

# BOOK REVIEWS

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*The Practice of Reading.* By Denis Donoghue. New Haven: Yale UP, 1998. x, 307 pages. \$30.00 US.

As simple and straightforward as the phrase is, the title of this book is nonetheless problematic: whose practice of reading, what practice of reading? Is there a collective or communal practice as Stanley Fish once suggested? Or is reading, at least that kind of reading whose object is pleasure, not truth (in the not always helpful distinction we owe to Coleridge) a personal, private performance? A performance whose ultimate goal would not be the assigning of "meaning" to a text, but the self-understanding of the interpreter in the act of interpretation, a self-understanding which can never be the basis of an ideal autonomy, if it is to be more than solipsism, but the necessary prolegomena to an authentic social existence.

Donoghue does not ask these questions; no doubt he takes the importance of reading as self-evident. His quarrel, and it is as a quarrel that he takes on the matter of reading, is in some ways precisely with the theorizers, the questioners of reading. Like Plato's Euthyphro on the question of the true nature of piety, Donoghue's answer to the question—what is the practice of reading?—seems to be to offer his own such as it is and without much reflection (asserting in the autobiographical first chapter that he had no need of theory to bring him to the reading of literature), and to offer it as somehow corrective to that of the false gods of theory and their "followers," the bleating sheep of ideology.

*The Practice of Reading* is a miscellany of eclectic essays on a range of "things"—it's hard to be more precise—literary, pedagogical, intellectual—that have provoked the author's attention, though more often his irritation and contempt. The major irritant, of course, is theory, which he reduces invariably to Deconstruction (always with a capital), theory as Institution and specifically the institution of Jacques Derrida's will to power not only over texts but over all the faculties, claiming, according to Donoghue, "the unique privilege of pronouncing on questions of true and false, right and wrong, moral and immoral." But Deconstruction with a capital is simple contradiction. Of *différance*, which is the non-foundational non-word, non-concept, but perpetual awareness at the heart of deconstruction, Derrida writes: "There is nothing kerygmatic about this 'word,' provided that one perceives its decapita(liza)tion. And that one puts into question the name of the name." The function of deconstruction *vis-à-vis* any institution is to demand of it the capacity to question constantly, as part of its essential being, its own legitimacy. One could wish that Donoghue remembered an important sentence

from a book he is sure to have read—Pound's *Guide to Kulchur*: "When you don't understand it, leave it alone."

But Donoghue won't leave it alone, even when, as he says, "it may be true that the 'culture wars' are over," and that it is a "blessing that my professional life proceeds free from the noise of ignorant armies clashing by night." He is unhappy that there was no clear victory for his side in those wars and is "not convinced that it is time to put away the weapons." Who then is the enemy? What are the divisions of these ignorant armies? Donoghue offers a list: "Women's Studies, Feminism, Gender Studies, Gay and Lesbian Studies, African American Studies, Marxist Criticism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Studies." These are not to be taken as the rubrics for critical or epistemological methodologies but the flags of particular groups of ideologies and ideologues. The battlefield is the University. "In the classroom, an ideologue tries to transform students as social subjects and, by doing so, to further the interests of the social group that the ideologue represents." And despite the general currency of the notion of interdisciplinarity, Donoghue states that he sees little communication among the several interests, presumably because as mere ideologies they have no intellectual or critical standing. Their disputes are internal, comparable to policy and strategy splits in political parties. "A quarrel breaks out when an adept of, say, Feminism feels that a colleague has veered from the path of righteousness or has otherwise undermined the principles of the guild." The use of the word 'adept' as a substantive is indicative. Donoghue has described himself in this book and in the earlier memoir *Warrenpoint* as a collector of words and sentences; 'adept' is one of those words, and it is used several times in this text to categorize theorists with his undoubted knowledge of its origin in the medieval Latin 'adeptus,' an alchemical term for one who has achieved the great secret of knowing how to change base metals into gold. Funny; but who among the ignorant armies would get the joke? Earlier, Donoghue noted that the appearance of the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* was a "critical strategic event": "There is now somewhere for feminists to go to be together for a while." Presumably it was not necessary to add the expected 'and have a good cry.'

