in this fashion, Rebecca Beasley contributes more to the broadening of our understanding of the movement than she would have done by simply restoring the reputation of one of its neglected figures. ✱

Robert Chodat. *Worldly Acts and Sentient Things: The Persistence of Agency from Stein to DeLillo*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008. 254p.

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Robert Chodat's erudite book investigates the claim that agency does not dissolve in twentieth-century American literature but rather gets distributed across various forms. In his eyes, modernist and postmodernist writers offer up an unexpected range of human and non-human agents, and in doing so these writers complicate an understanding of what it means to possess will and to take purposive action. Chodat demonstrates a remarkable capacity for curiosity regarding the "extended thought experiments" (21) of Gertrude Stein, Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and Don DeLillo. He clearly admires the open-endedness of the "great uncertainty" (234) he finds in these writers' works, and the underlying hope of his book is that we share in appreciating the lasting appeal of competing notions of agency.

His project is angled against the grain of critical theory, which—thanks to the work of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault, among others—now takes for granted the demise of the willful, individual artist. Despite its target-rich environment, *Worldly Acts and Sentient Things* is far from polemical. Instead of lining up rows of theoretical pins and then knocking them down with childish glee, Chodat sets a formidable array of literary, linguistic, psychological, and sociological philosophies spinning and then manages to keep them all up in the air at the same time, even while opening up investigations into major works of twentieth-century American literature. This ability to entertain so many disparate points of view at one time is one of Chodat's most alluring qualities. It is also one of his most frustrating; at times, he takes such pains to prevent any premature judgment on his own or his reader's part that he threatens to negate the possibility for productive debate. In the end, however, these moments do not mar this contemplative and enriching book. His readings are unerringly sensitive to the subtle nuances that make his literary and theoretical subjects complex and provocative.

The tension driving these readings lies between two types of agents: persons and presences. He defines a "person" as something that exhibits an "embodied condition" (12), whereas a "presence" constitutes "a being distinct from an embodied person, yet somehow influencing or controlling it" (15). The structure of the book bears out this binary opposition. The book is divided into two parts, which act as mirror reflections of each other. Each part contains three chapters: one on a text whose agents tend to resemble persons, one on a survey of relevant theory, and one on a text whose agents tend to resemble presences. Chodat insists that each of his chosen poems or novels deconstructs its own tendency, yet the structure

of the book suggests that a study of these texts is founded on the recognition of their prevailing patterns. The unusual placement of the theoretical surveys—not prior to the analytical chapters but between them—suggests the ingenuity with which Chodat deploys theory in his book. The treatises of William James, Steven Pinker, and Wilfrid Sellars in Part One or of John Dewey, Stanley Cavell, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Niklas Luhmann in Part Two are not merely appendages grafted onto a set of close readings (as is too often the case). Chodat's distillations of these various theories in favor of persons or presences function as bridges between Stein's poetry and Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* in Part One and between Ellison's *Invisible Man* and DeLillo's *Underworld* in Part Two. Without them, we could not make the jump; in fact, the book is as much about philosophy and cognitive science as it is about poems and novels. This bifocal quality imbues the book with a sense of organic completeness lacking in many monographs. It also ensures that this book will be of interest to members of multiple disciplines within the arts and sciences.

The chapter on Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* is the most representative of the project of exploring how texts resist preconceived notions about the loss of agency and, at the same time, avoid erecting monolithic representations of what exactly an agent is. Chodat's ruminations on Stein are thought provoking, though they could have benefited from a bit more close reading. As it is, he relies a great deal on generalizations about Stein's body of work that he extrapolates from one, albeit apt, example. In his chapter on Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Chodat convincingly rejects the traditional reading of the narrator as an Emersonian figure in favor of seeing him as someone embedded in the intersubjective context of histories and institutions. Lastly, Chodat offers a cogent analysis of the collective mind in DeLillo's *Underworld*, and his critique of the non-human agency represented in the novel allows him to intervene in the familiar territory of the novelist's preoccupation with conspiracy and paranoia. In this light, the omission of a sustained treatment of Thomas Pynchon's work seems strange, even more so given the suitability of *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* to a discussion of non-human agency; nonetheless, this is a minor annoyance. ✱

Brad Gooch. *Flannery: A Life of Flannery O'Connor*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009. 449p.

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People who seriously study the works of Mary Flannery O'Connor occasionally debate about when it is acceptable to refer to the author by her middle name. Does

referring to O'Connor as "Flannery" lessen her somehow? Perhaps referring to the author consistently as "O'Connor" emphasizes her status as Great Theological Thinker and Canonical Author. But we need to see O'Connor as Flannery the human being, too, in order to appreciate certain of her literary complexities. Brad Gooch's biography, thoroughly researched (though unauthorized) and stylistically polished, earns the right to its title by showing us the flaws, the struggles, the sadnesses of the amazing person who wrote some of this country's best fiction.

Literary criticism about O'Connor's work tends—inevitably, perhaps—to emphasize ways in which O'Connor was molded: she read this theological or philosophical work, so a theme appears; she read that fiction, so her work borrows images, characters, plotlines, techniques. We have piled the critical blankets of influence on top of her so much that the artistically ambitious Flannery O'Connor struggles to fight her way out. O'Connor made no secret of the crucial importance of her Catholicism to the way she wrote, and some of us want to tie everything about her writing to a straightforward illustration of dogma.

