

Book Reviews

***Christopher Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus": A 1604-Version Edition.* Edited by Michael Keefer. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1991. Pp. xcii, 211. \$24.95. Paper, \$10.95.**

Doctor Faustus is as well known for its ragged textual state as the torments of its central protagonist. It was printed in two versions, in 1604 (the A-text) and in 1616 (the longer B-text), and dispute still rages over which version is the more authentic. Traditionally editors have favored the B-text; more recently, however, allegiances have shifted to the A-text, and there are now at least three editions of the 1604 version of *Doctor Faustus* available.

What Keefer brings to his edition of the A-text is a fresh interpretation of the play's structural ambiguities and historical contexts, informed by a thorough familiarity with new theoretical developments. He claims he has restored "two displaced comic scenes to their proper places" (vii), and finds that it makes thematic sense for the first of these episodes involving Robin and Rafe to interrupt the exchange between Faustus and Mephistophilis in which the doctor signs away his soul. This is an intriguing decision, but it hinges upon the assumption that Faustus's wrangles with Mephistophilis formed part of a split scene. Stylistic exaggeration is at work here: Keefer has not cracked the organizational code of *Doctor Faustus*, he has merely offered one possible scenic sequence.

Other aspects of the edition are more guarded. New material on the historical Doctor Faustus is employed to revise settled views about the play, and a penetrating analysis of the ideas underpinning previous editions is elaborated. Keefer is at his best when he identifies the Christian flavor of W. W. Greg's parallel-text edition, and when he

enlists the work of cultural materialists such as Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore to illuminate *Doctor Faustus*' subversion and containment of established orthodoxies.

Similarly striking is Keefer's thesis about the genesis of the play: the A-text, revised in the mid 1590s, was printed in 1604; it underwent further changes (additions were commissioned in 1602, and the 1606 Act of Abuses necessitated the removal of references to God) before it was reprinted as the B-text in 1616. In its earliest form *Doctor Faustus* can be dated 1592-93 (without ruling out the possibility of an earlier date of 1588), and reveals a responsiveness to legends of Simon Magus, to the writings of Agrippa and Calvin, and to Hermetic-Cabalistic notions of spiritual rebirth—to the theological past out of which it evolved.

Engaging with questions about the ordering of scenes, editorial tradition, dating and sources, Keefer is convincing and impressive, even if he occasionally overstates his case. I was less happy with the principles underlying his editorial practice. Previous editors of Marlowe are criticized for entertaining Romantic conceptions of authorship, but Keefer himself is guilty of endeavoring to restore *Doctor Faustus* to an "originary textual moment." While poststructuralist and Marxist theory is embraced, conventional biographical profiles of Marlowe and the historical Faustus are developed. To compound these inconsistencies, the modernized text of the play obscures many aspects of the A-text's construction, and adds act and scene divisions, replaces question marks with exclamation marks (as at I.i.79), removes brackets and colons (favorite Marlovian devices), regularizes the spelling of names (thereby erasing rich Latinate variations), introduces asides, and tidies stage directions, mopping up ambiguities. More unsettling, perhaps, is Keefer's incorporation of isolated and extended readings from the B-text which he maintains has substantive value. The problem is that there are traces of memorial transmission in the B-text (Keefer acknowledges this), and so which lines from the B-text should take priority over the A-text is inevitably a vexed issue. Nor is it sufficiently explained why parallel passages from the B-text are printed in an appendix and others appear in the accidental emendations.

The territory now becomes dangerously subjective. Still, there were many places where I disagreed with Keefer's modifications and thought an unchanged A-text reading acceptable. Where in the A-text Mephistophilis is given the stark threat "thou art damnd," in the B-text (which

Keefer follows) he intones lamely: "Thou art damn'd, think thou of hell" (II.iii.75). A nice ambiguity is passed over in Keefer's preference for the B-text's version of Faustus's despair—"Hell claims his right" (V.i.49)—as the A-text reads: "Hell calls for right."

At several points Keefer has chosen B-text readings where memorial reconstruction might justifiably be suspected. "And to be short" (II.i.125) Mephistophilis states, wrapping up his description of hell in Keefer's version; the A-text, however, which is not used, runs "And to conclude. . . ." Local differences might not appear to be a cause for concern. Yet overall they constitute a play with alternative emphases, fewer uncertainties and harsher possibilities than Roma Gill's old-spelling 1990 Oxford edition which also privileges the A-text. And one emendation does seem fanciful. From his reading of Petrus de Abanus and Agrippa, Keefer substitutes "seals" (I.i.52) for Faustus's A-text "sceanes"; but "sceanes" is a misreading of "schemes" or magical diagrams.

