

## Book Reviews

***Time's Witness: Historical Representation in English Poetry, 1603-1660.***  
**By Gerald M. MacLean. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990. Pp. xvii,**  
**356. \$40.00. Paper, \$17.50.**

This is really two books in one. The first is a scholarly study of a certain kind of seventeenth-century occasional poetry, namely poetry written in response to a particular public event. By far the best known specimen of this genre is Marvell's "Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland" (1650), but there are hundreds of other texts which MacLean's diligence as a researcher offers to rescue from obscurity. Some of these are explicitly and archly royalist, like Thomas Randolph's "Ode to Mister Anthony Stafford" (1638), Richard Crashaw's "Upon the Duke of Yorke his Birth" (1635), or the considerable group of poems occasioned by the execution of Charles I in 1649. Others are critical of or hostile to the Stuart agenda: John Russell's "The Battle of Lutzen" (1634) implies that Englishmen ought to be defending the Protestant cause in Europe rather than growing "tender and effeminate" at home; John Cragge in "A Prophecy Concerning the Earle of Essex that Now Is" (1641) urges a similarly aggressive policy with respect to Ireland. These opposition voices come out in support of the establishment during the Commonwealth, as in Thomas Manley's "Veni; Vidi; Vici: The Triumphs of the Most Excellent and Illustrious Oliver Cromwell" (1651). Without the help of a skilful and enterprising guide, most of us would read these poems clumsily, if at all. The first book is one I'm grateful for.

Superimposed upon this work of scholarship, wedged into its margins by means of the rough magic of the word processor, is a far more familiar project. A few sentences from MacLean's last paragraph will identify it.

We need a new history of the production, reproduction, and reception of "English" poetry in the seventeenth century, one based on an analysis of changes in the relations of cultural production that will avoid the depoliti-

zation of formalist accounts or the simplifications likely to result from master narratives such as the transition from feudalism to capitalism central to classical Marxist historiography.

What will such an enterprise do for us?

It will trace the emergence of modern sexual divisions and gender formations within the general interpellation of the imperial reading subject to contributing to our understanding of the gender and class fantasies which print culture made possible in early modern England (266).

MacLean hasn't convinced me, in the pages which precede this remarkable declaration, that we need any such thing. He hasn't even convinced me that he believes we need the new history he calls for. If that's what we need, then why hasn't he written it? If "gender formations" are his concern, for example, then why has he not chosen a single text by a female poet? MacLean has convinced me that what he needs (or thinks he needs) is this last paragraph, with its largely gestural display of allegiance to the now dominant ideology of Renaissance studies: cultural materialism/New Historicism. Not that I'm blaming MacLean for this state of affairs. But if seventeenth-century poems are embedded in a network of compromise, patronage, and cultural pressure, then it's difficult to claim that contemporary critical works are disinterested productions of autonomous thought. The times to which this book bears witness are, in a striking way, our own.

MacLean devotes a chapter to Abraham Cowley's unfinished epic, *The Civil War*. Since the text predicts and longs for a Royalist victory, there were good reasons why Cowley should have abandoned it. After the death of Viscount Falkland at the Battle of Newberry in 1643, Cowley finds it impossible to maintain the distance appropriate to the epic voice:

The trowbled Muse fell shapelesse into aire,  
Instead of Inck dropt from my Pen a Teare.

Cowley excluded *The Civil War* from his *Poems* (1656); a version of Book I was published in 1679, but the rest of this text, including the lines just quoted, remained in manuscript until the publication of Allan Pritchard's edition in 1973. About this poem, its political context, its style, and the reasons for its suppression, MacLean has many interesting things to say:

Cowley could not finish the epic of England's delivery from forces of Parliamentary darkness by the swords of a Stuart army, but in closing the third book in a revelation of his direct personal involvement with the political events of the poem, he does achieve the only possible form of closure available (209).

I wish MacLean had mentioned, or enquired into, the legend that Falkland provoked his own death in a mood of political despair. Perhaps this was Cowley's model for artificial closure of a narrative gone wrong.

The virtues of *Time's Witness* are, on the whole, the scholarly ones. Where else could you learn, for example, that General Fairfax wrote a poem regretting the execution of Charles I? Or that the verbal celebrations of the Restoration of Charles II included *The Famous Tragedie of the Life and Death of Mrs Rump* (1660)? The disappointments of *Time's Witness* are, by contrast, critical. The discussion of Marvell's "Horatian Ode" is perfunctory (224-26); it raises none of the difficult questions of tone and political stance that have perplexed and divided Marvell's shrewdest modern readers. MacLean's favorite modifiers ("exemplary," "commonly," "invariably") are signals of a quest for confirmation, legitimation; the pleasures of this journey could have been augmented by a sharper appetite for surprise.

*Dalhousie University*

*Ronald Huebert*

***The Making of Johnson's Dictionary.* By Allen Reddick. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. Pp. xiii, 249. \$49.50.**

This meticulous study of Samuel Johnson's monumental *Dictionary of the English Language* (first edition, 1755) covers the history and development of the great lexicographer's original plan, its subsequent modifications, and its implementation through successive editions up to the fourth (1773), the last to include Johnson's own extensive revisions.