When Donoghue turns his "weapons" on more specific targets, the results are not any happier:

If you follow Foucault or Gramsci, you exempt yourself from de Man's epistemological scruples. [But does epistemological scrupulosity come in flavours?] In each of these ideologies, teachers see themselves as 'organic intellectuals' (in Gramsci's phrase) articulating the desires of simple folk who apparently can't speak for themselves. It may be difficult for professors to act on Gramsci's program, "to remain in contact with the 'simple people' and, moreover, find in this contact the source of its problems to be studied and solved." But they do the best they can.

In the classroom these ideologies satisfy an otherwise frustrated desire in teachers and students to intervene directly in political life on behalf of women, gays, blacks, minorities, and the wretched of the earth. Such studies appease one's will to power, even if the political object is achieved only notionally or not at all. It is doubtful that they have much provenance outside the seminar room.

The depiction of Feminism was caricature; this is mere travesty. Any 'Gramscian' who actually read the text Donoghue cites would be severely disabused from forming such a "program." The word is Donoghue's, not Gramsci's. If Gramsci's "The Study of Philosophy" posits anything like a program, it would be this: "The beginning of ... critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, that is, a 'know thyself' as the product of the historical process which has left you an infinity of traces gathered together without the advantage of an inventory. First of all it is necessary to compile such an inventory." The suggestion that reading Gramsci would encourage either the abandonment of epistemological scruple, or any speaking for rather than out of the experience of the masses, is grotesque.

There is not a citation from Bakhtin, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Levi-Stauss, Lyotard, de Man, or Paul Ricoeur that does not involve a similar sort of distorting or ignoring of the context and import of the original. The result is that the first half of this book, which is largely devoted to Donoghue's take on theory, is pretty much useless except as further evidence of the malaise and bad faith depressing the humanities. It may be that a miscellany, which this book is, should or can only be read miscellaneously, and two or three of the essays that make up the second half, but especially "The Antinomian Pater," which seems wholly out of place in the grace and seriousness of its attention to its subject, will survive this otherwise dismayingly tendentious performance. Donoghue's plea for close, patient reading is perennially valid. But the value of this book is, quite paradoxically, to reveal how an unwitting, anti-ideological counter to putatively ideological reading can fall into the very faults it wishes to condemn.

J.K. Snyder

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*The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama.* By Mario DiGangi. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. xi, 216 pages. \$59.95 US, \$19.95 paper.

*The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* is a competent study, although it is perhaps questionable whether a book so brief can be regarded as a "comprehensive account" of homoeroticism in Renaissance drama, as the back blurb claims; it often reads more like a catalogue containing synopses of further

work to be done, or of texts that need further consideration. DiGangi asserts the “polemical and strategic purpose” that has determined his choice of texts—“the decentering of Shakespeare”(28)—and invites us to look at the broader picture of Renaissance homoeroticism as variously expressed in four separate genres covering both familiar and less frequently read texts: “The homoerotics of marriage in Ovidian comedy,” “The homoerotics of mastery in satiric comedy,” “The homoerotics of favoritism in tragedy,” and “The homoerotics of masculinity in tragicomedy.”

The introduction makes the critical methodology of the study clear; DiGangi is well connected in the school of cultural materialists, and states at the outset that “whatever innovation I have to contribute to Renaissance studies is based on a commonplace in lesbian and gay studies: ‘homosexuality’ is a modern concept that cannot be applied, without a great deal of historical distortion, to the early modern period”(1). DiGangi’s critical positioning is a testament to the continuing importance of another brief but enormously influential book, Alan Bray’s *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982). What surprises me a little, however, is the selective reading of this study that DiGangi and other materialist critics now seem to carry out. From Bray, DiGangi accepts the premise that “early modern homoeroticism cannot be defined as a minority practice or a discrete erotic identity”(1), which takes us logically (perhaps) to the next assertion that “the ‘homosocial’ and the ‘homoerotic,’ therefore, overlapped to a greater extent, and with less attendant anxiety, in the early modern period than would later be possible under a modern regime of sexuality”(2). Yet this line of reasoning brings us to the erroneous conclusion that “homosexual acts were not generally forbidden or regarded with horror in Renaissance England, as Bray’s own book has shown”(10). And yet Bray states unequivocally, and with the weight of extensive historical research behind him, that “It is difficult to appreciate the weight of [moral] condemnation if one has not had to read through—as the researcher must—the constant repetition of expressions or revulsion and horror, of apologies for the very mention of the subject that it was felt necessary to express whenever was mentioned the ‘detestable and abominable sin, amongst Christians not to be named’” (*Homosexuality in Renaissance England* 61). DiGangi does confront this problem indirectly in a note at this juncture, which addresses “Bray’s occasional reification and anachronistic use of ‘homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality,’” referring the reader to discussions by Sedgwick, Goldberg, and Elizabeth Pittenger. But suspicions are raised that historical accuracy quickly becomes elided and submerged in a kind of game of terms, each sliding and doubtful, and variously applied according to the methodological and ideological agenda of the critic. DiGangi wants to talk about, for example, orderly and disorderly modes of homoeroticism, and to distinguish them from male friendship (acceptable homosociality) and sodomy (bad, dangerous, illegal). “Homoeroticism” is a term many have come to deploy, to avoid the sense in “homosexuality” that suggests a distinct personality type. However, it might