For the reader requiring a *Doctor Faustus* which is theoretically current and modernizes the A-text, Keefer's is the edition to acquire. It is refreshing, substantial and generally accurate, although some changes are not recorded, italics are used carelessly at several places, and one accidental emendation seems to have disappeared (92). My own reservations focus upon the weight accorded to the B-text and upon the production of an edition of the A-text alone. A new, updated parallel-text edition is needed, with a range of tentative theories about the histories of the A and B versions, which allows readers to adjudicate between the texts and to make their own choices.

The Queen's University of Belfast

Mark Thornton Burnett

***Ben Jonson's 1616 Folio.* Edited by Jennifer Brady and W. H. Herendeen. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1991. London, Toronto: Associated UP, 1991. Pp. 221. \$35.00.**

This volume includes an "Introduction: On Reading the 1616 Folio," which sets out the rationale of the study, followed by eight essays dealing with some aspect of the Folio. Jonson's groundbreaking publishing venture is itself treated as an artistic construct, moving aesthetically and

in an interrelated way through the various genres. The eight essays are arranged to follow Jonson's content plan for the Folio as it reveals his aesthetic theory in practice.

Kevin J. Donovan's "Jonson's Texts in the First Folio" examines the Folio in terms of copytext and concludes that in some cases the earlier Quartos are superior. The Hereford-Simpson's Oxford edition is discredited in some instances because of errors in the choice of copytexts. Particularly useful are the suggestions for other bibliographical studies of the Folio and the recognition of a book's physical fact—the prestigious folio format and the typography for example—and its social role and context.

"A New Way to Pay Old Debts: Pretexts to the 1616 Folio" by W. H. Herendeen examines the prefatory materials of the Folio, particularly the dedications Jonson wrote for the plays and epigrams. Jonson uses the dedications in a variety of ways: his theory of satire is in the dedication of *Volpone* and that of the epigram in the dedication of *Epigrammes*; the dedications work inwardly to the texts by defining form and intention and outwardly toward critical responses by the reader; as well, in their variety the dedications involve society, morality, economics, art and the world, and Jonson's career to date.

In "Facts of the Matter: Satiric and Ideal Economies in the Jonsonian Imagination" Katharine Maus contrasts the economic systems of the plays in which wealth is not created but merely redistributed with the ideal economies of some of the celebratory poems—"To Penshurst" for example—and the masques where, first of all, there is overabundance for all concerned, and, secondly, a social structure based on non-material and inexhaustible virtues. Here, again, the ordering of the contents of the Folio suggests an evolution of thought.

William Blissett's "Roman Ben Jonson" interprets the three Roman plays in the Folio, and Stella Revard in "Classicism and Neo-Classicism in Jonson's *Epigrammes* and *The Forrest*" traces Jonson's double debt to and adaptation of earlier writers and models. Revard's article is especially helpful in identifying the writers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who influenced Jonson.

"Ben Jonson and the Ideology of Authorship" by Sara van den Berg ranges from a consideration of the Folio's title page as a statement of Jonson's artistic theory to a brief examination of various portraits of Jonson. Primarily, however, the essay is concerned with Jonson as author

and authority and the implications of those two titles. From *Epigrammes* and *The Forrest*, van den Berg examines the multiple personae Jonson assumes to deal with his art, the subjects of his poems, and himself.

In "Printing and 'The Multitudinous Presse'" Joseph Lowenstein uses Jonson's rivalry with Samuel Daniel as writers of masques to lead to considerations of Jonson's treatment of masque texts in the Folio. The printed texts are different from performances, and Jonson's ownership of those texts is asserted by his treatment of them. The "Multitudinous Presse" of the article's title refers to the momentary, the "Presse" of performance, in juxtaposition to the permanency of the poetry acquired by its printing, by the Press.

The last essay in the collection, "'Noe fault, but Life': Jonson's Folio as Monument and Barrier" by Jennifer Brady, moves outside the Folio proper and considers its impact on Jonson himself, particularly in his later, much troubled, and dependent years. The Folio monument, it seems, had become an albatross. It is a morbidly fascinating but tragic story.

A review of this length cannot do justice to this collection of essays. Using a variety of critical approaches, it is a wealth of information, and no one reading this volume will work with the Folio in quite the same way again.