When Johnson signed the contract with a consortium of London publishers in 1746 to undertake the massive project, he believed he could complete the work in three years, with the help of six assistants or amanuenses, five of whom were Scots. In the event, it required nine years to assemble the many thousands of illustrative quotations from earlier

works in English, and to match them with appropriate word definitions and etymologies. Considering the fact that no previous English dictionary had been conceived or produced on such a systematic basis, we may still marvel that it was completed in less than a decade. By comparison, the great eleven-volume Oxford English Dictionary, housed in its special Scriptorium, and staffed by an enormous train of editors, compilers and consultants, took seventy years from conception to completion, and its latest Supplement, published in 1986, is virtually a continuation of the same marathon endeavor. All told, the OED and the Supplement contain over half-a-million words and some two million quotations, more than twelve times the number in Johnson's two folio volumes. It is significant, nonetheless, that the OED was originally planned, in 1857, as "a volume supplementary to the later editions of Johnson" and that the chief editor, Sir James Murray, "kept open a copy of Johnson's *Dictionary* for immediate reference in the middle of [his] Scriptorium during the long years of compilation" (176).

Johnson himself had kept open on his attic desk in Gough Square, a much more modest Scriptorium, a copy of the work of his main predecessor, Nathaniel Bailey's *Universal Etymological Dictionary* (1721), which, together with Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia; Or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1728), was frequently consulted during the first nine years of Johnson's labors.

While he defined LEXICOGRAPHER as "a harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words," Johnson was far from dependent on Bailey or Chambers or anyone else. His own characteristic style often comes into play, as in his celebrated definition of NETWORK as "anything reticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections." Bailey's "a Device for catching Fish, Birds, &c.," though simpler and more practical, seems lame by contrast. Johnson's amusing transformation of Bailey's definition of OATS ("Forage for horses generally, and sometimes provision for men") into "A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people" has deservedly found a place in literary history. Whether the amanuenses from the North took it, and some other lexicographic digs at their countrymen, in a sporting spirit we can only guess.

Several of the words often associated with Johnson's erudite style, such as INSPISSATION ("a thickening, or making thick") and ANFRACTUOSITY ("winding or turning; intricacy"), had in fact appeared in Bailey with

similar definitions. Some of Johnson's own renderings are quite remarkable for their simplicity, and he took particular care in expressing technical and scientific terms in layman's language. While, as Reddick and other commentators have pointed out, he tended, especially in the later revisions, to give his *Dictionary* a didactic or moral slant, he did not prudishly exclude crude language or current slang. It is true that he omitted blatant obscenities, as the apocryphal story of the two elderly ladies who allegedly congratulated him on his not listing four-letter swear-words suggests; Johnson is said to have smiled as he uttered the little rebuke, "Ah then, my dears, you must have been looking for them." He did, however, list basic bodily functions such as YUX ("the hiccough") and FART ("to break wind behind"), illustrating the latter with a verse of Swift's:

As when we a gun discharge  
 Although the bore be ne'er so large,  
 Before the flame from muzzle burst,  
 Just at the breech it flashes first;  
 So from my lord his passion broke,  
 He *farted* first, and then he spoke.

From Reddick's careful reconstruction of Johnson's methodology, it is quite evident that the compiling of illustrative quotations took up the lion's share of the time, both in the preparations for the first edition of 1755 and in the extensive revisions (some of which, strangely, were never used) for the fourth edition of 1773. Using the extant sources of manuscript materials in the Yale and British Libraries, which include important working papers as well as portions of the original text in Johnson's hand, Reddick has been able to retrace in detail almost every step in the process of compilation, from the assembling of illustrations on small slips of paper, the insertion of definitions and etymologies, and the preparation of copy for the printer, to the final editing and revision for publication. His conclusions are, perhaps, more interesting than his very thorough description of the process. Johnson, though proud of his achievement, admitted the task of fixing a language that was always in flux to be ultimately impossible. At best, then, lexicography was for him a paradoxical endeavor, in many ways doomed to failure. Yet, as this book clearly demonstrates, dictionary-making, in the hands of a great writer, became a vital form of literary discourse, with distinct polemical and philosophical possibilities.

Supreme verbal authority though he was, Johnson never claimed infallibility. He readily admitted his mistakes, such as PASTERNEK ("the knee of a horse") and even stubbornly retained them in subsequent editions. "Dictionaries are like watches," he once said. "The worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true." By the same token, books about dictionaries are bound to have their shortcomings. Reddick's may be faulted at times for ANFRACUOSITY of style ("winding, mazy, full of turnings and winding passages") and for a rather unreliable Index. A more substantial flaw lies in the author's neglect of Johnson's French sources, both for etymologies and for information on the techniques of dictionary-making. His well-known disdain for the efforts of the French Academy to standardize the language, for instance, was balanced by his avowed admiration for the individual *dictionaries* of Furetière and Ménage, both produced in brave defiance of the Academy. The recent work of a Japanese scholar, Daisuke Nagashima, *Johnson the Philologist* (Kansai University, 1988) deserves a mention in this context.

The latest in the valuable series of Cambridge Studies in Publishing and Printing History, Reddick's book complements, but in no way replaces, the work of previous analysts such as William K. Wimsatt, Jr., James H. Sledd, Gwin Kolb, and Robert DeMaria. In the end, of course, the best locus of study is the great *Dictionary* itself. Sounding a local note, I would like to remind readers that the Killam Library at Dalhousie possesses no fewer than eight early editions, including the first and the fourth, all housed in the Special Collections area. As Reddick observes, "critics and scholars have not thought seriously about the importance of understanding the *Dictionary*, or Johnson's life and mind, through an examination of his efforts in revising the work" (92). Here we have both the challenge and the opportunity.