Those of us who consider O'Connor an original—consistently more interesting than the thinkers and writers she supposedly imitates, more self-contradictory than the creed that she, with full sincerity, espoused—should be grateful to Gooch for displaying the human Flannery, the Flannery who regularly violates our expectations of O'Connor. She earned no grade of A in her first semester of graduate school (121). She could be naïve (politically in her cooperation with Robert Lowell's anti-communism campaign at Yaddo, romantically in her failed relationship with Erik Langkjaer) and racist (when she collected and repeated jokes, when she used the n-word), and she never did figure out how to achieve a fully adult relationship with her mother, Regina Cline O'Connor. Flannery O'Connor took comfort in the principle that one does not have to be a good person to write well (162), and Gooch shows us why she would need to be comforted by that idea.

Gooch's book is not the first strong biography of Flannery O'Connor. Jean W. Cash's *Flannery O'Connor: A Life* appeared in 2002, and in 2003 Paul Elie published *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, a biographical study of connections among O'Connor and three other Catholic writers (Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, and Walker Percy). There have been a number of other biographical publications over the years, essays here and there by people who knew her well, most significantly the essays of Sally Fitzgerald, who did not live to complete the authorized biography she worked on for decades. Susan Balée and Melissa Simpson have even produced biographies specifically for young readers. These biographical studies tend to praise what O'Connor was able to accomplish in spite of her health. Gooch's book, in contrast, shows us somewhat more of the author's melancholy. In Gooch's

treatment, the loss of her father when O'Connor was young led to generally unsuccessful attempts to find another male protector. Buying peacocks was not simply a matter of collecting beauty; it was a matter of making peace with being stuck on her mother's farm (219). Although O'Connor was pleased when one of her most important correspondents, Betty Hester, converted to Catholicism, O'Connor was significantly hurt when Hester later left the Church, apparently under the influence of another novelist pen pal, Iris Murdoch (343). Even as he surveys the successes of O'Connor's intense writing life, Gooch emphasizes struggles, pointing out that Flannery's self-confidence waned and that she "created no new stories" in 1962 (346). In Gooch's context, the creation of such final stories as "Parker's Back" and "Revelation," stories O'Connor revised on her deathbed, is a matter of the cutting short of potential creativity.

I know that Brad Gooch is quite fond of O'Connor's fiction, but sometimes, perhaps in pursuit of biographical objectivity, it seems to me, he overcorrects. My quibble with the book is its occasional tendency to reduce O'Connor to an imitator, especially of Hawthorne and Faulkner. I wish more attention were paid to O'Connor's originality, on her magical spinning of straw into gold. Gooch discusses charmingly O'Connor's training a chicken to walk backward and her comparing herself to that chicken, but I would prefer less emphasis on O'Connor's own contrary backwardness, more emphasis on her radical newness as a writer. Of course, O'Connor made the task of any biographer quite difficult. She seems not to have wanted to be classified or studied as a woman writer. She consistently said her life was both irrelevant to her art and uninteresting, yet at the same time she worked hard to maintain records (in the forms of drafts and carbon copies) of the intellectual and religious autobiography she created through her now-famous essays and letters. Any biographer is likely to feel that fresh research on O'Connor is a matter of pointing out facts she wanted kept secret.

While it is not Gooch's intention to draw out the relevance of her art to the interpretation of her fiction, his book has influenced me in several ways. When I chat with visitors to the O'Connors' farm, Andalusia, and when I teach my O'Connor course at Flannery's alma mater, Gooch's discussion of the ways in which Regina O'Connor never stopped irritating Flannery has made me amend my old generalization that her mother gave Flannery thirteen blessed years of writers'-colony life. His discussion of Flannery's devastation over her father's death—she compared it to being shot by God (qtd. in Gooch 72)—relates clearly to a number of death scenes in her stories. Sometimes Gooch does connect the dots for the reader, as when he shows that "The River" needs to be reinterpreted in light of the fact that like the story's "three little bullies," Flannery "got a kick

out of luring unsuspecting victims into a pigpen” (61). More often, he leaves it to the reader to find the significance. It is interesting, for example, to reread “The Comforts of Home” and “Everything That Rises Must Converge” after reviewing what Gooch reports (31, 117) about O’Connor’s own handbags.

In my O’Connor class last spring, my students became accustomed to hearing me report on what Gooch had taught us all about the week’s assignment. Perhaps especially in the town where she lived the longest and is most honored, it is helpful to see the ways in which Flannery O’Connor had a great deal to overcome. She inherited some old-fashioned assumptions about race and class and gender, and she had her miseries, but she also had the intellectual and emotional strength and courage to put all of her own assumptions and convictions to the test. Gooch gives us a new path to appreciation of a writer who remains proudly mysterious. ✱

Monika Shafi, ed. *Approaches to Teaching Grass’s The Tin Drum*. NY: Modern Language Association of America, 2008. 258p.