Acadia University

Graham C. Adams

***The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice.* By Tilotama Rajan. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990. Pp. x, 359. \$42.50. Paper, \$14.95.**

In *The Supplement of Reading*, Tilotama Rajan looks at "how the activity of reading is narrated in a wide range of romantic texts and how the role of the reader is projected and complicated by romantic theory itself" (3-4). Her thesis is that during the romantic period, literary meaning is deferred from the text to its reading; hence the reader of romantic literature becomes not simply a passive receiver of the "work" as the completed form of its author's intentions, but an active collaborator with the author in the creation of a "text" in which the reader completes, supplements or deconstructs authorial intentions. In her introduction,

Rajan distinguishes between two varieties of recuperative reading: a positive one "which synthesizes the text by arranging and expanding elements actually given in it," and a negative one "in which the act of reading supplies something absent from and in contradiction to the textual surface" (5). In part I of her book, Rajan traces the development of these two varieties in German Romantic theorists from Schleiermacher to Kierkegaard; in part II, she looks at how a selection of English Romantic texts by Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Wollstonecraft and Godwin presents "an array of intersecting problems" related to these modes of supplemental reading.

Rajan's emphasis on the act of reading takes her away from the deconstructionist approach of her dense but impressive first book, *Dark Interpreter*. While *The Supplement of Reading* continues to view romantic texts in terms of fractures and fissures, deferral and difference, the most interesting feature of this book is Rajan's attempt to supplement the strategies of deconstruction—her own and others'—by means of an intertextual approach which "works the spaces" between rhetorical or textual theories like those of Derrida and De Man, and historical or cultural critiques like those of McGann and Kristeva. In effect, having deconstructed the logos, she now wishes to replace it with dia-logos.

Rajan's critical dialogism is evident in part I of her book, which reads and presents German romantic theory in such a way as to engage in current critical debate. Rajan sees a development in German hermeneutics from an emphasis on grammatical or exegetical reading in which meaning is centred in the text (Ernesti), to a psychological or phenomenological reading in which meaning is centred in the author's consciousness (early Schleiermacher) or a correspondent world-historical spirit (Hegel) to a negative or antithetical reading in which meaning, if it is there at all, must be supplied by the reader, who contradicts the textual surface (Schelling) or projects into an absence (Kierkegaard). This movement seems to anticipate the development of modern critical theory, but Rajan is at pains to distinguish her nineteenth-century theorists from twentieth-century ones. What she finds in late Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard is a theory that anticipates deconstruction in its destabilizing, deauthorizing tendency, but at the same time goes beyond the sterile reductiveness of purely rhetorical deconstruction because of its focus on discourse, which allows author, reader, the outside world of history and culture—and, most importantly, meaning, truth and understanding—back into the text, though

in a qualified way. The text becomes "an intent at meaning that generates in the reader a corresponding intent at understanding"; however, "what is meant is not self-identical," and "what is understood is not simple" (71). Thus Rajan's analysis of romantic hermeneutic theory becomes a means by which she can interrogate modern deconstruction theory, hoping to redefine key terms, (such as "difference"), and lead it in a more positive direction: in the work of Schleiermacher, she concludes, "difference is refigured as actually closer to life and therefore to truth" (96).

This dialogue between romantic and modern theory continues into Part II of *The Supplement of Reading*, which looks at a selection of English Romantic literary texts "at the point where they raise the question of their own reading" (7). One of Rajan's chief interests here is to explore how the act of reading is implicated in and complicated by the questions of politics that preoccupied the Romantics and continue to preoccupy the modern new historical theorists with whom Rajan engages in these chapters. Here again she adopts the strategies and language of contemporary critical theory but attempts to transcend its limitations by means of her dialogic approach. Thus, for instance, she reads Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, and Blake's *Thel* and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* from a Marxist/feminist perspective, showing how all four texts participate in eighteenth-century discourses of class and gender which undermine their authors' attempts to transcend class or gender differences through discourses based on universal feeling, female liberation or mythic vision. Yet even though her new historical method allows her to present some challenging and original analyses (her "heretical" feminist reading of Blake is particularly valuable), Rajan, taking issue with some Marxists, insists that the meaning of these texts is not limited or fixed by the historical circumstances of their production. Rather the very gaps that reveal the inevitable historicity of the text also open it up to the participation of future readers who transcend that historicity by bringing new perspectives to bear upon it. Thus the text becomes a "site for individual and cultural exchange," a productive stimulus for the creation of ever new readings in an endless process of transformation.

In her openness to multiple readings, Rajan's own method is akin to the "perspectivism" she finds in the early work of Blake, a position which she defines as "simply an admission that one's own point of view is not uniquely privileged," that "there is no synoptic point of view one can