*Dalhousie University*

*James Gray*

***Celtic Contraries.* By Robin Skelton. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1990. Pp. xiii, 272. \$34.95.**

This is a collection of fourteen essays on modern Celtic literature in English, nearly all of which have had a prior existence as lectures, radio talks, introductions and previously published papers. They are arranged

more or less chronologically according to the date of the main work of the authors discussed. With the exception of Robert Graves, all the writers included are Irish. The topics range from the poetry of Oscar Wilde to the poetry of John Montague. In between, Robin Skelton has some interesting things to say about the plays of John Millington Synge and Jack B. Yeats as well as the novels of Aidan Higgins.

Despite their inclusion, one feels that Skelton's heart is not really in his writings on drama and prose. What truly engages his interest and his critical intelligence is "versecraft" and the literary culture that helps bring it into being. So at the core of this collection of essays is a series of illuminating pieces on the poetry of Wilde, Synge and Yeats, poets associated with the turn-of-the-century Irish literary renaissance, and another series on the poetry of such contemporary writers as Kinsella and Montague. Skelton's treatment of the earlier poets illustrates the ways by which Irish poetry increasingly absorbed and domesticated European classical and romantic influences. Skelton's treatment of the later poets illustrates the ways by which contemporary Irish poetry in English has been influenced by the practices of Gaelic prosody, particularly its reliance on internal assonance and consonance.

Consistent with Skelton's interest in cultural cross-fertilizations are his studies of Susan L. Mitchell and *Æ*. Susan L. Mitchell was not, in Skelton's judgment, "a major writer," but, through her connections with the Yeats family and the circle of *Æ*, she was able to produce delicious poetic satire at the expense of her literary acquaintances. According to Skelton, *Æ* "was a second-rate writer, a third-rate painter, a politician of minor significance, but a phenomenon of major importance in the Ireland of his lifetime." Susan L. Mitchell and *Æ* are important not because of their poetry; Skelton is, if anything, overly generous in his assessment of their efforts. Rather, they are important to Skelton because of their contributions to the creation of a Dublin literary culture. Skelton seems to suggest that, without this kind of background, there would be no Yeats, no Synge, no Montague in the foreground.

Throughout his discussions of these poets, Skelton relies on the methodology of new criticism, providing often brilliant close readings of selections from their work. Still, the collection as a whole is uneven. The selection of authors is more than a little peculiar. Skelton ranges between the late-nineteenth-century work of Oscar Wilde and the almost contemporary writing of Aidan Higgins and John Montague, but provides not a single

word about Shaw, Joyce, Beckett, Behan, Friel, Heaney, and the other contemporary Irish novelists, poets and dramatists whose work is creating a new literary renaissance in Ireland. It also seems to me negligent to include only one woman, and a minor figure at that, when so much that is exciting in contemporary Irish writing is being done by women. There is no hint that novelists like Jennifer Johnston and Edna O'Brien, for instance, can easily hold their own in the company of Aidan Higgins.

Despite the care with which Skelton has revised his work in order to knit together disparate pieces, the "theme" of the collection, stated in the "Preface," that writers contrive to bring unity out of the "contraries" of their lives and work, does not consistently express Skelton's concerns. There is an unfortunate sense here of a thesis having been arbitrarily manufactured to cover the odds and ends of work in Skelton's files, rather than of a coherent argument developing through the examination of appropriate examples. The pleasure and the value of this collection is far more in the parts than in the whole.

*Memorial University of Newfoundland*

*Bernice Schrank*

***Classics and Trash: Traditions and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres.* By Harriet Hawkins. Theory/Culture Series. Toronto, Buffalo: U of Toronto P, 1990. Pp. xix, 219. \$65.00. Paper, \$17.50.**

Stanley Fish once made a remark *à propos* St. Augustine's critical practice which Harriet Hawkins should have kept in mind while she was writing *Classics and Trash*. Augustine's "rule of faith" (which was also a rule of interpretation) was "dazzlingly simple": "everything in the Scriptures, and indeed in the world when it is read properly, points to God's love for us . . . . If you should come upon something which does not at first seem to bear this meaning . . . you are then to take it 'to be figurative.'" This should remind us, writes Fish, that evidence brought to bear in the course of formalist analysis will not only prove something, it will prove anything. Hence, the unwary formalist critic runs the risk of reducing all texts to manifestations of the same set of ahistorical truths—which is precisely what Hawkins does in *Classics and Trash*.



This is not to say that *Classics and Trash* does not begin promisingly. Hawkins opens by telling her readers that her text arose from her "personal conviction that a recognition of the continuing cross-fertilisation between 'high' literature and popular genres inevitably enhances our understanding and appreciation of both." In the passages which establish the basis of this conviction Hawkins is at her best, as when she traces the textual network linking Christopher Marlowe, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, and Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*. However, having established (and not for the first time) that "high" and "low" culture interact on a number of levels, Hawkins loses her way.

The basic problem with *Classics and Trash* lies in its absence of any theoretical framework which goes beyond a naive common sense. The reader will not have ventured far into the text before realizing that Hawkins has no clear explanation for the difference between "high" and "low" culture. Nor does she have a definition as to what constitutes a "classic" and what constitutes "trash," even though these are the terms with which she chooses to work. Hence, from the very beginning, by treating the terms "classic" and "trash" as self-evident categories, she contradicts her ostensible aim of demonstrating that the similarities between "high" and "low" culture outweigh the differences.