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The novels of the German author and Nobel laureate Günter Grass (b. 1927), long staples of the postwar German Studies canon, have also received wider exposure in the English-language academy within the past two decades via inclusion in world literature, film, and cultural studies seminars. More and more educators are discovering that Grass’ work provides opportunities to introduce students to many facets of the modern human condition such as memory, historical authenticity, resistance, race, and gender as filtered through the 20th-century German experience. This development is reflected by a new volume in the *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* series from the Modern Languages Association. Edited by Monika Shafi and containing eighteen essays, *Approaches to Teaching Grass’s The Tin Drum* is an excellent pedagogical resource for those wishing to include his 1959 *magnum opus* in their syllabi. It contains an impressive variety of themes and methods for educators in German Studies seminars and world literature courses alike, as well as for educators in fields such as Holocaust studies, history, film, and cultural studies.

The organization of the book follows the outline familiar to other volumes in the series. The preface, written by the editor, both provides a context for the pedagogical approaches in the book and also briefly outlines the interpretations of

the novel contained therein which give rise to these approaches. This is followed by a chapter titled "Materials," in which can be found a list of translations of *The Tin Drum* and copious relevant secondary literature for both undergraduate and graduate seminars from print, audiovisual, and electronic sources. Finally, in the section called "Approaches," eighteen essays are arranged by sub-categories including "Historical Contexts," "Narrative and Reading Strategies," "Teaching Issues of Race and Gender," and "Teaching the Film *Die Blechtrommel*." This final section is especially worthwhile, as creative and thematic parallels can easily be drawn between its director Volker Schlöndorff and Grass himself, and analysis of the significant variations in the film and text is instructive. An extensive bibliography and a comprehensive index are also included after the essay collection, providing ample resources to consult further for materials to be used in lesson planning, in-class activities, and student assignments.

As Shafi notes, "no single interpretive approach can do justice to [*The Tin Drum*]'s wealth of ideas, forms and allusions" (13). She is to be commended for her well-chosen array of both senior and rising scholars in German Studies, who offer interpretations and pedagogical suggestions from an impressive variety of perspectives. These include history and memory (Julian Preece, Todd Kontje, Patricia Pollock Brodsky, and Timothy B. Malchow), narrative analysis (Irene Kacandes, Sabine Gross, Alfred D. White, Katharina Hall, Richard D. Schade, Jane Curran, and Elizabeth Hamilton), race, gender, and class (Dagmar Lorenz, Peter Arnds, Barbara Becker-Cantarino, and Teresa Ludden), and film studies (Stephen Brockmann, Margaret Setje-Eilers, and Susan C. Anderson). Particularly impressive are the contributions of Brodsky, Curran, Gross, Hamilton, Kacandes, and Schade, in whose essays original scholarship is seamlessly woven into innovative instructional suggestions for the classroom and beyond.

Whether in the essay text itself or via footnotes, nearly every scholar also comments on some aspect of the original German text via their own translation of certain phrases or passages. Others highlight valuable insights in translation studies gleaned from comparing specific passages in the German version with the authorized Ralph Manheim (English) translation. This additional dimension of attention being paid to the translation of the text provides potential "teachable moments" both for classes in which the work is only taught in translation as well as seminars in German.

This leads to one minor criticism of the book, in that some essays display excellent literary scholarship on *The Tin Drum* but do not simultaneously embed this in an ongoing instructional context. Here, I am particularly thinking of the contributions of Todd Kontje and Peter Arnds. So as not to be misunderstood,

these are without question insightful interpretations of Grass' novel. Yet they do not display pedagogical implications of their analysis in as constant a way as is hoped for given the overall intent of the MLA series. Certainly, primarily literary interpretations of specific themes in *The Tin Drum* are useful inductive guideposts for independent creation of classroom activities and assignments. At the same time, essays whose pedagogical suggestions are sparing or do not rely on first-person classroom accounts do not make their cases as authoritatively as could be hoped, and perhaps leave too much to the imagination of the reader—particularly educators teaching this work for the first time.

Nonetheless and without question, both German Studies educators with solely a passing acquaintance with *The Tin Drum* and seasoned professors looking for additional avenues of inquiry into the work will find much useful information here. In addition, because of the multifaceted approaches to interrogating the text, this volume is also quite valuable for Holocaust studies, film studies, modern history, and related courses where literary study is part of an interdisciplinary pedagogical approach on modern Germany. One could also say another benefit to the existence of this volume goes beyond the immediate thematic and instructional enrichment. Currently only four of the 105 volumes in the MLA's *Approaches to Teaching Literature* series are dedicated to works by German authors: Goethe's *Faust*, the short fiction of Franz Kafka and Thomas Mann, and now Grass. With this scholarly, sound addition, wider circles in the academy might seek out potential links between canonical German literature and their own projects, engaging in interdisciplinary scholarship towards future volumes on other German authors of world-literature status. ✱

Thomas Glave, ed. *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. 405p.

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Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles is the first scholarly collection of Caribbean gay and lesbian literature that came out this past year (no pun intended). Despite the abundance of books written about this region, very few scholars have seriously examined the themes of homosexuality, bisexuality, and transvestitism in particular fields, such as Puerto Rican and Cuban literatures. What makes this anthology different from others is that its editor, Thomas Glave—an associate professor of creative writing and Latin American and Caribbean literature at SUNY Binghamton—reveals the complex

dynamics of gender politics in a pluralistic, multilingual, Antillean region. Glave insists on calling the anthology a “gathering” of diverse experiences that covers a wide Caribbean spectrum of “same-gender-interested” writers who oppose hegemonic cultural discourses of heterosexual patriarchy imposed at home and in the diaspora. This gathering of writings is an important contribution to the literary conversation that challenges myths of gender roles and the complex intersections of race, class, politics, and sexual economy in Caribbean societies.

