

## Book Reviews

*Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics.* By Sharon Rose Wilson. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1993. Pp. xviii, 430. \$37.50.

Wilson's is a provocative and useful book, a stand-out within the flourishing "Atwood industry" that has developed around the work of Margaret Atwood over the past few years as American scholars, and particularly American feminists, have discovered her work. In exploring Atwood's habitual use of folk- and fairy-tale themes and motifs, and particularly her dependence upon the Grimm Brothers' versions of these ancient and variable narratives, Wilson succeeds in offering readers a fresh and productive way into Atwood's texts. At the same time she challenges contemporary attitudes toward fairy tales themselves, which are so often maligned (especially by feminists) as repositories of negative stereotypes that are "bad for women" (11). On the contrary, Wilson sees fairy tales as frequently beautiful and inspiring in themselves, and as remarkably versatile tools for the illumination of human potential, especially that of women in our own time—provided these narratives are used as they should be, which is to say subversively.

Wilson begins with the assumption that Atwood is not a "comedy-of-manners" or even a realist writer primarily. Rather, she should be seen as a "fabulist," a kind of "magic realist" in whose work unreal elements (dreams, myths, fairy tales) combine in kaleidoscopic patterns and in reflexive ways with the realistic details of everyday life that form the narrative backbone of her texts (3). Her most frequent allusions are to a particular body of fairy-tale narratives, among them "Fitcher's Bird" ("Bluebeard"), "The Juniper Tree," "The Robber Bridegroom," "The White Snake," "The Littlest Mermaid," "The Red Shoes," "The Snow Queen," and "Little Red Cap." These stories function as intertexts within Atwood's larger narratives and are used (sometimes paradoxically, sometimes deconstructively, always obliquely) to interrogate the cultural

"givens" which threaten to strangle the inner lives of her female characters.

Wilson sees Atwood's poetry and fiction, then, as politicized around the issue of gender, and acknowledges that it would be easy to read her fairy-tale allusions as negative, for they most frequently involve images of cannibalism and the dismemberment of female bodies. Yet Atwood's "archetype" (or characteristic pattern of use) is inherently positive, Wilson argues, for it typically entails movement from a dramatized or ritualized dismemberment of some sort through metamorphosis to healing (xii). Her approach is recuperative in another way as well, for as a "feminist post-colonialist" (28), Atwood tends to work with marginalized or inappropriately-disempowered fairy-tale figures as a way of highlighting or modelling the recovery of silenced voices that her work points toward.

The "Medusa witch" is a case in point (and a beautifully ironical one, given Atwood's own frequent characterization in the popular press as a Medusa/Gorgon figure, with her unruly hair, her acerbic tongue and her allegedly-pitiless basilisk eye). The pre-patriarchal Medusa was a positive artist-figure, a part of the creative and procreative Triple Goddess of ancient myth. Atwood's most typical protagonist, says Wilson, is the woman artist who is riven by traditional and erroneous assumptions that the roles of "woman" and "artist" cannot be conflated, by the assumption (often internalized) that to choose art is choose to reject or devour men. Healing in Atwood's paradigm can come only through embracing that Medusa/artist function as positive, as life-giving, as the route to rebirth.

It is not that Atwood's texts are pat or offer easy resolutions, says Wilson. Her work, in typical postmodern fashion, tends to abjure closure; indeed, it is the reader rather than the character, frequently, who constructs resolutions, extra-textually. What Atwood does, however, is ask disturbing questions about hierarchies of dominance and submission—most often through the cross-hatching of fairy-tale threads with real-world referentiality in the panoptical imaginative space that is her distinctive literary terrain.

One of the most interesting sections of Wilson's book is its work with Atwood's visual art. Wilson includes a substantial selection of Atwood's watercolors, drawings and collages (21 full-color plates and a further 12 black-and-white figures)—some of which are cover designs or illustrations for her books and others which are more private productions.

Pictures such as "Fitcher's Bird," "Termite Queen," and "The Weremen" support Wilson's contention that Atwood's imagination is infused with the fairy-tale elements that emerge in her writing. Others, however, like "Mary, Queen of Scots II," "Frankenstein I," or "Moodie in the Wilderness" point to a clearly gothic component of Atwood's sensibility, a constituency which Wilson fails to address very fully in dealing with Atwood's vision.

Wilson's weakness in addressing "the Gothic," or in identifying Atwood's particular use of fairy-tale references as part of the larger landscape of gothicism, is one of the limitations of her text, and there are others. Her readings of individual works can be sketchy, as in the case of *Cat's Eye*, where her discussion of Rapunzel and Snow Queen motifs as informing this text is so attenuated to be unconvincing. She has undoubtedly taken on too much in attempting to discuss all 27 of the Atwood books published to date, as well as her visual art, even in a book of nearly 500 pages.