Moreover, for a text which makes frequent use of the word "genre," *Classics and Trash* shows no recognition of even the most basic points of genre theory. If, for instance, Hawkins had looked at Todorov's 1966 essay, "The Typology of Detective Fiction," she would have found a good working distinction between "popular fiction" and "literature." "As a rule," writes Todorov, "the literary masterpiece does not enter any genre save its own; but the masterpiece of popular literature is precisely the book which best fits its genre." Had Hawkins begun with a theoretical model such as this (even with the aim of refuting it), she could have posed the questions before her with greater clarity. What is more, she would have found that Todorov had anticipated her conclusion: "in marked contrast to major artists, minor artists generally seem afraid to challenge racial and sexual prejudices, while truly trashy genres go out of their way to reinforce them."

Without the backbone of a rigorously argued structuralism, Hawkins's claim to find identical meanings in texts produced by widely differing cultures is little more than a spurious universalism. "There is something profoundly positive to be said," writes Hawkins, "for the appeals made to sameness and to mercy and to internationalism in art." There is also another

(less positive) word for this sort of universalism: ethnocentrism. Hence, when Hawkins finds that "there isn't any significant difference in descriptions of the enemy" in *Beowulf*, *The Tempest*, and accounts of Japanese prisoners of war in the 1940s, she is erasing the cultural identities of three very different societies. In so doing, *Classics and Trash* points to the moral that "things have ever been thus" (the logical corollary to which is: there is no point in trying to change them).

*Classics and Trash* is thus a disappointing, even annoying, text. Published by the University of Toronto Press in a series under the general editorship of Linda Hutcheon (whose *Poetics of Postmodernism* is an important contribution to the postmodern debate), *Classics and Trash* uses the language of post-structuralist criticism, and appears to engage with radical issues of canonicity and the construction of gender identity. It soon becomes apparent, however, that this is only the garnish for what the author admits is "an old-fashioned and currently devalued 'liberal humanism'" in quest of "universalist sympathies." And, like St. Augustine, Harriet Hawkins finds universalism everywhere she looks.

*St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland*

*Christopher Morash*

***Redeeming Politics.* By Peter Iver Kaufman. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1990. Pp. xiii, 209. \$22.50.**

More than a half-century ago a minor academic controversy developed over whether there ever had been or could be such a thing as Christian philosophy. This slim volume, the third in a series of monographs from Princeton University's Project on Church and State, responds to a similar question concerning a Christian theory of polity. Kaufman's affirmative answer rests on historical data culled from what he calls case studies of a number of Christian apologists from the fourth-century era of Constantine's adoption of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire to the blending of radical Puritanism with military campaigning in Cromwell's seventeenth-century New Model Army.

Kaufman organizes his material around a theme he terms "sociolatry": "a type of ideology that associates salvation with political idealization, symbols and spells circulated to inspire loyalty, obedience and service" (5).

Dividing his case studies into the categories Conquest, Clerocracy and Crisis, he examines three forms in which the intermingling of Christian church and temporal state has been given historical expression. The first fused the two spheres in a religious doctrine of salvation aligned directly with military and political success: Eusebius on the Roman Empire of Constantine the Great, and William Dill as a Puritan divine serving as chaplain in Cromwell's army. The second asserted the supremacy of religious authorities over secular power: medieval papalist claims to *plenitudo potestatis* by Innocent III and Boniface VIII deriving from the ecclesiastical reforms of Gregory VII; and the third illustrated the need to disconnect the Christian carriage from a temporal locomotive power perceived to be losing either its source of energy or its sense of direction: the political theory in St. Augustine's *City of God*, and what Kaufman designates as the secular dualism of a radical Protestant like Conrad Grebel.

The resulting work is a good example of the much-needed and increasingly available *haute vulgarization* in a broad range of revisionist studies in Western culture, offering the serious general reader the results of scholarly research previously known for the most part only to students in a variety of specialized areas. It is to be expected that Kaufman's conclusions will not all meet universal acceptance among the experts: the summary character of his text precludes extended arguments, and many of his assessments offer one from among contested alternatives, whose proponents are often scholars whose views arguably reflect positions resting on personal commitment to one or another form of Christianity.

Kaufman's interpretation of Augustinian political thought in the monumental but overblown *City of God* as revision rather than rejection of the Eusebian providentializing of Roman imperial realities is a refreshing though not novel change from the still prevalent view in some quarters that Augustine advocated an essentially other-worldly attitude for Christians. But it is unfortunate that he repeats the distortion equating Augustine's two cities with the Christian heaven and the temporal world (130). Kaufman certainly knows better; and this criticism may simply conflate his compression of detail with a somewhat breezy style to distort what he might say in a fuller and more circumspect account. Nor is Kaufman the first to fail in attempts to offer a coherent and consistent reading of the *City of God* by taking insufficient account of the to-ings and fro-ings of Augustine's tendencies to strike ringing definitions and conceptual frameworks too slight to carry the weight of historical, literary and sociological bric-a-brac

and qualifications tossed into this *magnum opus* during the lengthy period of its composition.

Kaufman's treatment of Calvin's political theory strikes a nice balance between the Genevan Reformer's rejection of the institutional and hierarchical structure of the medieval Christian church and his willingness to impose a clerocracy on the citizens of Geneva. But again the brevity of the account strikes a false note by overstressing the drama and tension between these two facets of the Calvinist position. Like Luther, Zwingli and Bucer, Calvin was more medieval in outlook on the role of political authority in imposing theological uniformity than sometimes has been admitted. Continuity rather than contrast existed here across the dividing line between Protestant and Catholic political theology, as Kaufman's data base shows, but he does not stress the point sufficiently. Religious tolerance had no more resonance among the leading first generation Protestant Reformers than among their Catholic theologian counterparts.