In his preface “Desire through the Archipelago,” Glave describes the multiple difficulties the anthology faced during the publishing process, particularly going through the hurdles of prejudiced editors who viewed the project as narrow-minded and too specific for the literary market (4). As a response, the book brings out in the open controversial issues on gender politics and its contribution to an egalitarian democracy with more tolerance and respect toward gays and lesbians as productive members of society. With this purpose in mind, the editor expects the readers “to journey through this gathering and garner much pleasure along the way from the questions and possibilities that not only will loom but also deepen, widen” their minds (7).

All the writings compiled in this anthology criticize the stereotyped images of dominant heterosexual gender roles and the limitations they have imposed upon the “unseen” gay and lesbian community since colonial times, such as the Jamaican government’s constant denial of a homosexual presence in their community (Lawson Williams’ “On Homophobia and Gay Rights Activism in Jamaica”). Homosexuality crosses all spectrums of race, class, politics, and socioeconomic positions, creating complex interlinks of same-sex relations laced with constructions of race and class (for example, a black drag queen defying myths of masculinity in the diaspora), and exposing the hypocrisy of conservative sectors. Even societies that advocate revolutionary changes, such as present-day Cuba, reject the radical changes that gay and lesbian communities advocate from within, to the point of violently dehumanizing them. Thus, the views on gender roles and machismo have changed very little, despite the goals of political revolution.

Our Caribbean covers a wide variety of texts written in English—some in Creole English with Patois words—and others translated from Spanish, French, and Dutch. In the table of contents the writings appear in no particular order or established categories, illustrating the resistance of defining gay and lesbian writing in reductive, static terms. In this way, the literary conversation flows from one topic to another while simultaneously engaging the readers to interrogate issues of heterosexuality and homosexuality in a Caribbean cultural context. Although the majority of these texts are fairly recent—written in the past 20 years—there

are excerpts from well-known authors such as Audre Lorde and Reinaldo Arenas. The oldest in the collection is the 1956 short story “The Face” by Cuban writer Virgilio Piñero, which indicates that homosexuality is nothing new, but rather it has been going on discreetly behind doors.

The styles and genres are many: poems, short stories, memoirs, letters, essays, and travelogues. The essays vary from reflective analysis to academic research accompanied by extensive endnotes and valuable bibliographical references. The writings fluctuate from the very humorous (Aldo Álvarez’s “Property Values”) and tragic (Michelle Cliff’s “Ecce Homo”) to very intimate tales of sexual awakening (Kevin Everod Quashie’s “Genesis”) and hardcore narratives (Colin Robinson’s “The Mechanic”). All of them expose the contradictions between established dominant moral values and the fulfillment of desire (Arenas’ “Eroticism”), the distortions of men’s and women’s performative roles (Rinaldo Walcott’s “Fragments on Toronto’s Black Queer Community”), the exploitation of popular fears such as foreign disease and diluting masculinity (Timothy S. Chin’s “Bullers and Battymen”), and the hypocrisy of institutions such as religion and marriage that uphold traditional homophobia justified with racial and social discrimination (Assotto Saint’s “Haiti: A Memory Journey”). Yet, some stories present a few individuals who implicitly show tolerance, support, and even love for those friends and relatives who choose to challenge both machismo and the “good woman” roles (R. Erica Doyle’s “Tante Merle”).

At the end, there is a useful vocabulary of Caribbean terms, as well as short biographies of the contributors. However, both the editor and the writers problematize words such as “gay,” “lesbian,” and “queer,” originated in North American and European cultural studies, as well as offensive, demeaning ones—“bullers,” “battymen,” “zami,” “massici,” “patos”—when applied in the Caribbean context of everyday language and popular culture, because they do not comprise the inclusiveness of other people’s diverse orientations: for example, lesbian women who include men into their social family networks (Gloria Wekker’s “Mati-ism and Black Lesbianism”). Initially, a reader may think this could be a problem of political correctness and/or translation, yet later realize these utterances involve categories of gender that conservative sectors construct as naturalized roles to be performed in Caribbean societies, thus prolonging the same colonial structures long after national independence.

Furthermore, writing becomes a creative space of freedom not only from prejudice and oppressive power relations (Marilyn Bobes’ “Somebody Has to Cry”), but also to come out and challenge the authority of violent, nationalist, heterosexist practices with their sexual orientation and practices. Some of the

academic writers use theoretical frameworks (such as biomythography and autoethnography) and their socio-political location to negotiate political, social, and economic change and to express their identity as a fluid one in contrast to the prevailing moral values of nations defined as a traditional, masculine, heterosexual, white (or light-skinned) imagined communities. Some of the authors go further beyond the traditional binary of male/female by presenting a more androgynous (perhaps hermaphrodite?) view of gender, thus showing the hybrid plurality of gender possibilities (Glave's "Whose Caribbean?").