be queried whether “homoerotic” is any less anachronistic than “homosexual” in that it also carries the idea of acceptability of sexual practices that were, outside of the imaginative world of poetic discourse, so rigorously denounced. Although DiGangi pauses to observe it in passing, much recent commentary on Renaissance homoeroticism needs to more fully *digest* and come to terms with Bray’s attribution of “widespread acceptance of hierarchical homosexual relations not to tolerance but to an epistemological inability to interpret such behavior according to the legal, religious, satiric, and nationalistic discourses that excoriated the disorderly ‘sodomite’”(7). The introduction raises other concerns about the exclusiveness of DiGangi’s methodological approach. Eliding Bray’s claims of the extreme moral denunciation of homosexuality in the Renaissance makes it easier for DiGangi to denounce Joseph Cady’s “traditional view of Renaissance sexual repressiveness”(14), Cady being accused of distortion and over-simplification, since he foolishly “caricatured” a whole host of respectable historians and critics as “new-inventionists.” It is perhaps unfortunate that Cady’s argument concerning terms of Renaissance discourse (“masculine love”) is not more convincing, since his point about repressiveness deserves more attention than it has received.

In spite of DiGangi’s dismissal of any methodologies which in his mind seem vastly inferior to “rigorously materialist” methods (9), the discussions that ensue are often valuable, and aspects of them may serve as points of departure for later work. While he works to “decenter” Shakespeare, the treatment of Shakespeare, especially *As You Like It*, is strong; the chapter on the homoerotics of mastery in satiric comedy offers very helpful discussions on the eroticization of servants; and Chapman is given the kind of attention that, perhaps surprisingly, he has not previously received in discussions of Renaissance homoeroticism. The weakest moment (for me) is DiGangi’s characterization of Mortimer in Marlowe’s *Edward II* as a “sodomite” as well as a regicide, since he is “the architect of Edward’s sodomitical death”(114). Yet is it not significant that Mortimer remains ignorant of the method Lightborne uses to murder Edward? Although DiGangi asserts that “‘sodomy’ is a category dependent as much upon social relationship as upon a bodily relationship”(114), and although sodomy in the Renaissance was “traditionally linked with politically dangerous behaviours such as treason in ways that other categories of erotic disorder were not”(18), it remains a notable distortion of the political and psychological meaning of Marlowe’s tragedy to assert that Mortimer emerges as the true “sodomite” of the play.

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*Privacy and Print: Reading and Writing in Seventeenth-Century England.* By Cecile M. Jagodzinski. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999. 218 pages. \$69.50.

In this engaging and informative book, Jagodzinski argues that “the emergence of the concept of privacy as a personal right, as the very core of individuality, is connected in a complex fashion with the history of reading” (1). She observes that reading became a more private activity during the early modern period, one quite unlike the medieval practice of reading aloud to others. The history of reading also includes textual representations of readers. Because publication posed a distinct threat to the privacy of both authors and their subjects, seventeenth-century writers often established a compact with their readers “by presenting themselves as readers and by creating characters who served as model representations of readers”: in this way, Jagodzinski argues, author and reader shared a private experience with the text, one that made the reader “complicit in the observation of the world the author created” (10). Reading and privacy were thus closely connected in two ways—in the actual act of reading and within the texts being read.