Nonetheless I am inclined to forgive Wilson for not producing comprehensive textual readings in light of what she offers instead—the fruits of her own admirable erudition (including a comprehensive appendix listing, by type, all of the fairy-tale and folklore motifs that Atwood employs) and a number of fresh insights into Atwood's writing. If she leaves her readers with considerable work to do after they have finished her book, that may be for the best. So much contemporary literary criticism seems to work in the direction of closing down discussion, of attempting to apply a rigid critical template that will pin literary texts squirming to the board for once and for all. Wilson's study, on the other hand, is admirable for the way it *opens* Atwood's texts and raises *questions* about them, so as to *engage* the reader in further inquiry. It is the difference between presenting "a new reading of the Atwood canon" as Wilson promises (xv), and insisting upon a single closed reading that would end critical dialogue, as more obdurate literary critics tend to do.

*Michael Ondaatje*. By Douglas Barbour. Twayne's World Authors Series. New York: Twayne, 1993. Pp. xiv, 247. \$22.95.

Barbour's study, in the tradition of other titles in *TWAS*, provides a solid introduction to Ondaatje's oeuvre, offering fresh, persuasive readings of all of the major works, and simultaneously reflecting Barbour's familiarity with the corpus of Ondaatje criticism to date. The volume includes a biographical chronology, a comprehensive bibliography and generous endnotes that reflect the author's familiarity with various critical contexts. More importantly, Barbour addresses the full range of Ondaatje's poetry more thoroughly than other studies have done; in addition to full chapters on the novels and longer works like *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Running in the Family*, Barbour devotes two chapters to Ondaatje's short poems (including a discussion of *the man with seven toes*), and a full chapter to the verse-novel, *Secular Love*. Unfortunately, Ondaatje's most recent novel, *The English Patient*—which garnered international acclaim by winning the 1992 Governor General's Award and Booker Prize—appeared as this study was going to print, and consequently is discussed with comparative brevity in an Afterword.

The text is ordered chronologically, with a chapter for each major publication. Barbour's introductory chapter contextualizes these analyses in an overall pattern of Ondaatje's career as a progression from an essentially modernist stance in his earliest poetry, and through post-modernism to, finally, a more postcolonial agenda that emerges in the 1980s. Aware of the obscurity that accompanies these terms, Barbour defines his sense of each, beginning with the symbolist-modernist tradition exemplified by Wallace Stevens, and then describing the paradoxical, fragmentary (or "novelized") nature of a more postmodern "poetics of indeterminacy" (6-7). When applied to a writer with Ondaatje's capacity for ambiguity and contradiction, this representation is not without its difficulties, as Barbour is aware. Despite the value of this model in helping to describe some of the fundamental changes in Ondaatje's writing over the years, Barbour rightly acknowledges its limitations throughout his study. Early in Ondaatje's career, it appears that the length or form of his works have as much to do with their nature as the dates of their creation; Barbour argues that

[Ondaatje] begins as a writer in the Stevens tradition, as a modernist lyricist, and generally remains true to that tradition in his shorter poems before *Secular Love*.

In his longer works, Ondaatje . . . becomes a specifically postmodern writer. (6)

As he discusses the short poems in the following chapter, however, this categorization is at least partially undermined when Barbour notes that Ondaatje's first collection of poems is "on the boundary between modernism and postmodernism, as one poem can remain determinedly modernist while the next slips quietly into a postmodern mode" (11). Evading a simple chronological development from mode to mode, Ondaatje's work reveals modernism and postmodernism, postmodernism and postcolonialism in an often contradictory or ambiguous co-existence. Discussing Ondaatje's shift to a more postcolonial sensibility, Barbour notes how postmodern ambivalence and contradiction undermine efforts to ascribe specific postcolonial values to Ondaatje himself. Writing of the incorporation of another poet's "defiantly postcolonial" poem into *Running in the Family*, Barbour argues that the "single-minded political agenda" of poem itself is "too monologic for [Ondaatje's] text, yet its presence in it adds another voice to the dialogic collage it is becoming" (146). This moment seems emblematic of the role of postcolonialism in Ondaatje's writing as a whole, where it assumes a place within a chorus of competing voices. Ultimately, Barbour's discussion foregrounds his understanding that Ondaatje's writing evades easy conclusions; while this writing invariably "betrays a confused ideology, its power lies in its ability to express the variety of stances to be found in any society, not as arguments but as visceral gestures . . ." (205).