Ironically, even among the gay and lesbian communities they get caught by the same constructed binary categories of dominance and passivity they seek to dismantle; for example, setting the difference between effeminate and hyper-masculine queers ("Eroticism"), or between femme and butch lesbians (Shani Mootoo's "Out on Main Street"). To counteract the racial and social discrimination at the economic and political levels, writers must dismantle these norms and break free from the "gender prison imposed on us by white racist constructions of black masculinity, which go hand-in-hand with the black ideologue's construction of family and black masculinity" (Wesley E.A. Crichlow's "Charting a Buller Man's Trinidadian Past" 125). Homosexuality, they argue, is more than just sex; it is also about identity in which ambiguity and contradiction become sites of constant negotiation that can possibly "enable new forms of social and cultural relations" ("Bullers and Battyemen" 93).

Overall, this anthology will be of great interest to students and general readers alike in courses of Caribbean studies, gender studies, and postcolonial theory; it fills a wide gap left out by traditional literary studies on Caribbean culture. It is a powerful manifesto that will actively engage students' minds in the discussion of gender roles and politics in classrooms today. At times readers can get the impression that for an egalitarian democracy, gay and lesbian writers might end up chasing a utopian dream of equality and acceptance. Yet it is a dream worthy to fight for, to cross the boundaries, and create new ways to embrace diversity. ✱

Fredric Jameson. *Jameson on Jameson: Conversations on Cultural Marxism*.
Ed. Ian Buchanan. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. 277p.

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Jameson on Jameson collects a series of interviews with this productive and provocative cultural critic and historical materialist. The contexts of these interviews are quite diverse, spanning three decades (the earliest was first published in 1982)

and engaging with scholars representing many political and cultural commitments worldwide. Most have been published before, but not necessarily in English or in the English-speaking world. The interview format is itself a unique means of engagement with Jameson's ideas and method, typically expressed in disciplined (some may call it "difficult") prose. In his introduction to this volume, "On Not Giving Interviews," Jameson explains that the imprecision of the interview may work at cross-purposes with his imperative to carefully create a new language in which human need—"the questions and problems—suddenly become[s] visible" (2). The interview form may lack this affective punch, valuable pedagogically as a kind of alienation effect (as in Brecht, among Jameson's claimed antecedents), but it does offer the reader an opportunity to watch the thinker think in something like real time, to respond to these questions and problems in a way that must be immediately credible. And given the breadth and scope of the interviews, the reader is also able not only to trace a historical development to Jameson's thinking, but also to see how that development responds to concrete and global conditions at the moment of the conversation.

For these reasons, *Jameson on Jameson* will be useful to scholars in need of accessible thematic and methodological introductions to Jameson's form of historical materialism and cultural studies. Further, the interviews do allow Jameson to explain some of his concepts in relation to each other and in contexts different from those they were first proposed to explain, such as any possible relationship between the political unconscious and the postmodern understood as an epiphenomenon of late capital, and to reflect on topical questions within the frame of the broader inquiry he is dedicated to. While the interviews open some older work for more nuanced interpretation (Jameson's comments on the relevance of Sartre and, perhaps surprisingly, Heidegger come to mind), this text is not a space in which Jameson introduces concepts that he has not developed elsewhere.

The final interview in this collection is a contemporary one. Here, Jameson's reflections on today's problems are couched not only in the preceding body of work but also a penetrating awareness of present theoretical and methodological discussions. Jameson understands Sergio Agamben's post-Foucaultian description of biopower, for instance, as an appropriate context for ecological praxis (if "bare life" is to be understood ecologically, as life among the living). In another instance, Jameson insists on the need for a "totalizing politics," that is, a methodological frame (such as globalization as late capital) in which cultural phenomena arise, echoing Paul Smith's admonition to continue hammering at the totality. This emphasis on methodological rigor strikes against a tendency in some forms of

cultural studies, perhaps the stereotypical form of cultural studies in the United States, in which the critic takes up one theoretical “tool” for this object and that “tool” for another one, swapping theories and theorists in and out like so many commodities or brand names. The final interview in the volume shows that Jameson’s values and methodology have remained relatively constant throughout his long career, even when writing on aesthetics or existentialism. This is an intellectual project with globally transformative ambitions. Even though significant cultural production and opportunities for radical politics in the global North have been largely foreclosed, “however sterile the first world may have become, there are all kinds of other places in which interesting tendencies are starting up, despite universal commodification. It’s a very exciting time,” Jameson concludes (240). ✱

David Huddart. *Postcolonial Theory and Autobiography*. London: Routledge, 2008. 199p.

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The purpose of this book is to analyze the use of the genre of autobiography in connection with the theory of postcolonialism. The author’s intentions are to break with misperceptions of autobiography as a way to reestablish western notions of civilization and culture. He examines how autobiography does not necessarily oppose or contradict the importance of social class, economic determination, and identity as studied by the Marxists and in particular established in works by Spivak, Derrida, Said, and Eagleton, among others. The book is divided into six chapters with a bibliography and index at the end. The first chapter is an introduction in which Huddart reviews several of the notions that entangle these two fields of study. Among them is the idea that the “self” is formed on the basis of preexisting languages of interpretation that will define it. These languages of interpretation also set up a kind of morality that will have to be followed. These are two of the reasons why Huddart embraces the term “life writing” instead of “autobiography,” considering, as other critics did before him, that the latter term refers to an ethnocentric, paternalistic, masculine, and Western perception of reality that undermines the fight for emancipation from the colonial mind.