Jagodzinski relies on a range of writers and genres to formulate her argument; her primary sources include devotional guides, conversion narratives, personal letters, drama, and early fiction. Beginning with spiritual readers and ending with Aphra Behn’s *Love-Letters*, Jagodzinski explores five instances of “readers and authors negotiating their experiences of privacy and print with one another, with religious and political authorities, with their families and lovers, with society, even with God” (19). Along the way, she offers many useful insights. Perhaps the most important and original is that recusant Catholicism played a crucial role in developing a reading public and the concept of privacy. Protestantism, with its belief in the possibility of an unmediated relationship between reader and God, is commonly said to have helped bring about the modern concept of privacy, but Jagodzinski suggests that Catholicism equally gave rise to a sense of an autonomous and private self: eager to preserve their wealth and perhaps their lives, recusants fashioned public selves that disguised personal creed and the private reading it entailed.

Other highlights include her observation that the act of reading depicted in conversion narratives worked “to create and at the same time invade an incipient privacy” (73); her suggestion that, paradoxically, privacy came to have value partly through the publication of private letters, such as those of Charles I and John Donne; her persuasive analysis of Margaret Cavendish’s plays as evincing a strategy of “reconciling the private and public through reading, writing, and publication” (96); and her argument that Behn’s epistolary fiction bears witness to her own scepticism about privacy, that is, that the creation of a private self may serve as the duplicitous means to a personal, self-interested end. All of these examples suggest that privacy was

not equated with solitude, but was centred on “a recognition of the possible differences between one’s public and private roles and the right to conceal or keep secret the workings of the inner self” (164), and they also support Jagodzinski’s hypothesis that the “valuation of privacy was neither complete nor universal in the seventeenth century” (3).

Jagodzinski does a fine job of capturing the development of privacy in early modern England and of suggesting the enduring ambivalence toward it. Her approach, as the above summary suggests, is literary-critical and sociohistorical, and her analysis is largely convincing. Overall, though, the book lacks methodological and interpretive cohesion. Her two-pronged means of analysis is far from atypical, but the literary-critical and the sociohistorical are not often as distinctly bifurcated as they are in this book: Jagodzinski’s study tends to move between the two in a way that makes it seem like two separate projects instead of a cohesive, unified whole. Certainly, this has much to do with the breadth of her discussion, which includes the roles that religion, politics, print, literacy, and gender all played in developing the concept of privacy, and the scope of her analysis, which moves from actual readers to authors and, finally, to readers and writers represented by authors. But this is a slim volume, and the range of genres and shaping influences Jagodzinski explores aren’t as fully addressed as we might wish. Often, too, Jagodzinski entices the reader with ideas that she doesn’t explore in the course of her study. For example, she offers an early discussion of “private speech” (11), but neglects to pursue what seems to be a promising avenue of inquiry when she goes on to consider specific texts: perhaps her analysis would be better served by the use of a theoretical framework such as that offered by Lev Vygotsky’s *Thought and Language*, a seminal work that undoubtedly influenced the essays in the lone volume she seems to have consulted on the topic of “private speech.” At other times, Jagodzinski mentions theorists and critics that don’t seem especially useful or relevant to her study. For example, the work of medievalist Carolyn Bynum invoked in the discussion of Donne’s letters seems anachronistic, as does the long passage quoted from Czech novelist Milan Kundera—both examples, though not wholly irrelevant, emphasize similarities while obfuscating the important differences that define early modern privacy. As an analysis of the dialectical relationship between reading and privacy, Jagodzinski’s book offers the beginnings of what could be a valuable contribution to extant scholarship on the topic: perhaps she and other scholars will take up some of the ideas the book offers and pursue them to a more satisfying end.

Lyn Bennett

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*The Making of the English Canon from the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century.* By Trevor Ross. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1998. x, 400 pages. \$44.95.