To his credit, then, Barbour never allows this theoretical framework to stifle his own exploration of the richness and power of his subject, preferring to partake in "a reading of a series of poetic writings in which the engagement with language in its microparticulars tends to be foregrounded in the texts, and in [his] readings of them" (9). As such, this study has few faults. There are moments, especially early in the book, when Barbour's use of other secondary texts becomes intrusive. His discussion of Ondaatje's early poetry, for instance, leans rather heavily on a review of the poems' critical reception, and on J. E. Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols*. This tends to make Barbour's research unnecessar-

ily weighty at times, especially given his own proficiency as a critic. However, this is a minor complaint. On the whole, Barbour's comments reflect his adroitness as a close reader; eschewing generalization, his analyses are detailed and always connect with Ondaatje's work in intimate ways, at times working through passages or poems line by line. At this level, Barbour demonstrates great sensitivity to "language in its microparticulars," convincingly explicating the linguistic gestures (including syntactic ambiguity, omission, parataxis, etc.) that characterize the power of Ondaatje's poetic language.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this study is in Barbour's ability to remain open to the definitive indeterminacy of Ondaatje's work. As a critic, Barbour admires the paradoxes, gaps and overlapping voices of Ondaatje's oeuvre. Rather than giving in to the temptation of reductionist interpretation, Barbour resists interpretive closure at the same time as he recognizes the energetic openness of his subject, allowing tension and ambiguity to prevail even as he skilfully surveys their sources and implications:

Finally, what I come back to, again and again, is the ever-changing yet always engaging energy of the writing itself, and the fact that because I can't fix either the characters or the text within a single generic focus or a particular kind of reading, they remain in flux, evading explanation, yes, but singing a siren song of empathy I cannot resist. (135)

*Dalhousie University*

*Michael Greene*

*Satire and Sentiment: 1660-1830.* By Claude Rawson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994. Pp. xviii, 309. \$64.95.

Claude Rawson describes his aim in this book as follows: "to capture and analyse stress points, rather than to provide a progressive narrative" (xiii). A glance at the "Acknowledgements," however, suggests that what one really has here is a collection of book reviews with some longer essays added. That much of the material has already been published elsewhere, a fact that usually puts book publishers off a manuscript, did not deter Cambridge from going ahead with this book. Why? Probably because

Claude Rawson has a reputation for being one of the premier critics in eighteenth-century studies, something of a Hector in his field who was able to flee the UK for better opportunities in the US and now occupies a special chair at Yale. The more important question is whether *Satire and Sentiment* adds significantly to eighteenth-century scholarship.

The case for this book has to do with the strength of Rawson's individuality as a critic, which can be seen in the rhetorical flashes of his language and the unfettered methodology of his approach to literary issues. The flashes are exactly of the nature that copyeditors would never tolerate from lesser known writers (which is something of a pity, but that alas is another subject). The climax of Oldham's "Sardanapalus" is referred to as a ". . . Disneyan fantasia of priapic rocketry . . . played out against a decor of heavy baroque ornamentation" (18); Boswell is said to have a "proneness to erotomanic bizzareries" (227), and Thomas Moore's "Melodies," while not exactly "hymning harmonious Houyhnhnm through the nose," were performed by the author himself "like a drawing-room Bob Dylan" (259). Academic discourse, laden as it is with the conventional terminology of critical theory, could use more of this color. Rawson is also one of the few critics not to shy from using a passage from Yeats, Eliot, or Flaubert to illuminate an eighteenth-century English text. This kind of cross-referencing dares to break the Pavlovian adherence to the ideals of historicization (all too familiar at the moment) and allows for subtle yet economic commentary.

As far as methodology is concerned, the book shows vintage Rawson sense and sensibility—nothing wrong with that. One even escapes the token salutes to Foucault that creep into so much current criticism. This is not to suggest that Rawson is here working in a contextual vacuum; his essay on Austen draws heavily on the work of Norman Page, and there is other evidence of building on previous scholarship (e.g., Paul Fussell). On the other hand, the chapter, actually two, on the mock-heroic and war might have included a reference to my own study (*The Grotesque Depiction of War and the Military*, 1990) if, for no other reason, than that Rawson follows very similar lines of argument. He may have been ignorant of the book but his references do suggest that he was still researching the topic as late as 1992. In any case, the mock-heroic essays involve a wealth of classical learning, and Rawson's conclusions seem to strike the correct chords. The best material in the collection comes in the

longer chapters; in addition to the mock-heroic analysis, other notable parts include "Revolution in the moral wardrobe" (on Burke), the Boswell chapters and the discussion of *Persuasion*. As general editor of the Boswell Papers, Rawson is well-qualified to offer opinions on how we should understand "the endlessly opinionated chatterbox we all know and some people love" (246). But some of these extended sections are too long—one travels a distance between significant points in "Revolution in the moral wardrobe."