adopt to attain that privilege," and that "different points of view cannot be 'smoothly combined' because they do not necessarily bear on the same object" (213). This approach leads Rajan to place various texts and readings side by side, not choosing between them, but rather drawing conclusions out of the fact that they coexist. This is a particularly useful method for dealing with romantic texts such as *Lyrical Ballads*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and *The Triumph of Life*, whose generic complexities, structural disjunctions, philosophic inconsistencies or textual difficulties have made it difficult to fit them into the romantic canon. Indeed one of the most practical aspects of this study is that it engages an issue we've all confronted in the classroom: how do we interpret texts like these, that seem to invite innumerable conflicting interpretations, or to resist interpretation at all? By openly admitting the unsettling disjunctions in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *The Book of Urizen*, and *Europe* (texts which are made even more "unreadable" by Blake's notorious habit of switching, adding or deleting plates), Rajan liberates us from the need to squeeze them into the conceptual framework of the later prophecies, and opens exciting new interpretive possibilities. And by dramatizing, in a refreshingly clear, straightforward way, her own difficulties interpreting Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, given the notorious uncertainties of the text and the fragmentary nature of the manuscript, Rajan offers a model for her thesis that the reader must "reflect on the ways in which different reading communities establish the identity of a text so as to legitimize their own philosophical or ideological positions, and on the strategies of transference that underlie our use of literature to reinvent ourselves" (345).

Of course Rajan's perspectivism opens her to charges of critical relativism and unreliability, which she persistently counters by her insistence that supplemental reading is a productive, engaged activity, even if it does not reach conclusions or "continuously correspond to truth"; and that reading differences is not a sign of intellectual paralysis, but a means towards intertextual, interpersonal and intercultural understanding. If anything, having situated herself in the space between various critical camps, Rajan is *too* conscious of possible arguments that might be brought against her theories from all sides, and this at times gives her work an irritatingly nervous, defensive tone. To measure oneself against other critics is sound practice, but in this book the other critics sometimes loom too large; this is particularly true of De Man, against whom Rajan

seems to be carrying out a personal vendetta. Another problem with Rajan's dialogic method is that it leads her to mix various modes of theoretical jargon; her writing is full of critical catch phrases (texts are "conflictual sites" which participate in an "hermeneutic economy" or reveal a "phenomenology of disarticulation"), double negatives ("Shelley unweaves his past self in such a way that his rereading unread itself"), and generally infelicitous diction and syntax (she speaks at one point of Schleiermacher "constituting this process of autodeconstruction as foundational"). Nevertheless, after laboring through sentences like these, one comes upon passages of wonderfully lucid, unaffected prose, in which Rajan illustrates her most difficult theoretical points with comprehensible, straightforward analogies and examples.

It is a tribute to Rajan that, ultimately, her theory does not overshadow her practice. Thus, while her book will challenge doctrinaire deconstructionists and new historicists, it will be enjoyed by all readers of romantic literature, who will not only find interesting interpretations of individual romantic texts, but will most likely respond favorably to Rajan's analysis of and commitment to "the human participation in the dance of words."

Dalhousie University

Judith Thompson

***Edmund Blunden: A Biography.* By Barry Webb. New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1990. Pp. xiii, 360. \$35.00.**

Early in March 1924 a farewell dinner was given for Edmund Blunden, at 27 about to sail to Japan to become Professor of English at Tokyo University. Among the thirty or so people present was Virginia Woolf. Her brief account of the occasion in her diary concluded thus: "And did we really all believe in Blunden's genius? Had we read his poems? How much sincerity was there in the whole thing?"

Barry Webb, who quotes these questions in his biography, could no doubt answer them for himself with a resounding Yes; and for him to have persevered at it for thirteen years is evidence enough, one might feel, of his sincere devotion to Blunden's memory. Handsomely produced, usefully illustrated, and with over three hundred pages of main text, the book is a labor of love, and it has been put together with the full co-

operation of those still alive—notably Rupert Hart-Davis and Blunden's third wife Claire—who knew Blunden best, as well as with that of Hector Buck, one of his closest friends from public school days, who died before it was published. Thus this first extended treatment of a distinguished poet and man of letters who died as long ago as 1974 is likely to be the nearest his admirers, and students of modern British literature generally, are going to get to an "official" biography.

As such, one should be grateful for it; but it could have been better. When readers have received pleasure and edification from literary works, and when these have provoked extensive critical discussion, they wish—if only out of simple gratitude—to learn more of the life which has been largely spent producing them. Such a detailed biographical account is self-justifying. Where, however, a writer has received less than his/her critical due, a biographer should surely take the opportunity of building the criticism in. This, alas, is the case with Blunden; but it is not the case with this biography, which on the whole does little more than refer in passing to Blunden's many books, and sometimes quote from them, rather than provide through critical evaluation the *raison d'être* for the biographical approach. Whereas, for instance, Blunden's front line experience of World War I is well fleshed out (and it is good to know, at last, the circumstances in which he won his Military Cross), the many fine poems which resulted from that experience (and it is surely as a war poet and prose commentator that Blunden has been especially valued) are not given the close attention they deserve: "Third Ypres," in my view one of the best war poems written by any British poet of the period, is no more than mentioned by its title.