Another very important idea is that, according to the author, postcolonial theory is filled with what he calls autobiographical moments, through which one can observe who is speaking or authorized to do so. He accepts the problem that autobiographies may be the fruit of different cultural, social, and economic impositions and acknowledges the criticism of postcolonialism made by Marxists

who see colonialism as a result of economic purpose. Nevertheless he sides with Edward Said and his analysis of memories as ultimately being representations of one's identity, customs, and beliefs.

In the second chapter, taking into consideration the writings of Said, Cixous, and Derrida, the author takes upon himself the task of "de-defining autobiography." He wants to establish the way in which an individual defines himself not only on the basis of his background and biographical circumstances but also in relation to the external forces that have influenced him throughout his existence. This is particularly perceptible in Said since, as Huddart explains, his writings are influenced, whether he wants it or not, by the postcolonial theories with which he is familiar. In that sense, Said has Derrida's and Foucault's theories as part of his writings regarding the complexity of the subject, the reading of modernity and the acquisition of knowledge.

The third chapter concerns the invention of the postcolonial author. Taking into consideration the writings of Barthes, Foucault, and Marx, Huddart accepts the description that these theorists give of the Western author. They move from the Middle Ages when the name of the writer was not as important as his mission, towards a more modern approach in which the author is identified with a name and almost with an all-knowing persona. This would be the case with Freud and Marx and the starting of new fields of expertise such as psychoanalysis and socialism. Nevertheless, for Huddart, the figure of the author in postcolonialism is found in Said's *Orientalism* as well as Molly Nesbit's affirmation of the continuous mobility and functionality of his existence. Contrary to the Western author, in postcolonialism, there seems not to be a need for the establishment as long as there is an intellectual who, in the words of Varadharajan, "can be at home with homelessness" (89).

In "Writing Spirits Autobiography," Huddart analyzes the deconstruction of the autobiography from Derrida's study of Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*, getting to several conclusions on how the reader and the present time become the point of view through which the writing is going to be observed and judged. A second thought is that autobiography, when considered from the point of view of postcolonial theory, needs to be open. In this respect Huddart applies the theory of psychoanalysis and how these assumptions cannot be studied from an absolute and established structure. Instead, one needs to keep in mind contingencies and changes in the individual that will also modify their application. Lastly, autobiography is seen as differentiating in the sense that it covers the interior of any context, but at the same time, the exterior reading depends less on the author than on how he will be perceived.

The last two chapters of the book—“Full Disclosure and the Native Informant in Postcolonial Theory” and “Singularity and Postcolonial Exemplarity”—conclude that the hiding of the subaltern voice in Spivak is deliberate and results in full disclosure of its views while maintaining a less confrontational approach. Moreover, the genre of autobiography not only introduces the theme of postcolonialism to a more literary world but also permeates all types of literary theory giving the reader a context and background in which to develop it.

Huddart’s work in general has to be considered a deep and multifaceted approach to the analysis of the role of autobiography in postcolonial theory. The connections he found between autobiography and some of the most important theorists of the twentieth century are extremely important. His deep and methodological analysis of the statements proposed by these different authors and sometimes their failure to recognize a genre such as autobiography as a fundamental influence in the creation of the literary account is significant. The expertise that Huddart shows in the field of postcolonial, Marxism, and deconstruction to demonstrate that what has been regarded as the white man’s premise to impose a view can be changed to reflect the life of the colonial in a more explicit and even powerful way. ✱

Alicia Kozameh. *Mano en vuelo*. Córdoba, Argentina: Alción Editora, 2009. 102p.

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Mano en vuelo is a deceptively slender, densely narrated volume packed with evocative images and compelling paradoxes. The searing, free verse poem can easily be perused in a single sitting; however, the complex, sensorial passages invite multiple readings in order to more fully grasp their intensity. The poem hints at exotic music, colorful attire, and desert landscapes. At the same time, it tells of pain, anguish, horror, and atrocity. While singing the beauty and elegance of flight, the poetic voices remain conscious that the journey will inevitably result in a tragic fall. *Mano en vuelo* is at the same time an extended soliloquy and a harmonious duet; the poem features two distinct voices that speak simultaneously and in parallel fashion. In this way, Kozameh’s melodious words evoke interdependence and symmetry both in the reciprocity of the narrating subjects and in their mutually dependent gazes. Perhaps Roberto Retamoso (Professor at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario and specialist in contemporary Argentine poetry) does not exaggerate when he eloquently writes in the book’s introductory comments of magic, of weightless words freed from specific referents and of allegorical readings.

The sustained metaphor alluded to in the title—a hand in flight—ultimately remains open to multiple interpretations.