The case against *Satire and Sentiment* has to do with the inclusion of some of the chapters. Aside from the opening piece on Rochester, the review-essays seem thin set beside the better and more substantial analyses. One expects more from a critic like Rawson. Fine as reviews for a general reader, the short chapters on Addison and Steele and another on Richardson offer little that is new to eighteenth-century scholars. Stress points? Hardly—they only detract from the collection, and one wonders if ego got the better of editorial control. Even the *Persuasion* essay is basically a reprint of Rawson's "Preface" to the Oxford World Classics edition. Couldn't the volume have been 30 pages shorter?

One wonders if Cambridge, who launched its special "Eighteenth-Century Literature and Thought" series some years ago, a series that contains many excellent volumes, will produce more collections like this one. There are some excellent flash points in Rawson's book and one reads them with great excitement, but there are dull moments as well that must be patiently endured. Perhaps a little more editorial participation would have prevented the latter; then again, perhaps the Claude Rawsons in our midst should be left alone. After all it is understandable that we pay some price to get away from the mobbing conventionality that now characterizes our profession.

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David McNeil



*Narrating Discovery: the Romantic Explorer in American Literature, 1790-1855.* By Bruce Greenfield. New York: Columbia UP, 1992. Pp. x, 249. \$36.50.

While *Narrating Discovery's* main focus is to describe how a colonialist "rhetoric of nature" underlies nineteenth-century American romanticism, Bruce Greenfield's initial discussion of eighteenth-century exploration narratives has important implications for a variety of scholarly interests, including contemporary postcolonial studies. Heretofore marginalized categories of exploration and travel narratives have benefited from the many recent critical discussions which have analysed colonialism and the imperialist practices that have helped shape world literatures. However, despite Europe's long history of expansionist practices, including exploration and mercantile trading, the majority of postcolonial critics have settled on contemporary writers as the objects of their study. While the past has not been ignored, it has often been swept under a general rubric of "imperialism," and in *Narrating Discovery* Bruce Greenfield argues that even critics discussing early American literature have conveniently forgotten much of its history:

it has not been common practice to understand even the early national period of American literature in terms of its continuities with colonial practices. These are rejected, in fact, as part of the European past, a past that threatens the new nation's primitive engagement with nature and its organic expansion into American space. (10)

Greenfield argues that "American literary romanticism flourished and matured during the era of the nation's greatest territorial expansion and Euro-Americans' most extensive use of force against the original inhabitants of those territories" (2), yet critics such as R. W. B. Lewis (in *The American Adam* [1955]) have represented these "territories" as "spacious," "unbounded" and "an area of total possibility" (6). In fact, Lewis's themes are restatements of how the explorers and early fiction writers themselves perceived the territory.

Greenfield critically examines American romanticism by providing close readings of exploration and travel narratives and ends with considerations of fiction (Edgar Allen Poe) and philosophy (Henry David Thoreau). *Narrating Discovery* begins with works by British explorers

travelling in what is now Canada: the eighteenth-century explorers/traders Samuel Hearne, Alexander Mackenzie and Alexander Henry all participated in commercial trading ventures which involved co-operation with existing native populations. In chapter two ("Early Western Travels and the American Self") Greenfield discusses Lewis and Clark, Zebulon Pike and John Charles Fremont, who he argues were the first explorers to articulate a self-consciously American identity which began to erase indigenous peoples. Hearne, Henry and Mackenzie "deal with New World lands that are sparsely populated and subject to the imperial attentions of British commerce," and perhaps because "there is no suggestion that the regions travelled through will see many more Europeans in the foreseeable future," they "openly acknowledge the resident populations of the areas through which they travel, and they rely on their help in order to survive" (72). In contrast,

American western narratives of the first half of the nineteenth century begin to project a different relationship with the lands through which their writers travelled, and we can see in them some of the changes in thinking that led to a sense of the frontier as the threshold of an unbounded region of "virgin land" in which individual Americans could operate more or less freely. . . . Somehow . . . Indians were no longer a part of what was discovered in America, and the far western lands, despite their dramatic, difficult, or downright alienating topography were immanently part of the "America" these travellers brought with them. (77)

The nineteenth-century American traveller/explorer generally came from a "relatively privileged position," and "they all took their travels at the behest and expense of the United States government, the primary reason for their entering unknown territory being the execution of government policy, not the pursuit of personal or commercial goals" (78). The explorer becomes both a civil servant, who exerts a definable governmental presence in the new lands, and an entrepreneur, who often returns to the land and profits from it as settlers travel west.