This comparative lack of a literary-critical perspective is the more puzzling in view of the book's publisher. Given Blunden's years (1931-1945) as a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, and his tenure, short though it was, of the Oxford Poetry Chair—not to speak of his large contribution to British letters—one would have expected his biography to come, if not from Oxford University Press, then from another British publishing firm. Had it done so, its author's treatment of Blunden as a writer who needed virtually no critical introduction, but could be elaborated on as a much-loved bookman, cricket enthusiast, devotee of rural England and cultural ambassador might have seemed inbred, but not strange. Instead, however, an American university press has published this biography of an important British poet and literary man, which suggests

that in his own country Blunden had ceased, after and perhaps even before his death, to seem a figure deserving of the attention given to Wilfred Owen and Ivor Gurney, both of whom he had championed.

All honor, therefore, to Yale for bringing Blunden into greater prominence. Yet that prominence might have been claimed as much by his work as by his interesting, but not rivetingly interesting, life, with its three marriages, its alternation of academic posts at home and abroad with literary editorship, and its unremitting production, for love or money, of books, reviews and journal articles conscientiously catalogued by Blunden's biographer but of widely unequal levels of merit. It might have been well if Barry Webb had applied to his biography one of the critical views quoted in it. Reviewing Blunden's *Poems 1914-1930*, Philip Morrell concluded: "here I find the regions altogether too wide and cannot help thinking that if the book had been cut down, say, to two-thirds of its present length it would have gained by the process."

Certainly this biography need not have been lengthened by the inclusion in it of more literary-critical discussion; rather, superfluous material (among it the elaborate over-supply of multiple epigraphs before every single chapter of its 27-chapter, nine-part structure) could have been jettisoned to accommodate it. On the small scale, I see no function in the description of H. W. Garrod, with whom Blunden was friendly at Merton, as one who "nearly always wore a hat, even indoors." On a progressively larger scale, was there need to devote a whole page to Blunden's reminiscences in 1951 of Hugh Walpole, dead ten years before? Or to take up three pages with Blunden's impressions of Test Matches against Australia in 1938 and 1953? Nor was it appropriate to designate Blunden's attitudes to Nazi Germany in the 1930s as "Edmund at his most gullible" when Blunden had not been pronounced gullible in any earlier situations. By what precise miracle, one is left to wonder, were Blunden's false teeth, broken during a visit to Manila, "miraculously repaired?" Why should one feel that Blunden "unwittingly [removed] himself from opportunities within the new British universities" (few of them operational before 1960, when Blunden was 64) by taking up the Chair of English Literature at Hong Kong in 1953? And few readers will be likely to agree with a picture of Blunden as perpetually hardup when his salary in 1920 was £250 a year for three days' work a week on the *Athenaeum*, and in 1924 a superbly lavish £900 a year as Professor of English at Tokyo University. Part of the latter sum, we are enigmatically

told, went on the "unexpected expense" (which "ate into his salary") of "£12 for a bath"—not, in my experience, to *take* a bath, and surely not, in a Japanese house formerly occupied by a Japanese professor, to install one. It is a pity when a biography raises questions it seems unable to answer; even more so when some of the questions are not intrinsically worth raising.

"Life's a story not so simply told," Webb's biography ends, in Blunden's words. Indeed. Blunden's could have been told more compellingly, and the case for its telling—the poignancy and power of Blunden's writing at its fitful best—should have occupied the teller more. So should a concern for accuracy in matters of detail. It is not "forty miles home" from Shoreham to Brighton (where Blunden was in camp in 1915); it is four or five. The composer Gerald Finzi lived in a Hampshire hamlet called Ashmansworth, not in a thrice-mentioned "Ashmandsworth." Blunden did not (I am assured) "pass opinion" on the work of the poet Dannie Abse in 1931 or thereabouts: Abse was eight at the time. Japan and things Japanese suffer especially from distortions, hard for an old Japan hand like myself to forgive and even harder, I suspect, for Blunden's many Japanese admirers, some of whom assisted Webb when he visited the country presumably to extend his knowledge of Blunden's milieu. Karuizawa, correct once, is wrong twice (as "Karuizama"); "Kogoshima" should be Kagoshima; "Keijo University" must surely be Keio, one of the best private universities in Tokyo; pictures are hung (and ancestors honored) in a *tokonoma*, not a "tokonama"; and the Crown Prince (now Emperor) of Japan is not a "Akahito" but Akihito. These various errors are not unimportant, and their existence makes one less willing to allow that this biography, while far from being everything, is yet something.

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Philip Gardner

Traces of Another Time: History and Politics in Postwar British Fiction. By Margaret Scanlan. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990. Pp. 211. \$27.50.