Trevor Ross's *The Making of the English Literary Canon* is the most recent and elaborate attempt to answer the questions raised (but not answered) in *Cultural Capital*, Paul Guillory's important study of canon-formation: Under what historical conditions did the modern syllabus emerge? What ideological and material factors have determined the canonization of certain authors at certain periods of literary history? In our era of feminism and post-colonialism, movements that have shattered previous confidence in a fixed canon of "great authors," an increasing number of scholars have turned their attention to the historical sources of the modern canon. The canon, most agree, dates from the eighteenth century. In this century, as Douglas Lane Patey argues, literate men and women cultivated a penchant for the "aesthetic," Alexander Baumgarten's coinage for sensually appealing texts and objects without practical use or *telos*. The need for these objects derived from important shifts in the ideological and material circumstances of the age—from a nostalgia bred from the banalising influence of modern print culture, as Jonathan Kramnick argues, or from the hedonism of bourgeois individualists, the Marxist assessment of Terry Eagleton.

What Trevor Ross adds to these analyses is a sophisticated and challenging theory of the historical transformations that generated the modern canon. He agrees with those like Richard Terry who have contested the assumption that the canon was merely an idea of the eighteenth century. Even in the Renaissance, during what Ross calls the "rhetorical" era, there were some crude gestures towards the canonical status of certain authors. But "rhetorical" culture bestowed its laurels for reasons different from our own. In Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey, it interred the authors who seemed best to serve the ends of the *present* day, and whose works enriched the vernacular tongue and harmonized the conflicts of the age. These self-aggrandizing, non-historical and predominantly verbal criteria of the Renaissance differed essentially from the "objectivist" values of canon-making that gradually prevailed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For this later era, Shakespeare or Milton possessed *objective* value as artists. The source of this value was not verbal prettiness, or any social utility comparable with the usefulness of non-literary writing. Rather, like everything else in this age of rising consumerism, "literature" had value as a commodity, a *special* commodity that men and women used to polish their souls and to improve their credentials as fashionable people. These people of fashion came to believe that one must read and appreciate Shakespeare because he was intrinsically "great." Knowledge of this and other canonical authors bestowed "cultural capital," Pierre Bourdieu's brilliant term for those intangible assets we use to buy entrance into the privileged circle of "cultured" people. And the coiners of this cultural

capital were a new class of literary professionals whose expert direction seemed necessary to fathom the gem-strewn depths of literary greatness.

Hence, Trevor Ross has given us the fullest history to date of our own ancestry as professors of the literary canon in the consumer-driven, scientifically optimistic society of the Early Modern Era. Like natural scientists of the same era, eighteenth-century critics wished to inscribe the species of literary greatness on static tables and hierarchies, an organization of knowledge that differed fundamentally from the rambling and changeable list of worthies produced in the Renaissance. They aimed to sensitize the public palate for literature through the medium of *education*, a powerful dam against the sludge of popular writing that flowed like Fleet Ditch through the heart of national culture. In delineating the ascendance of this literary culture, Ross displays considerable subtlety and deftness, relaxing the Procrustean rigidity of Foucault's *epistemes*. No culture, he admits, is purely "rhetorical" or "objectivist." For example, the most dominant literary scholar of the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson, remained attached to many of the critical tenets of rhetoricism. While he shared his culture's obsession with establishing stable criteria for determining the literary merit apart from transitory ornaments of fashion, he spurned the coveted role of professional arbiter, often deferring instead to the unschooled judgements of the "common reader." Like a Renaissance rhetor, moreover, Johnson thought of literary art in terms of verbal refinement and social utility.

Impressive in its scholarship and historical breadth, *The Making of the English Literary Canon* nonetheless presents certain difficulties of terminology and narrative coherence. For example, Ross asserts that "rhetorical" culture was concerned with the literary "producer" rather than the consumer. Yet surely, as he elsewhere acknowledges, rhetorical culture of the Renaissance differed from scholasticism precisely in its reaffirmation of the *public* role of the orator or writer and his contribution to civic welfare. Similarly, "objectivist" does not seem the most felicitous term for a literary outlook that stressed, above all, the *subjective* attributes of the literary consumer—the cultivation of a critical sensibility or "taste." It might also be objected that this book concerns the "canon" only indirectly, for it is mostly a description of how eighteenth-century people came to distinguish and value a certain hierarchical category of writing called "literature." This study does not make clear, for example, by what standard Shakespeare came to be preferred over Marlowe, or Milton over Donne, or Pope over Prior. Contrary to its title, *The Making of the English Canon* leaves us wondering how, in fact, the English canon was *made*.