In sum, the Kaufman volume provides a good, even moderately exciting, read for those for whom its contents will be news. It also has a well-selected and annotated up-to-date bibliography and a useful index.

*Saint Mary's University*

*Arthur Monahan*

***Textual Spaces: The Poetry of Pierre Reverdy.* By Andrew Rothwell. Amsterdam, Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1989. Pp. 314.**

A considerable body of criticism now exists, centred upon the work of Pierre Reverdy, whom the surrealists, in 1925, considered to be France's greatest living poet. The centenary of his birth has, happily, produced a number of major colloquia and studies, amongst which we may note in particular *Lire Reverdy* (ed. Yvan Leclerc, P. U. Lyon, 1990) and the book at hand. Andrew Rothwell's analysis is well documented, elegantly written, carefully thought through, always cogent and firm without ever succumbing to pretentiousness. Delicately—and felicitously: is this not a disappearing art?—imbricated with earlier Reverdy scholarship (particularly that of Robert Greene, Mary Ann Caws and Michel Collot), Andrew Rothwell's study focuses upon a number of crucial yet understated and, in consequence, rather unscrutinized aspects of Reverdy's aesthetics, textual

evolution and overall significance. In particular, he underscores the deft but discreet self-reflexive discourse that Reverdy's poetry and prose writings generate; the importance of certain critical shifts in Reverdy's practice, theory and poetic disposition during the pre-Solesmes 1918-1922 period. The discussions—finely argued from carefully and sensitively meditated texts—of the tensions of cubist aesthetics in the context of emergent Dada, surrealist and existentialist models, as of the tensions of factors such as discretion and modern metaphysical self-exploration, autotelic non-anecdotality and "morality," *émotion poétique* and *consubstantiation*, interiority and desire, *image* and *présence* (the designations are, in part, my own) shed much light upon both the development and the overall pertinence of Reverdy's complex, and by no means static or unidimensional, poetic project. *Textual Spaces* is, in short, a fine contribution to Reverdy criticism; it also constitutes a further refinement of our sense of modern poetic function and theory as a whole.

Dalhousie University

Michael Bishop

***Waiting For the Son: Poetics/ Theology/ Rhetoric in Margaret Avison's sunblue.* By C. D. Mazoff. Dunvegan, ON: Cormorant Books, 1989. Pp. 98. Paper, \$9.95.**

"Margaret Avison certainly walks a tightrope, writing about a God in whom most modern men can no longer believe, in a language which most believers cannot understand" (6). In *Waiting For the Son*, C. D. Mazoff follows Avison on that tightrope as he considers both the poetry and the theology of Margaret Avison. At times his balance is enviable as he draws upon church history and Biblical references both to explore and to emphasize interpretations of several of the poems from *sunblue* (Lancelot Press, 1978). Unfortunately, in some of his presentation he teeters, and on occasion he plummets.

In his introduction, Mazoff states that he is interested in Avison's use of typology, her soteriology, ontology, epistemology, eschatology, and the ramifications of her Pauline theology. The vocabulary he uses clashes with the deceptively simple words used by Avison, and might provide early warning of the frequently pretentious use of both literary and theological

terms, often with parenthetical asides which, although illuminating, can strike a patronizing note. This note reverberates annoyingly in the summary of the first chapter. Possibly Mazoff sensed this because he does not summarize the remaining two chapters.

Mazoff addresses a perceived gap in literary scholarship, the lack of critical analysis of Avison's Christian poems. Basing his analysis on his conception of Pauline doctrines as they apply to Avison's poetry, and using standard reference books referred to in his bibliography to explain some of the allusions and images Avison invokes, Mazoff provides new insights into her poetry. He explains that "the children's voices / all red and blue and green . . . / just as at Ur" in "Bereaved" allude to the colorful temple which contained an image of God on top of the Ziggurat at Ur (65). For readers anxious to gain one more means of access to the many layers of significance in Avison's poems, such tidbits of knowledge are welcome. Less welcome are questionable readings or misreadings of poems, as when Mazoff sees the mission visitor in "Needy" relegated to "'worker' with new forms" (54). Unwelcome are frequent instances of contorted exegesis (which Mazoff, when criticizing this in other writers, reminds us is "reading into" a poem). The discussion of "SKETCH: From train window (Leamington to Windsor in March)" includes this explanation:

The last stanza is connected to the first by an enigmatic image of a "dog pottily floundering across" a " wooden bridge," which conjures up simultaneous images of drowning and salvation as in "The Swimmer's Moment" (WS/D 47); the idea of baptismal regeneration, as well as images of fullness and even inebriation. The green in this poem [Avison writes of "wintergreen air"] is not lush but "pale," a negative image but for the straw stuck to it": the straw from the manger, perhaps? The narrator returns us to the "beeswax mist," yet the movement is not circular: "you can hear the hidden culvert gurgle" (giggle?). (29)

Such an explanation raises questions about the criticism as well as those that Mazoff as critic explicitly asks as he considers the poem's meaning. While some readers may seek the enrichment that can result from allusions to other poems and can appreciate the cumulative effect of idiosyncratic systems of symbolism, Mazoff so often dips with carefree abandon into other poems while he is discussing a particular poem that following him can be challenging, and, in the end, not always worth the effort.