The title of this study promises more than the book delivers. After an introductory chapter in which she talks generally about the historical novel as genre, Margaret Scanlan divides *Traces of Another Time* into three parts: *Troubles in Ireland*, *Losing Confidence: Spies and Other Aliens*, *Apocalypse*. There is little attempt to develop an argument linking the parts, which vary in tone and focus according to their topics.

The novels discussed deal with: troubles in Ireland (both contemporary Northern Ireland and the Ireland of earlier "troubles"); depictions of the qualities of the ruling, imperial class in mid century decline either in India or Whitehall and the intelligence service; apocalyptic visions of the collapse of traditional "political" values and the ensuing difficulty for individuals to play a significant "historical" role. Such texts are investigated not so much to formulate an argument about the nature (or development) of the depiction of political values and action in public events (which is more or less what is meant by "history"), as to explain what is the attitude towards public action and belief in each specific work. The result is an implicit insistence on the "point" being made in each book, and a consequent resort to plot "reference" rather than plot summary per se. The result is frequently turgid. Here is a passage on Thomas Kilroy's *The Big Chapel*:

Not only does a tolerant humanism fail in a situation that provokes irrational loyalties, but the only character in the novel who seems consistently to have the emotional strength to oppose fanaticism dies in exile. Emerine, Master Scully's illegitimate niece and adopted daughter, is passionately loved by Nicholas and his brother Marcus. Unafraid of nature, of what people think (*BC* 228), she is horrified when Nicholas becomes the priest's only companion, reminding her of "what she feared and hated in the town, the poisoning of everything that was trying to live naturally" (*BC* 225). When Emerine finally marries Marcus, the incestuous overtones are unmistakable. Seeing herself as a mythic force striving to unify the warring sides, she decides to be married in Kyle. . . (77)

I chose this passage almost at random—many other similar passages would have served as well to illustrate my point—and I ceased quoting equally arbitrarily. It would have made little difference if I had begun a few lines earlier or continued to quote for several more lines. At this point in *Traces of Another Time* the focus is local; only the specific text under scrutiny at this moment is being discussed, and the general argument of the book, insofar as there is one, is suspended in the interests of "getting *The Big Chapel* right." In this regard Margaret Scanlan is a laudably conscientious critic, but the consequence of her punctilio is to leave the total effect of *Traces of Another Time* less than the sum of its parts.

The texts chosen do all deal with issues concerning the relation of the individual to large public events in the twentieth century, and those events are primarily British. To this extent there is an inevitably unifying thread in the topics touched on by the discrete texts, although in the "apocalyptic" texts like Burgess's *The End of the World News* and Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* series, the problems dealt with incorporate the role of women in the world, the vulgarization of human beliefs about history, and the failure of middle-class communism—all rather more wide ranging than sectarian conflict in Ireland or even the end of the Raj and its managerial class.

In her introduction, Margaret Scanlan discusses the blurring of the distinction between history and fiction in much contemporary theory: "In the novel we see the source of this confusion of history and art as the difficulty human beings generally have in distinguishing the real from the imagined" (36). Her chosen texts are frequently linked by a common interest in historical myth-making, both in Britons' assumptions about their global role and obligations during and after Empire, and in fictional attempts to capture the essence of that myth—or to locate its distortions in decline. But this common interest is implicit rather than demonstrated. And a concern for the way we reflect or know the past—in either fiction or history—is at odds with the attempt at ordered argument about a historical pattern revealed in the novels discussed.

The End of the World News, Scanlan argues, "is not so much 'about' the past as it is about the need to recognize how limited our knowledge of it really is" (176). All well and good, but that itself is not the central argument of *Traces of Another Time*, which suggests an attempt at a different kind of closure in its "Afterword": "British writers of the late

twentieth century are well aware that the phase of history into which they were born has already ended, and like Le Carre's Bill Haydon, must occasionally feel the dismal contrast between the empire and contemporary Britain" (195). The word "occasionally" reveals the caution with which Scanlan makes any generalizations. The unambitious range of her conclusions is best illustrated in the final sentences of her study:

What gives them [these novels] their special urgency is the sense that reader, characters, and author are bound together in the struggle to remember that we live in history and that, in this struggle, fiction may be an ally as well as an enemy. The critical spirit and vitality of these novels is evidence enough that the novel still responds to a living world of social experience, that the voice of British fiction still carries across the water. (196)

There are interesting parts in *Traces of Another Time*, and the discussions of some of the novels are interesting in themselves. As a whole, however, the book is less interesting than its moments of perception and insight.