The American romanticism of the nineteenth century is generally regarded as the first period in which a genuine American literary identity is articulated and Greenfield traces the structure of this identity to Americans' relationship with their landscape. Perhaps the most original and suggestive parts of the book come in the final chapter where he

claims that writers such as Melville, Poe and Thoreau, traditionally regarded as critical of American territorial expansion, in fact attempted to

adapt literary narrative to the transcendental formula for American self-realization that Emerson had articulated. They . . . describe as events the processes of transcending the whole history of conflict and exploitation that figured as part of the discovery of the Americas and that now loomed as an obstacle to a secure American identity. (186)

Greenfield's reading of "transcendentalism" through the explorer's colonial representation of the land is a potentially powerful way of understanding the American creation of selfhood. American "rugged individualism," combined with myopic mythmaking, ensured that for over two centuries, from Lewis and Clark through to Thoreau and beyond, Euro-Americans imagined a vacant landscape over which they repeatedly "discovered" themselves.

Overall, *Narrating Discovery* is a thoughtful and productive examination of American romanticism's discursive background, though I have two minor criticisms which do not diminish its value. When discussing the explorers' works Greenfield too easily assumes them to be realist narratives and their narrators to be "individuals" who "connect daily experience to conscious intentions and goals" (18). I would argue that in the published accounts, the "daily experience" has been overdetermined by a series of textual agents and actions. For example, Samuel Hearne spent over 20 years rewriting his journals and ultimately finished after he had returned to England, Alexander Henry took 40 to publish his *Travels and Adventures in Canada*, and Alexander Mackenzie's journals were radically revised and expanded by William Combe. The "narrators" of these publications are produced through a complex of cultural and textual events only a portion of which are the historical "daily experience" of the original journey.

Finally, some of Greenfield's conclusions do not do justice to the strength of material presented throughout the book. His reading of transcendentalism and the romantic explorer has a great deal to say about the political and mythical construction of what is now called the "United States," but his own summary is disappointingly general. When compar-

ing Thoreau's "discovery" narratives to those of contemporary explorers, Greenfield states that in the latter,

the economic and political reasons for obscuring the Indianness of the land are fairly evident in the official goals of the expeditions. Although Thoreau's intentions seem more complex, the powerful appeal of his rhetoric of first contact suggests that for nineteenth-century Americans and, I suggest, for later North Americans his vision of discovery was another energizing simplification of America's history of commerce and conflict. (201)

The acts of erasing lands and peoples, and replacing them with a "virgin territory," whose exploitation is rationalized by myths of American progress towards selfhood, deserves to be characterized more strongly than as an "energizing simplification." Greenfield's argument throughout the book would be strengthened by more specific examples of the "history of commerce and conflict" to which he frequently alludes. Notwithstanding these minor objections, *Narrating Discovery* is an important and provocative book, one that is rich enough in detail to provide a fertile ground for further studies.

McMaster University

Edward Parkinson

*Wordsworth, Dialogics and the Practice of Criticism.* By Don H. Bialostosky. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. Pp. xxvii, 288. \$54.95.

In *Wordsworth, Dialogics and the Practice of Criticism*, Don Bialostosky continues the effort he began in his first book, *Making Tales*, to displace Coleridge from the centre of Romantic post-Romantic critical authority, and to replace him with Wordsworth. Bialostosky argues that Wordsworth's poetry and poetics delivers a less transcendent and consoling, more challenging and liberating message than generations of critics, following Coleridge's lead, have thought. Once rescued from Coleridgean misconstruals and misconstructions, the Wordsworthian system might provide a means of addressing some of the most pressing questions, and bridging some of the most gaping rifts, theoretical and pedagogical, in the academy today. Thus, not content to stay within the specialized realm of

Romantic studies, Bialostosky's book engages in a "re-examination of the literary enterprise and of Wordsworth as a founder and continuing object of that enterprise" (xviii).

For Bialostosky, Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* articulates a view of poetry as "a pleasurable verbal and cultural practice that self-consciously cultivates powers inherent in . . . ordinary verbal and cultural experience," and is "not dependent upon special poetic faculties and their 'magical' or god-like powers" (37). Hence it could/should serve as the basis of a "democratic and demystified common critical enterprise" (48) in which the cooperative exercise of discursive power might replace prescriptive pronouncements, logomachy, coercion and intimidation. Essentially, Bialostosky sees Wordsworth as a practitioner and theorist of a Bakhtinian dialogized poetics aligned around shared speech rather than aesthetic artifice, transcendent imagination or arcane symbols, a system for which he finds precursors in classical and eighteenth-century rhetoric (from Gorgias to Blair and Beattie), as well as in the self-conscious, serio-comic poetics of Chaucer, and the pragmatic, political, progressive intellectual enterprise of Bacon. But Bialostosky is not chiefly interested in the genealogy of this Wordsworthian rhetorical tradition, for which he merely sketches out a "partial and perhaps somewhat idiosyncratic reading list" (39). Rather his primary concern is to show how it illuminates Wordsworth's poetry, and could revolutionize contemporary critical practice. Thus he focusses on canonical and lyric poems that have been at the centre of critical discussion, such as "The Solitary Reaper" and the first book of *The Prelude*. Bialostosky illuminates these anew by reading them dialogically, as utterances of speakers responding to other speakers rather than as symbolic messages or glimpses of transcendence. And the way in which he does so constitutes an intervention in critical debate on Wordsworth, and a reconceptualization of critical debate in general.