Tighter editorial control might have improved this volume. Too frequently quotations from a variety of sources are incorporated into the discussion without adequate indication of who the speaker is or that the speaker has changed. Readers should refer frequently to the endnotes and are warned to make no assumptions. Two poems are included in the appendix; neither is by Avison, and neither is identified by author except in endnotes which are indicated on the pages in the text where these poems fit into Mazoff's discussion. Readers who enjoy games of hide-and-seek will be the only ones who will appreciate the diversion of finding all three pages necessary to understand the relationship of the entries in the appendix to Avison's work. (Once established, the relationship of "Roller Skater Man" is debatable.) Although the volume is attractively bound, page set-ups are disconcertingly interruptive. Widow and orphan lines of quoted passages could have been avoided, and a simple reordering of the quotations that introduce the second chapter would have prevented a mid-stanza break and the isolation of one stanza overleaf.

Mazoff's book is "envisaged as a complement to the two already existing volumes of criticism on Avison's work: *Margaret Avison*, by Ernest Redekop and *Lighting Up the Terrain*, edited by David Kent" (5). Despite its weaknesses, it does serve that purpose. Mazoff senses the lack of a unified view of Avison's poetic, but even if the view he presents is not universally acceptable, it should excite discussion and stimulate further criticism of *sunblue*.

*Dalhousie University*

*Judy Dudar*

***Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory 1910-1945.* By Cary Nelson. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1989. Pp. 336. \$24.95.**

When he wrote the preface to his authoritative *Literary History of the United States* in 1948, Robert E. Spiller declared that "each generation should produce at least one literary history of the United States, for each generation must define the past in its own terms." Certainly one of the anomalies of recent American literary history is the length of time it has taken for contemporary critics to answer Spiller's challenge. Nowhere is

this more evident than in the study of modern American poetry. In the years since Spiller and his co-editors completed their survey of the period, there have been significant changes in our understanding of the history of modern American poetry. In their roles as the founders of a distinctively American modernist tradition, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams have come to overshadow T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Moreover, in recent years, several previously neglected poets have been included in the canon, most notably Marianne Moore, Langston Hughes, and Hart Crane. Yet, despite these additions, the history of modern American poetry is still conceived in terms remarkably similar to those first formulated in the 1940s and 1950s. That is to say, it is still conceived as the triumph of a formally experimental, but politically conservative, modernism over a tired and ineffectual genteel tradition.

As Cary Nelson observes in *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory 1910-1945*, this rather melodramatic opposition tells us more about the conventions of literary history than it does about the poetry written during the first four decades of this century. In fact, the modernist tradition of Pound, Eliot, Williams, and Stevens that is so familiar to us today belonged to a much larger poetic culture that has been repressed or forgotten since the 1950s. Nelson's object in his revisionary history of the period is to recover some of the diversity of the American poetry produced between 1910 and 1945, and to suggest what we have lost in repressing so much of this literature.

Nelson's approach to literary history has been influenced to a very large extent by developments in black and women's studies. Thus it is not surprising to find that many of the poets he attempts to recover from the past are little-known black and women poets whose verse is still able to do important "cultural work" today. Just what this work consists of can be gauged by looking at one or two of Nelson's examples. Certainly the most exotic is the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a German national who was part of the American scene for a brief time in the early 1920s. Although she published widely in the little magazines of the day, her work was never collected in book form. As a result, she is known only to those familiar with journals like *The Little Review*, *Broom*, and *Transition*. Yet, according to Nelson, her work remains important for the way it "dramatizes the cultural construction of sexual difference . . . [effecting] a kind of inner violence on ordinary language and on the accepted models of sexual difference" (72). Mina Loy's anti-romantic love songs are also singled out



for the critique they offer of the "relations between the hierarchies of national culture and the hierarchized oppositions of gender" (73). Commenting on a group of love songs that first appeared in *Others* between 1915 and 1917, Nelson writes: "Her intricate debunkings of English upper-class culture link the impoverished ideals of empire with an imperial self whose sexuality is an attenuated caricature" (73). Finally, there is Countee Cullen, a black poet whose work was widely known during his own lifetime but has since been ignored because of his dependence upon traditional forms. As Nelson writes, a poem like Cullen's "The Incident," which describes a young black child's first encounter with racism, demonstrates that "far from being preeminently genteel, poetry in traditional forms was a frequent vehicle for sharply focused social commentary" (23). In his reading of the poetry of this period then, Nelson is interested in those poets who can speak to us meaningfully about issues of race, gender, and the linguistic and cultural formation of social identity.

But the single most important contribution Nelson makes to our understanding of modern American poetry lies in his efforts to recover a long tradition of social poetry that has since been suppressed by the conventional histories of the period. According to the received view of modern American poetry, the years between the end of the poetic renaissance of the 1920s and the emergence in the late 1940s and early 1950s of poets like Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Randall Jarrell, and Theodore Roethke produced little poetry of lasting value. This view is still reflected in many of the standard anthologies of the period. Yet, as Nelson's reading of the journals and little magazines of the period effectively demonstrates, such a view ignores the wealth of socially engaged poetry written in the United States between the wars. Among those poets Nelson seeks to recover are the little-known feminist poet Lucia Trent and black activist Genevieve Taggard. He also discusses the proletarian poetry of the period, including Mike Gold's interesting experiments with found art and worker correspondence. Such poetry is frequently dismissed as journalistic verse or left wing propaganda, but as Nelson observes, it can be profitably compared "with Marianne Moore's more intricate reworkings of existing prose texts" (105).