Dalhousie University

Rowland Smith

***A Certain Difficulty of Being: Essays on the Quebec Novel.* By Anthony Purdy. Montreal, Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's UP, 1990. Pp. xv, 176. \$32.95.**

A Certain Difficulty of Being by Anthony Purdy is an important contribution to the small but growing number of books written in English (or translated into English) about the Quebec Novel. These books include: Maurice Cagnon's *The French Novel of Quebec* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), Ben-Z. Shek's *Social Realism in the French-Canadian* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1977) and *French-Canadian and Québécois Novels* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1991), Patricia Smart's *Writing in the Father's House* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991). Purdy's book fills a gap, as there is no other in-depth study in English of several canonical Quebec novels. Yet, though Purdy chooses to write in English, and while his quotations from secondary sources are in English as well, Purdy quotes from the primary

sources in French without providing English translations. In his foreword, Purdy gives two reasons for combining the two languages this way: his close analysis of the primary texts requires that the reading be made in the original, and the bilingual aspect of the book maintains the "essential foreignness" of the experience. His decision to write in English, and quote frequently and at length in French, excludes all unilingual or practically unilingual readers, and slows down an average bilingual reader, thus providing such a reader with a first-hand experience of a certain difficulty of being. Interestingly, Purdy discusses in his essays the notion of narrative schizophrenia. We must note that the quotes from secondary material are most often translations from French into English (Purdy quotes Aquin's essays in translation, Genette's, Barthes's theory in translation, and so on). All of this does raise the question who is Purdy's ideal reader? A bilingual Francophone? A bilingual Anglophone? Where the foreignness of the experience is most useful is in the references Purdy makes to such authors as George Orwell and Nathaniel Hawthorne. These references allow for new distinctions and insights.

A Certain Difficulty of Being is made up of six essays on the Quebec Novel. The novels are examined in the chronological order of their publication. While the first chapter discusses prefaces to nineteenth-century Quebec novels, each of the other five discusses a novel written between 1937 and 1970. The six chapters are rather loosely linked to each other and could be read as separate entities. The "link" between the six chapters is the "difficulty of being" both a Québécois and a novelist. Basing himself on André Belleau's notion of the conflict of codes ("Le conflit des codes dans l'institution littéraire québécoise," *Liberté* 134: 15-20), Purdy examines the novels as a conflictual space for literary and sociocultural codes. He discusses ontological and narrative uncertainty as it is manifested in the prefaces to some nineteenth-century novels, as well as in Savard's *Menaud, maître-draveur*, Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*, Langevin's *Poussière sur la ville*, Aquin's *Prochain épisode* and Hébert's *Kamouraska*, five of the most read, discussed, analyzed and taught, Quebec texts. Purdy's discussions are informed by a theoretical and critical apparatus—largely narratological—that is both varied and up to date. Yet, while very well grounded in theory, Purdy's essays stay close to the texts discussed. As Purdy's proclaimed purpose in this book is to be helpful, he explains some of the theoretical approaches he uses, and often includes in his discussion an overview of the substantial critical

literature on the novel examined. This approach is indeed helpful, as it reveals to the non-initiated reader the "nuts and bolts" of the discourse at hand. It makes *A Certain Difficulty of Being* an excellent text to recommend, among others, to those wishing to find out more about Quebec literature. It is true, of course, that such an approach must sacrifice some of its elegance for the sake of helpfulness; the numerous digressions, often rather lengthy, as well as some twenty pages of notes, do make the reading somewhat slow and tiresome at times. But it is worthwhile reading!

However, the heart of Purdy's work is its analysis of individual novels. Therefore, in order to gain a further appreciation of *A Certain Difficulty of Being*, let us examine briefly some of the topics explored in it. Chapter one explores prefaces to some nineteenth-century Quebec novels, where the authors use rhetorical strategies to deny that they are actually writing novels. Purdy believes that the "uneasiness which seems to haunt prefaces" to Quebec novels of this period reflects the conflict between literary codes and the moral climate of Quebec. Chapter two discusses the uneasiness of critics in assigning a generic label to *Menaud, maître-draveur*. This uneasiness, Purdy feels, is due to the fact that "Menaud is an anachronism," and his vision of the Quebec community is in conflict with its reality. However, it is precisely this difficulty of being that is the source of the novel's interest, claims Purdy. In chapter three, Gabrielle Roy's and George Orwell's techniques of narration are compared. Purdy believes that the narrative code chosen in *Bonheur d'occasion* ("omniscient third-person narration with shifting focalization") does not satisfy Roy, who then allows for the "invasion of a literary form by a social consciousness." In chapter four, Purdy discusses *Poussière sur la ville*. According to him, the novel is innovative for Quebec in that it breaks away with the convention of an omniscient narrator. Yet the reader of *Poussière sur la ville*, says Purdy, is uneasy with the novel's narration. Purdy explains this unease by the problematic relation between its two levels, that of the narrated "I," and that of the narrating "I," as well as by the conflict between "the logic of story" and the "logic of life." Purdy suggests interpretations of the transgression of the narrative code. Chapter five is a discussion of Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode*. Purdy feels that Aquin's attempt to reconcile his rejection of literature with the fact that he is writing a novel is at the very heart of *Prochain épisode*. Purdy examines Aquin's narrative code switching, his conscious exploitation of