Nicholas Hudson

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*Worrying the Nation: Imagining a National Literature in English Canada.* By Jonathan Kertzer. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998. 243 pages. \$40.00.

Here is a book that explores what has long needed to be recognized: that a national literary history is neither, with a naïvely radical gesture, an illusion to be dismissed, nor with equally naïve reaction, a truth to be recognized. In the "nation" we are confronted with a history both material and imaginary. "The nation is both a historical reality and a discursive need. We are not free to choose or reject it at will, since it has already helped to define the position from which we speak" (166). The nation as a "discursive need," and the expression of this need in a "literary history," are the intersecting focal points of the book. By making these the double object of a compelling historical survey and unremitting ideological critique, yet all the while insisting on their inescapability and even properness, Kertzer sets the terms and limits upon which all further discussion of this important topic must be based. It is a book everyone concerned with Canadian literature should be in a hurry to read.

The book is divided into five well-defined chapters, and it must be said that very little sense is given in advance as to what they will contain. The Table of Contents lists chapter titles only, and these titles are hardly meaningful until the chapters are well under way. Hints about the chapter contents and layout of the book as a whole only come at the very end of a long first chapter. All this is perhaps consistent with Kertzer's wish to displace a normative scholarly book form with the less thesis-driven genre of "worrying," which makes up for "what it lacks in consistency" with "tenacity," a "dogged engagement with the problematic" (35). I readily join Kertzer in promoting the value of such a genre, because it serves the useful function of arguing for a proper context or starting point of discussion, rather than a narrower solution to one. However, Kertzer's apology for the lack of a normative structure has the effect of obscuring the structure which is clearly there. The first chapter provides a critical discussion of three key terms, "national," "literary," and "history," and their combination. It also introduces the concepts of "sociability" and "justice," from which Kertzer constructs an idea of the political horizons which are inevitable for social practice and literary representation. The second chapter examines, by extension, the particular fate of romantic literary history in Canada. The third chapter turns its attention to literature itself, to examine expressions of "nation building" in long poems from the two centuries, while the fourth chapter gives a balancing view of fiction that explicitly resists or contests such building, with a perspective upon the "nation as monster." The fifth, concluding chapter once again draws back, and attempts to theorize the status of "the nation as a literary-historical category, as a principle of formal and social analysis, as a discursive function, and as a forum for sociability and poetic justice" (36). Throughout, Kertzer's talent lies in working at the critical avant-garde of poststructuralist and postnationalist

discourse, while producing his own critical distance. For example, to my pleasure, Kertzer properly acknowledges Homi Bhabha for among other things, his postcolonialist theorization of a “third space” in which for Kertzer, a national literary history must try to imagine itself. At the same time he recognizes Bhabha’s own dangerous limits—as one too readily moralizing under the camouflage of a post-Nietzschean critique of values (and I would claim, under the same camouflage, producing an effect rather indistinguishable from the very liberalism he denounces). Kertzer’s point is not to beat Bhabha at his own poststructuralist game, but to shift the game in a new direction, not merely cognizant of but dependent upon the ethical horizons introduced in his first chapter. Whether the critics he accommodates to this scheme will be happy with their roles, remains to be seen.

The book ends in an exemplary way. Kertzer’s aim has been to open up discussion about a national “third space” imaginable in or as a literary history, within the constraints of a horizon of sociability or justice. Though this aim is nicely achieved by a disciplined “worrying,” he concludes by going a hesitant step further, to offer a possible “model” of such a space appropriate to Canada. A mere paragraph, it is hardly part of his argument; yet it is more than a speculative flourish, for the text upon which it draws at some length also supplies an epigraph to the book, thus framing it. Kertzer finds this model in the founding discourse of the Traditional History of the Confederacy of the Five Nations. The irony is that this discourse, as Kertzer points out, “recalls all the grand principles of romantic historicism” (200). In truth, it seems a perfect example of the very nationalist ideology that he has been concerned to deconstruct. But this is to project a European paradigm on a Native group that “had never heard of [the German romantic historian] Herder,” says Kertzer: “familiar rhetorical figures function differently here.” They belong to “a different tradition, which has to be studied and respected in its own right if it is to be understood.” He never tells us what these alternative meanings might be, so the model dissolves back into another ideological problematic, and lends itself to his methodology of worry. Interestingly, he does not seem to worry about the additional irony that the same tradition is widely held to have been an original model for the American Constitution. Also, he seems not to be aware that the native discourse he cites has been subject to substantial debate as to its historical origin, and is believed by some scholars—and by the native authors themselves—to be profoundly influenced by Western thought (see the source document mediated by none other than Duncan Campbell Scott in the records of the Royal Society of Canada; and on scholarly debate, Adriano Santiemma, “Towards a Monocultural Future Through a Multicultural Perspective? The Iroquois Case,” *Canadian Issues/Thèmes canadiens* 21 [Montréal: Association for Canadian Studies, 1999] 93–106, with a useful, brief bibliography). While it is certainly true that we cannot project our own notion of what, for example, “Eagle” means into such a text, it is also true that we cannot assume that its meaning is somehow pure, the property of a merely “discursive” difference, rather than, as in the pro-