Bialostosky self-consciously experiments with a new critical genre and tone. Not content with simply articulating and applying a theory, he attempts to demystify, democratize and dialogize his own critical practice by opening his text to an imagined multiplicity of voices: the voices of his own self-critiques and revisions, the voices of the scholarly community past and present, the voices of the classroom. He speaks in and draws attention to his own voice throughout the chapter, continually reflecting upon, historicizing and critiquing his subjective responses and personal

critical affiliations. In a section of chapter two, for instance, entitled "Confessions of an American Coleridge Displacer," he theorizes Wordsworth's democratic system in the form of a personal narrative of the reception of his earlier publications on the topic. The textual analysis in the middle chapters takes a dialogic form, as Bialostosky's own readings emerge and grow, are defined and tested, in response to and counteraction to the readings of others, in a much more active way than the usual citation of sources. For example, after showing how "The Sailor's Mother" is illuminated by reading dialogically, Bialostosky imagines McGann's criticizing his reading, and then answers the imagined criticism, carefully differentiating dialogic from ideological interpretation. A chapter on Wordsworth's sonnets takes the form of a symposium, in which Bialostosky collects a group of essays representative of various theoretical camps which deal with those sonnets, reads them intertextually, and inserts himself into the collection, organizing, selecting and commenting critically on them in order to articulate, defend and clarify his own position. His chapter on "Social Action in 'The Solitary Reaper'" is exemplary of his method throughout the book: at the centre of the chapter is a solid careful dialogic reading of the poem, but around and through that reading are acknowledgments of and meditations upon the other readings that have provoked, influenced, enabled and critiqued it, and that provide a necessary context for the theory that Bialostosky is building upon the poem. Thus the book fully reflects Bialostosky's assertion that the critic is responsible to engage not only with the text, but with the community of reading and teaching.

And this community includes not simply scholars but also students: one of the most pleasing aspects of this study is that it relates poetics to pedagogy in way that is faithful both to Wordsworth's own interests and to Bialostosky's commitment to "reading as a social act." In the introduction to his book, Bialostosky issues a call to develop poetics and a pedagogy that will call out and exercise the student's own powers and pleasures rather than subduing or humbling them before the dominion of the poet, teacher or critic. According to Bialostosky, Wordsworth's Prefaces advocate a similar co-operative venture, though this has been obscured by the attempts of generations of Coleridgean critics. The pedagogical orientation is reflected particularly in the two final chapters of the book. One of these takes the form of another symposium, in which

he tests the theoretical commitments of various critics against their pedagogical practice; the other pits Wordsworth against Allan Bloom in a debate over the form, function and future of liberal education.

Its anti-elitist, practical orientation, its mixing of theory and textual analysis, scholarship and pedagogy, makes this book both appealing and important. Bialostosky's call for critics to be aware of and responsible to not just the text but one another, their students and society, is healthy, and in his own attempt to break the mould of the isolated "New Critical" scholarly essay, and to replace it with the symposium, he provides a model for doing so. Furthermore, that model works: the book goes to the heart of central issues in Wordsworth studies, summarizes and responds to the chief critical developments, and relates them to broader issues of the state of literature and criticism at the present time, without losing sight of the poetry, of which it offers perceptive and provocative readings.

If there is a criticism to make of Bialostosky's experimental text, it is that in his persistent self-consciousness, his desire to historicize himself and others, to include and respond to all other points of view, he frequently becomes long-winded, ponderous and repetitive. It may be irresponsible to engage only with the text and, but it is also more efficient. Furthermore, while his tone is at times refreshingly honest, personal and open, it is at other times irritatingly apologetic, self-defensive and coy. He spends so long situating himself, declaring his allegiances, qualifying his arguments and trying to avoid sounding absolutist, prescriptive or offensive, that I found myself longing for him to just come out with it, and stop all the humming and hawing.