The lyrical stanzas of *Mano en vuelo*, written entirely in the first person, serve as meditative reflections. Two discrete yet interrelated sections present dual perspectives. The poem opens with the intimate song of one who sees or witnesses violence but does not seem to be involved personally. This stunned voice directly addresses a hand in flight. The speaker, unable to look away, describes a gradual ascension. Images of graceful, rhythmic motion—birds flying, laundry swaying in the wind, dancers—replicate the soaring hand. Sensual descriptions abound: tactile, visual, and auditory. The speaker's initial urgency to give voice to what is seen gradually leads to increasing self-doubt. Interrogatives predominate as the poetic voice begins to question the ability to bear witness. The uneasy viewer, overcome by the sound of screams, confesses a sense of exclusion. In the end, the defeated narrator recognizes an inability to define, explain, or resolve what has been seen and ceases to speak.

This breakdown elicits a change in narrative voice. No longer described from the perspective of the witness, the flight is now reported directly from the one previously under observation. The hand soars peacefully even as it anticipates an impending fall. Consequently, the poetic language features an overwhelming number of fervent negations. The opening words, a direct address to the witness and the reader—“no me miren ustedes, todos, no me miren, no miren lo que soy” [“don't watch me, you all, don't look at me, don't see what I am”] (42; translation mine)—entreat all who might watch to look away. Filled with admonitions and negations, the remainder of the poem attests to what the narrator is not doing: “...no miro. No veo ni percibo, no miro...” [“...I do not watch. I neither see nor perceive, I do not watch...”] (85). Ultimately, this second poetic voice cedes the act of narration despite knowing that the witness has been left stupefied and mute. *Mano en vuelo* culminates in serene dissolution. The tremendous effort of flight exhausts and depletes the delicate hand that is likened to a grain of salt, a gust of wind, and a swirl of smoke (100) before its final disintegration and disappearance.

This compact volume, Alicia Kozameh's first published book of poetry, follows a successful trajectory of narrative texts. Previous works, including the novels *Pasos bajo el agua* (1987), *Patas de avestruz* (1988), *259 Saltos, uno inmortal* (2001), and *Basse danse* (2007), have treated diverse themes including political imprisonment, exile, and the protagonists' compulsive writing endeavors. Paradoxically, while *Mano en vuelo* appears to depart from these more explicitly referential narratives (as indicated by Retamoso), one could also argue that the lyrical text in fact continues the trend toward increasing abstraction evident in Kozameh's oeuvre. As the author

states in an interview with Chiara Bolognese (a postdoctoral fellow with the CRLA archives in France), when writing about politics she tends to avoid direct testimony, opting for fictionalizations and metaphors. (The 2008 interview is available online: <http://www.mshs.univ-poitiers.fr/crla/contenidos/ALICIA%20KOZAMEH/Presentation/Presentacion.html>.) *Mano en vuelo*, inspired by the author's disquiet with the invasion of Iraq, offers no explicit interpretation for the image of the hand in flight. However, with repetitions of the word *testigo* or witness, a focus on the (fragmented) body, resounding screams, and the eventual disappearance of the narrating subject it is difficult not to undertake a political reading. The image of the hand—whether understood as a literal representation of a body blown apart or as a complex, figurative trope—instills a sense of urgency. Similarly, the poem can be understood as a specific response to US aggression in the Middle East or as a more universal repudiation of political violence. For this reader at least, *Mano en vuelo* inevitably evokes images of the infamous death flights that took place during the last dictatorship in Argentina.

At the same time, and likewise in keeping with much of Kozameh's previous writing, *Mano en vuelo* incorporates metafictional comments on the creative process itself. In fact, one could interpret the hand in flight as a metaphor for an artist, perhaps Kozameh's alter ego, immersed in the creative act. Even as the written word takes wing, the text offers a direct challenge to the witness (that is, the reader, and by extension, the literary critic) to interpret and explain: "Que diga. Que sepa qué decir. Que explique cada línea" ["Let (the witness) speak. Let them know what to say. Let them explain each line"] (99). The text exposes the fact that there is a (counter-poetic) violence committed in presuming to comprehend and to dare to make accessible the symbolic imagery produced by another.

The original handwritten manuscript of *Mano en vuelo*, together with its subsequent revisions, has been donated by the author to the CRLA (Centre de Recherches Latino-Américaines-Archivos). Kozameh was unable and unwilling to grant a request to sacrifice her cherished prison diaries filled with poems, drawings, texts, and personal letters written while incarcerated; these pages demonstrate the power of creative expression under a repressive regime. Kozameh instead offered this work, which she also holds in particularly high esteem. The manuscript, together with her diaries, has subsequently been digitalized. An English version of the poem, titled *Hand in Flight* and translated by Clare E. Sullivan, is already available in *Golden Handcuffs Review* 1.10 (Summer-Fall 2008): 194-217. Finally, an audio file of the author reading from *Mano en vuelo* for a radio station in Rosario, Argentina can currently be accessed on the internet: http://mtqn.podomatic.com/entry/2009-06-05T08_03_35-07_00.*

Laurence Urdang. *The Last Word - The English Language: Opinions and Prejudices*. Detroit: OmniData, 2008. 281p.