found iconology of the Northwest Coast, a hybrid product of various native and non-native histories after Western contact. I do not mean to berate Kertzer with an obscure reference here, but to point to the risky, occasional limitation of his work: his emphasis upon ideological at the expense of historical argument.

His argument for the inescapability of a national horizon is primarily a theoretical one—and as such it is well-crafted, productive, and far-reaching. But I would like the simple historical argument, that nations as institutions have material histories, with powerful shaping influence within their borders, to be just as emphatically regarded as a dimension of literary history. To say so is not to find fault with the book, however, but to join it in its own worrying, to mark a horizon for new worries. Kertzer's great clarity of style, his pleasing range of literary reference, his independent synthesis of existing critical voices, and his strength of logical argument should make his book a reference point for Canadianists for some time to come.

Glenn Willmott

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*Winisk: A Cree Indian Settlement on Hudson Bay.* By Vita Rordam. Nepean, ON: Borealis Press, 1998. xvi, 373 pages. \$24.95 paper.

In *Winisk*, Vita Rordam has written a wonderful account, straight from the heart, of her sojourn in a Cree village on the south shore of Hudson Bay. In 1955, Rordam accompanied her accountant husband on his two-year assignment with the National Defense Project building a radar station near the mouth of the Winisk River. Hired as the office worker for the construction company at a time when women were forbidden in camp, Rordam lived with her husband in a small building that she made habitable and cozy in the Cree village and commuted by dogsled and canoe across the river to work.

With no preparation in the language or study of Cree culture, Rordam found herself living closely with natives, her only other daily contacts being her husband, construction camp personnel, and two friendly and helpful Oblate priests who lived and served in Winisk. It was the priests who pointed out to Rordam that she was an intruder rather than an invited guest in the village. From this outsider perspective, Rordam maintained a lively interest in her native neighbours, as reflected in the amount of information on Cree culture that her book contains. In Winisk at a time when the Cree had not had much sustained contact with Europeans, she was able to observe and record information on many aspects of their traditional culture. But the 1950s was also a critical time for the peoples of the Canadian arctic and subarctic as the National Defense Project brought them into significant and ever-increasing contact with the outside world. Up to then, the Cree of Northern Ontario had known Europeans primarily as representatives of the Hudson Bay Company

or as missionaries of various religious orders in the late nineteenth century. Very few Cree in Northern Ontario in the 1950s spoke English; most followed a semi-traditional lifestyle as they continued their annual round of gathering together in summer villages and then dispersing to individually held hunting tracts for winter.

Rordam relates some cultural misunderstandings that occurred in her early encounters with the Cree, but as the account proceeds we can see unfold and develop her awareness, appreciation, and, finally, respect for the Cree people and their values. Her initial references to Cree women as “squaws” gives way to referring to them as women. With her European values, she was initially shocked and dismayed when curious Cree children came to peek in her windows or when women dropped by for unannounced visits at all hours. She was surprised by the self-reliance developed by the Cree early in life, as small children stoically resisted crying, or teenage girls set out on snowshoes in winter to visit relatives ninety miles away, Cree women hunted seals, or octogenarian Cree preferred to live alone rather than in their children’s households. Her initial criticisms turned to admiration and understanding of Cree cultural and family values as she discovered for herself the anthropological principle of cultural relativity: that cultures may differ, but no one should judge any culture as “better” or “worse” than any other. The Cree had evolved a lifestyle well adapted to their subarctic environment.