Bialostosky acknowledges his longwindedness, begging the indulgence of a friendly reader even as Wordsworth himself does in *The Prelude*. Indeed, with its qualifications and tentations, its intense self-consciousness, its digressions, its sometimes anxious awareness of the competing claims and voices of language and history, self and others, Bialostosky's dialogic method is remarkably reminiscent of the discursive strategies Wordsworth himself used. This helps to substantiate Bialostosky's claim for the essentially dialogic nature of Wordsworth's work. And finally, perhaps, this is the greatest point of this book: that it speaks to and illuminates the multiple voices of Wordsworth that too many other critics

have ignored in their quest to reduce him to an ideologue, a transcendent genius, a consoling humanist, or a straw man for their pet theories.

Dalhousie University

Judith Thompson

*The Orwell Conundrum: A Cry of Despair or Faith in the Spirit of Man?* By Erika Gottlieb. Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1992. Pp. 313. Paper, \$24.95.

Reading a study that opens with the question "Was George Orwell a literary genius?" (1), and then goes on to ask if *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is "a major novel of this century" (1), one's first impulse is to check the date of publication. Nonetheless, *The Orwell Conundrum* was published in 1992, and these are precisely the questions Erika Gottlieb sets out to address. (The answer in each case would appear to be—yes.) While critics have tended to see Orwell's last novel as at best a "flawed masterpiece" (1), her aim is "to refute the charges of pathological despair, fragmented vision, and uneven literary achievement in Orwell's most celebrated work" (189), while at the same time accounting for what she sees as the widespread critical failure to do the work justice.

Gottlieb offers a perceptive discussion of the unanalyzed assumptions underlying a good deal of Orwell criticism—in particular the tendency for discomfort with an author's *ideas* to translate itself into purely aesthetic judgments. (This is a critical fate to which satirists seem especially liable—witness the case of Swift and Huxley.) She also provides a wealth of detail from Orwell's other writings to counter the view that his last novel is merely defeatist—the expression of a dying man's despair—and likewise gives a useful account of the political context surrounding *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* composition. Given the wilful blindness of much of the Left to Stalinism's excesses, not to mention the repeated cynical shifts in Soviet policy, Gottlieb argues persuasively that Orwell's portrayal of a totalitarian future—often criticized as simplistic and exaggerated—is in fact only too realistic.

While all this is fair enough, it is hardly new. One glaring omission from the bibliography is Krishan Kumar's *Utopia and Anti-Utopia* (1985), which not only offers a more positive reading of *Nineteen Eighty-*



*Four* than the critics with whom Gottlieb takes issue, but in doing so marshals a good deal of the same evidence she uses, and to considerably better effect. In particular, Kumar's study is strong where Gottlieb's is weakest: in its relation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to utopian tradition. Despite an extended comparison with *Brave New World*, Gottlieb's study contains only two brief references to H. G. Wells, to whose utopian visions Orwell was certainly responding, and only one to Zamyatin's *We*—to which *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is indebted almost to the point of plagiarism. (Ironically, Orwell accused Huxley of failing to acknowledge a debt to *We*, although his own dystopia resembles it far more closely.) Indeed, some of the weakest features of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—its grossly stereotypical presentation of female sexuality, for example—are precisely those where Orwell's debt to Zamyatin is most evident.

While *Nineteen Eighty-Four* parodies the Wellsian utopia, it shares with other dystopias a tendency to re-enact one of the most problematic features of the utopian vision, embodying as it does an underlying fantasy of re-establishing the maternal security of the womb by the imposition of a distinctively masculine order. Critics have rightly been troubled by the erotic character of Winston's submission to the muscular O'Brien at the end of the book, as both his dreams of his mother and his loyalty to his lover are abandoned in his surrender to Big Brother: to see Orwell's connection with utopian tradition is to see where much of this comes from.

Above all, however, *The Orwell Conundrum* suffers from the vagueness of its initial premises. What constitutes genius? How does one define greatness? Precisely what is a masterpiece? And what is to be gained by establishing a work's credentials as a great masterpiece by a genius—a place in the canon? While Gottlieb acknowledges in a note that terms such as "canon" and "masterpiece" should be used with caution, there is little attempt to question the value judgments such terms imply. Instead, *The Orwell Conundrum* offers a reading of a single text that argues for a formal and artistic coherence that most critics deny it—and in doing so tends to reduce opposing critical views, of whatever school, to mere variants of the notion that pessimism equals bad art. To use the author's own critical terminology: this is no masterpiece, but it is certainly flawed.

*The Matter of Scotland. Historical Narrative in Medieval Scotland.* By R. James Goldstein. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993. Pp. xvi, 386.