Finally, however, Cary Nelson is doing more than simply adding new names to an ever-expanding canon. His revisionary history of modern American poetry is actually a manifesto for a politically engaged literary history, which challenges us to expand and redefine not only our definitions of the canon but of poetry itself. Implicit in his critique of the orthodox

view of modern American poetry that has come down to us from the New Critics of the 1940s and 1950s is the belief that, in depoliticizing poetry in the ways that it has, the academy has actually robbed poetry of its power to make meaningful social commentary. His effort to recover some of the diversity of modern American poetry is also an effort to recover a time when poetry had the power "to help people not only come to understand the material conditions of their existence but also to envision ways of changing them" (124). In short, to recover a time when poetry could make things happen. Thus, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory 1910-1945* is both decidedly old-fashioned and strikingly relevant, and it is likely that it will prove to be an indispensable history of the period for readers and writers of poetry alike.

*University of British Columbia*

*Paul Tyndall*

***Letter from Los Angeles.* By Charles Gullans. Santa Barbara: John Daniel, 1990. Pp. 71. \$8.95.**

In his introduction to *The New Oxford Book of Light Verse*, Kingsley Amis remarks on the inappropriateness of free verse to light verse: "when what is presumably aspiring to be high verse abandons form, a mortal blow is dealt to light verse, to which form has always been of the essence." The technical resources that make traditional form essential to light verse also make it an advantage in serious poetry as well. As George Johnston noted recently in the introduction to his collected poems, *Endeared by Dark* (1990):

Rhyme and meter, in their varieties, have been formative in English verse for as long as we know of such a thing. Now we are told that they have been left behind, because a corner has been turned, and there is no looking back; verse, it is said, has been freed from the older conventions of form. In effect, this has reduced much of it to a sameness and monotony of rhythm, however artfully the lines are begun and ended and spaced about.

Charles Gullans does not often write light verse in the usual sense, but he does employ the formal structures whose presence allows access to a varied world of sharply realized experience and, by way of the form, to a precisely

motivated response to that experience. Thus, in the title poem of his recent collection, *Letter from Los Angeles* we are given the following description of autumn in L.A.:

Wild in confusion,  
 The orange and lime are blossoming and bearing.  
 I pick the fruit from branches in full bloom.  
 From rind and flesh from stamen and corolla,  
 The pungencies of fruit and flower invade  
 My senses with their vegetable contagion  
 Until I almost sleep within their bright,  
 Alluring indistinction, almost merge  
 With the corrupted and corrupting season.

The blank verse here is in the ornate tradition and the rhetoric is that of high romanticism, but the point of the passage lies not in a merging with autumn's mellow fruitfulness, but in the "almost sleep" and the "almost merge." Invaded by "pungencies of fruit and flower," the speaker draws back from "the corrupted and corrupting season." A temptation, particular and personal, gains definition from a verse convention that motivates feelings derived from a tradition that includes Milton's descriptions of prelapsarian Eden in Books IV and IX of *Paradise Lost*, Marvell's "The Garden," Wordsworth's pastoral meditations, and Keats's Odes. All of this is conveyed through the form, which is present not as a nostalgic gesture to the tradition, but as a way of describing a pattern of feeling that the poem then rejects. The function of the form is here to motivate with the greatest economy a real and a complex tension. Form and convention here express the attraction of merging; the overt statement in the poem rejects merging. This is not an irony and it is not an *aporia* to be deconstructed. It is a complex feeling fully within the author's conscious control and a feeling that could be created only through this particular intersection of form and statement.

Gullan's blank verse serves other functions than the one I have just described. That is, his blank verse is only literary and ornate when he wants to employ those particular resources of the form. In the following lines, the language is colloquial and the style is plain. The poem describes the mingling of the present voices of guests at a party with past voices evoked by memory in a house lived in for some time.

The house is singing and the pictures talk  
 And friends are coming here to listen, speak,  
 And add their voices like a legacy  
 In laughter as robust as the red wine.  
 If you were in my place you'd understand  
 Why voices ring in every room, why sound  
 So permeates the rafters and the floors  
 I cannot walk but voices flood my ears  
 And flood my senses with the memories.  
 It is the music of my history  
 Echoing through the house and through my mind,  
 Voices from all the rooms where I have lived  
 And voices form the inwardness of things.

The literary antecedents for this kind of verse go back at least as far as Jonson's "To Penhurst." In this poem, it is not the antecedents that are important, although they do add precision to a new use of an old style. The point is rather that Gullans can tap a range of experience that is all but unavailable in twentieth-century poetry. There is here no self-dramatization, but there is a statement of the resonances of deeply felt ordinary experience.

The effort to find a ground of consciousness, which has led by way of the pursuit of the trace of the deferred presence to the *cul-de-sac* of deconstruction, takes the form in Gullans's work of a persistent and wholly conscious effort to define personality, usually his own, but sometimes that of another. Thus, in "Calvin in the Casino," we are given a world in which knowledge even of the self is statistical knowledge:

Random, benign, malign, or God's Decrees.  
 We stand transfixed by probabilities.  
 Knowledge is ignorance in fine detail:  
 Who knows for certain that at last they fail,  
 Know nothing else will help them in this place,  
 And pray for chance to help them, pray for grace.

In "Research," knowledge of the other is only knowledge of the self:

It is ourselves we judge, that we condemn  
 Or know or modify, when we face them,  
 The men we were not and could never be,  
 Though archetypes of our own history.  
 These are inverted horoscopes we cast,  
 It is ourselves we summon from the past.

It is interesting that these efforts to explore disintegrations of consciousness should be written mostly in the tightest as well as the simplest stanza form in English. Thus, once again, in "In Proprios Greges":

Although you do not answer when I call,  
 Words less than yours are as no words at all.  
 You do not, or you will not, speak to me,  
 But let your mystery and your silence be,  
 The hooded wanderers of the zodiac,  
 Who leave but airy footsteps in their track.