the conflict of codes, his use of intertextuality as a basis for parody, and concludes that by translating the difficulty of being a French-Canadian writer into literary terms, Aquin creates "an art of defeat." The last chapter (and the one I appreciated perhaps the most) is a narratological analysis of Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska*. Purdy arrives here to some rather iconoclastic conclusions; he refers to the narrative code of the novel as "narrative ventriloquism," he feels that *Kamouraska* in Barthes's terms is a text of pleasure rather than one of bliss, and finally suggests that the novel may be seen as a "simulacrum" of either the modernist or the postmodernist novel. . . . Purdy contends that analyzed from Belleau's point of view, *Kamouraska* is not a true manifestation of a lived conflict of codes.

This very brief overview of some of the questions raised in Purdy's essays demonstrates, I believe, the great interest and usefulness of these essays. He admirably manages to avoid what he refers to as "depressing academic futility." Rather than engage in it myself, I encourage all those interested in the Quebec Novel to read *A Certain Difficulty of Being* and see for themselves.

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***Tall Lives.* By Bill Gaston. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1990. Pp. 243. \$19.95.**

The tall lives of the title are those of the Baal twins, Del and Frank, who are six-foot-five, and those of their immediate circle. All these lives, we are led to infer, are tall in the sense that stories are tall. Lofty, however, they are not. They tend, rather, to the paltry and the bizarre. The only likable character in the book is mentally retarded. It is therefore no small tribute to the author's artistry that, despite some initial misgivings and some minor annoyances along the way, one is content to stay in this questionable company.

The twins, joined at birth at the big toe, are delivered and separated by their father, a bibulous veterinarian with a penchant for philosophy. From the beginning there is a vast difference in the boys' outlook and behavior, which events conspire over the years to aggravate. Del tends to

be submissive to circumstance—something of a wimp, in fact—while Frank loses no opportunity to act out his anger against the world in deeds of random violence and just plain nastiness.

The severed toes ache symbolically at times of crisis, and although the twins lives diverge for a long period there is a mystical, wordless communion between them so strong that in the catastrophe caused by Frank's misdeeds they find themselves seeing things from each other's viewpoint and acting accordingly. This is clearly the denouement towards which the author has been working. Disbelief is suspended by a tenuous thread indeed, but the pages continue very enjoyably to turn.

There are two other principal characters. Del's wife Mary, whom Del abjectly loves, and a fat pseudo-philosopher named Felix d'Amboise, whose vapid profundities head the book's chapters. There is a noble side to Mary. She nurtures a group of handicapped youngsters, including the loony but likable Fraser, who in the end is the only tie holding the marriage together. But Mary has a darker side. She livens up her dull life by having clandestine affairs and by working secretly as a stripper. She is also cruel, responding to Del's mild objection to rationed sex ("To start, say, Sunday and Thursday") with "Can't you take care of that, Del?" and then asking regularly, "Did you masturbate today, darling?" Usually, he did, fantasizing improbably about the colors of pigeons' necks and water plinking into millponds.

Felix is obese to the point of obscenity. At first he seems no more than a hideous gargoyle, there only to embellish the story. A person only Frank could love. It is through Felix, however, that Frank finds out about Mary's double life, and, being Frank, decides to have some malicious fun at Del's expense. Felix is tiresome, but he redeems himself in the end by providing the opportunity for a farcical burial at sea.

It is evident that *Tall Lives* is the work of a novelist with a future, and this clear promise of good things to come makes those minor annoyances all the more regrettable. One of these is an apparent fascination with things unsavory and scatological, and a determination, familiar to any parent of teenagers, to flaunt them. Del, for example, aside from his solitary pleasures, enjoys listening to and speculating at length on Mary's farts in the bathroom, which he finds "not unsexy, almost cute." "They weren't shit sounds, they were poop sounds."

Equally distracting is Bill Gaston's tendency to reach too far for an analogy or metaphor. Tension in the room that "smelled like electricity

and tasted like pencil wood." Mary, "white as foam on a quickly poured beer." Frank sees Del as "an outraged rototiller with long whirlwind arms spraying dogshit" at Mary. These infelicities abound, to the detriment of an otherwise laudable style.

Finally, why, in a book written by a Canadian professor of English and published by a Canadian publisher, are American spelling and usage adopted, even to the extent of sanctioning the ludicrous "normalcy"?

All these nits duly picked, I shall look forward eagerly to Bill Gaston's next.

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