The struggle for independence from English domination is the single most dominant theme in Scottish medieval history. For many years now scholars of the medieval kingdom, chief among them Professor Geoffrey Barrow, have argued that the War of Independence compelled the Scots to forge distinctive notions of monarchy, church and "community of the realm." By the middle of the fourteenth century the Scottish crown and its agents no longer feared conquest by their neighbors, and had won recognition throughout Europe (and in Rome) as a sovereign kingdom. R. James Goldstein's work represents on one level merely the latest contribution to the still ongoing search for the roots of Scottish nationalism in the medieval accounts of the long and bitter conflict. But on another it offers intriguing, if not altogether convincing, evidence that fierce national sentiment came to infuse not only the upper ranks of Scottish society, but also its most humble members. His study is, then, a "history from below," undertaken "with an eye to the class interests not of the rulers, but of the ruled."

The first stages of the War of Independence, Goldstein argues, saw the emergence of the idea of a community of the realm of Scotland, but this *communitas* represented only the highest levels of Scottish society. Even when William Wallace assumed leadership of the patriotic resistance to Edward I, the militant nationalism of the peasantry was harnessed so as to uphold the interests of the ruling classes of the kingdom, those men whose "legal system was designed to exploit" them. The determination to thwart Edward I's plans had successfully been transmitted downward into the ranks of the fighting man, and so to the great majority of Scottish subjects. But outside the kingdom the Scots were still engaged in a vehement war of propaganda with the English.

In the first years of the fourteenth century intellectuals such as Baldred Bisset learned how to compete with Edward I's formidable chancery in the production of written appeals to the authority of history. The documents known as the *Instrucciones* and the *Processus* demonstrated the Scots' skills in appropriating the writing of history to serve political ends. Within a few years of Bruce's enthronement in 1306, the ideologi-

cal weapons of the Scots elite were focussed on legitimizing Robert I's seizure of the crown. The "Letter of the Clergy" of 1309 and the Bamburg narrative of 1320-21 are used to demonstrate what Goldstein calls "the formation of a Brucean ideology out of older materials." That ideology was given its highest and fullest expression in the Declaration of Arbroath of 1329, which endowed the Scots, and their king, with a manifest destiny independent of England. Recognition of Scottish independence was won not because the English grew tired of fighting their enemy, but because the intellectual elite of the smaller kingdom learned from Edward I the value of manipulating the historical past by controlling "the material means of textual production." Goldstein argues that the remainder of the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries would see the Scots "outplay Edward at his own judicial game." The chronicle of Fordun and the works of subsequent medieval Scottish writers were at once manifestations of an increasingly sophisticated use of historical materials, and elaborations of a specifically Brucean ideology, designed to enshrine in the collective memory the triumph of the dynasty of Robert I.

According to Goldstein, John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, and especially its first book, provided the Scots with a legendary history of their own, distinct from and independent of that of the kingdom of England. Fordun's task in writing the chronicle was to show that the freedom of the nation could be preserved only under the leadership of a king lawfully established and entitled to rule. It became the purpose of the author of the greatest of all vernacular Scots poems, *The Bruce*, to perpetuate and further to develop Fordun's ideological groundwork. But *The Bruce* was also a significant turning point in this endeavor, for the poem "brought together for the first time the dominant Scottish vernacular, the political ideology of his class and the romance tradition." It served a double purpose, crucial to the preservation of Scottish society, for it subtly enjoined the peasantry to acknowledge that that society could endure only if all Scots, highborn and low, male and female, recognized their proper place within the feudal structure. Blind Hary, the author of the poem *The Wallace*, followed a similar agenda, but one intended to appeal not to the upper ranks of the Scottish *literati* (who had by now long been won over to the Brucean way of thinking), but to the visceral emotions of the unlettered peasantry. For Goldstein, Blind Hary's

achievement lay in his creation of a racial ideology, based on hatred of the English, that proved immensely popular among the ranks of the poor.

Goldstein's argument in respect of the shaping of a particularly Scottish historiography challenges several long held, and long cherished, notions concerning the genesis of Scottish nationalist sentiment. It does so in interesting fashion, but in the end it fails to convince the reader that the work of some of those earlier scholars is in need of revision. The ideological continuum he draws between the earliest attempts by the Scots to counter Edward I's formidable chancery and the bloodiness of Blind Hary's *Wallace* is not as clear as he suggests. Moreover, his argument that the production of texts was not "part of larger political processes" as much as "an autonomous reflection of those processes" demands the rejection of too much of the kind of textual criticism that has informed the study of Scottish medieval literature. His book will be of great interest to all those interested in the history of the Scottish struggle for independence, but it will not surpass or displace the valuable contributions made by previous scholars.

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