FELICE COLES
UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Laurence Urdang is a respected lexicographer who has researched and compiled dictionaries in the U.S. and Great Britain since the 1960s. His latest work, *The Last Word*, however, reads like a laundry list of complaints about the decay of the English language. The reader should not be surprised, given the subtitle of “Opinions and Prejudices,” but it is difficult to reconcile the bitter tone of the volume with the author’s stated purpose: “my goal was to provide those who like the subject of language ... enough here to satisfy their interest” (xii). The selection of chapters seems broad enough to fulfill this desire, but within each essay is a not-so-subtle invective on “the general decline in quality” (xv) of the English language. Urdang, as a self-identified “linguist,” engages in what he calls “nit-picking” (xvii) in order to highlight “a lack of attention, care, or knowledge” (xvii) of modern publishers, students, and writers. Following Steven Pinker’s classification of “language mavens” in his 1994 book, *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* (371), Urdang may be categorized as a somewhat more testy “wordwatcher” who examines “especially capricious eccentric and poorly documented words and idioms that get sighted from time to time” (383), or a less vicious “Jeremiah,” writing “bitter laments and righteous prophecies of doom” (385). While Urdang’s examples may be entertaining for some, others will find the negative tone and ceaseless abrogations wearying after a few chapters.

The reader would be well served to read at one time only a couple of chapters linked by topic. If the reader is interested in the decline of the English language, start with Chapter 1, “Language Change,” which concentrates on neologisms and mismatches in concord with subject-verb and pronoun gender reference. Urdang mentions that some changes in language are good: “one of the most obvious needs for neologisms is for the naming of devices, things, and ideas that are new” (2); but he but spends far more time on “the darker side of change” (7) in the examination of potentially offensive terms and problematic expressions, such as “There’s three men on base” (7). Next, move to Chapter 8, “Good English/Bad English,” a survey of the most common English “errors” in grammar (“Who are you voting for?”), usage (“infer” vs. “imply”), metaphors (“red herrings around our necks”) and word order (“The end of the story can only be written by you”). Pages are devoted to the subjunctive, singular vs. plural, the sequence of tenses and other “annoyances.” Continuing to Chapter 10, “Bad Writing, Taste, Discrimination,” the reader will find a dense and detailed account of mistakes and carelessness in

word choice, spelling, and grammar by journalists. Urdang's lament here is that writing can indeed be identified as "good," "bad" or "mediocre," if educators would provide enough literature to school children to prove it (172), but most teachers are incapable of recognizing high-quality writing themselves. Chapter 4, "Words and Expressions," is a compilation of anecdotes to show how some of today's English speakers "haven't the slightest idea of what they are talking (or writing) about" (66) by providing amusing examples of misplaced modifiers, unusual punctuation, and nonstandard word choice.

For those readers who like etymology, Chapter 2, "Word Origins," tackles interesting and improbable etymologies (15), exhorting writers "to heed the distinctions in nuance" (28) of Germanic and Latinate derived words as well as borrowings and calques. A similar topic is discussed in Chapter 3, "Meaning," which briefly contrasts denotation and connotation and provides many humorous real world examples of ambiguity and puns in an effort to advise writers to "be aware of the most common use of a word or phrase, for the innocent misapplication ... in an unexpected context can have a ludicrous result" (32).

Chapter 6, "Names," masquerades as an amusing trip through the origins of surnames, nicknames and products but concludes again with the complaint that the unscientific study of names renders future generations "expert in popular culture" but knowing "little or anything about 'real' culture, the true foundations of modern cultivated society" (102). Similarly, Chapter 5, "Language and Culture and Language," offers the viewpoint that modern education is lacking in foreign language studies, philosophy, and literature, to leave America with "a legacy of semi-literates" (88).

Chapter 7, "Feminist and Politically Correct Language," contains a three-page excerpt from Urdang's earlier review of *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing*, in which the author chides others for giving equal treatment to "perfectly legitimate objects to sexist prejudice alongside silly trivialities" (107). Urdang's quite reasonable point embedded in his diatribe is that grammatical gender should not be confused with natural gender.

For historical information, Chapter 9, "Taboo, Slang, Informal, and Colloquial Language," narrates the author's long history of compiling vocabulary for dictionaries, commenting on the ways in which lexicographers decide how to include or exclude items. Chapter 12, "Controversy and Dictionaries," examines the difficulties in compiling a dictionary: the issues of obsolescing words, how to indicate pronunciation, and reflexes of a lexical item (take, took, taking, taken). The chapter ends with Urdang's usual advice: a dictionary is a useful tool and "speakers and writers would be well advised to improve their speech and writing

by checking the book now and then” (199). Chapter 13, “Computers,” narrates Urdang’s history of preparing dictionaries using the technological advances of the 1960s (punched paper tape), 1970s (diskettes), and 1980s (the mainframe).

Chapter 14, “Pronunciation,” embarks upon a comparison of dialect differences of American vs. British English, along with a perusal of how foreign names are pronounced in the Broadcast English of both countries. The chapter ends with a note on spelling conventions and pronunciations, with a poem on this matter in the appendix. Chapter 11, “Spelling Reform,” is a brief foray into the traditions and origins of English spelling.

It is somewhat difficult to read this volume all the way through, due to its tone of dissatisfaction with modern English speakers, but taken in small doses, the book makes interesting and valid points. Urdang’s historical knowledge and the quantity of examples from his professional life almost overcome the curmudgeonly exercise of his opinions. ✱