This impulse toward definition realizes itself also in poems that define poetic art itself, as in the following couplets: "Then art is structure: nothing can be said / Without the order in which it is read. / Art is technique, by which the masters say / That ends are realized in a *métier*. / Art is distinction: process is not being. / The words you see are all there is worth seeing." And in "Measures," Gullans writes a poem in which he tells us that metrics is the basis of expression. The measure itself is empty: "The clock hangs on the wall / And knows nothing at all, / Nothing at all to say, / Except, This hour, this day, / This minute that I chime— / There is no other time." But measures provide significance and permanence: "We know our own intent / And with preemptive line, / With words that name, define, / And classify our fear, / We write what you will hear. / Our names are on the words / As flight is in a bird / And form blown into glass."

In "Metaphysics at Twenty-Six," the definition of personality appears to be undertaken ironically in a poem that is implicitly, like those I have just considered, a comment on the art of poetry. The poem is written in a rapid free verse, an onward rush of words that seem not to reach a resting point—short lines constantly running over:

The theology of  
 one's dilemma is cold,  
 luminous, and like that  
 of the absurd, defines  
 nothing. It is at last  
 its own reason, being,  
 as nothing else is, clear,  
 empty and absolute—  
 as it absorbs the mind,  
 one's energy of action  
 and all alternatives.

This is, in a sense, a poem of self-definition, but nothing is defined. The poem appears to be attempting statement but can achieve only suggestion. I suspect, as I say, irony at the expense of the free verse structure itself in which one cannot make definitive conceptual statement. Since nothing can be said here, the form of the poem is appropriate to its subject.

The richness of material and attitude made possible by a traditional technique is still widely present in English and American poetry, and it is a kind of verse writing that Canadian poets have employed in recent decades a good bit less self-consciously than have the English and the Americans. This is perhaps because the polarities that divide American poetry into the academic and traditional, on the one hand, and the radical and experimental, on the other, have not been so evident in Canadian writing. Some American poets play the whole instrument, as Richard Wilbur said of his own practice, but Canadian poets very frequently use the full resources for traditional form without feeling the need for a theoretical justification that even a traditionalist like Gullans seems to feel is required. And thus, our poets, like Gullans, have available not only the nuances of Modernist and postmodernist sensibility, but a rich world of wit, social comment, and transcendence as well.

Examples of this flexible formalism in Canadian poetry of this century are too numerous to deal with economically, but one thinks of the immense variety of stances and attitudes displayed through traditional procedures in the poems of A. J. M. Smith, Roy Daniells, Earl Birney, George Johnston, Elizabeth Brewster, and Jay MacPherson. As one example to stand for many, consider the skill with which Roy Daniells, in the sestet of "Noah 2," identifies himself with Noah and his own academic enemies with Noah's tormentors:

And then the rain began.  
A spatter at first that barely wet the soil,  
Then showers, quick rivulets lacing the town,  
Then deluge universal. The old man  
Arthritic from his years of scorn and toil  
Leaned from the admiral's walk and watched them drown.

This, like the best of Gullans's work, is a poetry of statement that utilizes the full resources of poetic tradition and of the language to say something.

***Wild Cat: Stories of the Cultural Revolution.* By Jialin Peng. Dunvegan, ON: Cormorant Books, 1990. Pp. 180. \$24.95. Paper, \$12.95.**

This collection of twelve short stories goes beyond its genre, the "scar literature" of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. First, instead of concentrating on the suffering and persecution of Chinese intellectuals, Peng presents us with the confusion and pain of the uneducated farmers as well: the squatters' village destroyed ("Phoenix Village"), the old tobacco farmer forced to pull up his beloved plants ("Tobacco"), the commune members cheated out of their life-savings by a con man ("Treasure Hunters"). What further complicates these portraits is that the victimizers are frequently victims, or at least potential victims, themselves. Thus, the con man is a brilliant student denied an education by the Cultural Revolution, who cheats his clansmen in order to attempt flight to Hong Kong. The official who orders the destruction of the village would really like to help its inhabitants, but fears that the visiting vice-premier will see him as being tolerant of capitalism if he does so.

Moreover, at their best, the stories move beyond being about China alone to using the Chinese experience as a way of commenting upon universal moral dilemmas. In "The Typewriter," the narrator reflects upon the way the government has distorted the ironic words of Szuma Chien—"Some deaths are as heavy as Mt. Tai, while others are lighter than feathers"—and transformed them into a way of justifying political murders.

I wish in the future there would be an historian as great as Szuma Chien, who would say unmistakably something like this; Any innocent and unnecessary death should be as heavy as Mt. Tai. No one should have the right to think any other human being's life, even an enemy's life, is as light as a feather. (26)

One only needs to read the newspapers, especially the allied commanders' and politicians' comments about the "low number of casualties" in the recent Gulf War, to see the relevance of Peng's insights to Western society as well.

Some of the stories are rather slight—with realistically depicted pain replacing character development in stories that require both to achieve their full impact. Another problem with the collection is that so many of the stories are so tragic that it becomes difficult to read more than one or two of them at a sitting. Yet they are frequently mediated by both humor and a

sense of compassion for all the characters. At their best, as in "The Typewriter," "Phoenix Village" and "Treasure Hunters," these stories convey much more than human suffering and betrayal; they show a mind searching for meaning in that suffering and finding none of the easy answers that a less sophisticated thinker might be tempted to provide.

This first collection shows both the lucid simplicity of language and form and the complexity of thought of an accomplished and very promising writer.

*Southern Illinois University*

*Judith Caesar*