Rordam discusses some of the problems faced by the Cree in the 1950s. Unused to a European lifestyle, the Cree had difficulty conforming to the timetables of European work schedules on the construction site; they were ignorant of paycheques and income tax and had difficulty filling out bureaucratic forms. She records the Cree logic in rejecting European religions because they could not see that religions had changed Europeans for the better. She notes the traditional Cree family value of sharing gradually disintegrate as they began to acquire European values, and she watches Cree social values deteriorate as some construction workers introduce alcohol and leave a legacy of illegitimate children. We see the pain of families separated when September signaled the return of their children to residential school, where we now know children were subjected to forced acculturation and physical abuse.

Additionally, through the book Rordam gradually reveals insights into her personal life. We all feel the pain of her husband’s near fatal heart attack in the fall of 1956 and her exhilaration on hikes and excursions in the subarctic bush. Everything was a learning experience for this alert woman who kept a detailed journal of her adventures and thoughts. After her sometimes amusing, sometimes sobering discussions, the principal section of text concludes with an account of the sad leave-taking from Winisk, bidding farewell not only to her Cree friends and the priests, but also to the little house with its green plants kept alive with considerable difficulty in the far north, the birds, and the dog sold her by Cree children.

An epilogue follows, which is less successful although also instructive in its content. Except for sporadic contact with Cree visitors to southern Canada, Rordam's Winisk memories gradually faded. Then, in May 1986, spring break-up of ice on the Winisk river flooded and destroyed the village, killing two people. News of this disaster in national newspapers brought Rordam again into contact with her Cree friends and finally, in the early 1990s she was prodded into preparing a book from her Winisk journals. Correspondence with old Cree friends now relocated in their new settlement of Peawanuck, further up the Winisk River, and the Northern Ontario native newspaper *Wawatay* at this time allowed Rordam to update herself on Cree people in the north. They made her see that the rapid culture change begun by the Defense Project in the 1950s had been an "unpleasant chapter in the history of the local natives" (355), and since that time, effects of continuing contact with the outside world had only increased the cultural disruption that Rordam observed in the 1950s, leading to significant social problems in these communities today. Rordam cites *Wawatay* articles on various Northern Ontario Cree reserves in addition to some of her correspondence with contemporary Peawanuck residents to underscore her discussion of these points. She follows this with a discussion of efforts of the Ontario Cree people to take control of their reserve management, education, and economic development as they move toward self-government. The motive in providing this information is noble, but the data are few, overgeneralized, and suffer from being based primarily on newspaper accounts. Rordam concludes the book with her blessing for the Cree people and all other Aboriginal people of Canada as they move into the contemporary world.

Two excellent collections of Rordam's colour and black-and-white photographs illustrate *Winisk* and are valuable for the information they provide on Cree people and their lifestyle as it was in the 1950s and as some of it remains today. Her original collection of photos may be accessed at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. Five appendices provide amplification on Cree vocabulary, the Cree syllabic writing system, and Winisk area flora, fauna, and weather during the mid-1950s.

Overall, *Winisk* is an informative and valuable account of an important period in native and subarctic history written from the perspective of an observant, intelligent, tolerant woman. It is not a scholarly book, but it certainly is one that Cree and Hudson Bay scholars should be aware of, and one that any person interested in the north and natives can read with profit.

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*Milton Acorn: In Love and Anger*. By Richard Lemm. Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1999. xiii, 279 pages. \$34.95.

Twenty years ago I did an MA thesis on the work of Prince Edward Island "People's Poet" Milton Acorn—a topic which, then, had as much academic cachet as pickled fish, and elicited more snickers than nods. For months I revelled in the passionate imagery of the self-declared communist's Island-based lyrics; but by the end, I'd had quite enough, thank you, of his Make-the-Rich-Pay polemics. Approaching Richard Lemm's new biography, *Milton Acorn: In Love and Anger*, I have to admit my view was jaded. The world of Acorn wasn't, at first, one I cared to revisit.

But once I started Lemm's book, I had trouble putting it down. Those lines and verses I'd parsed and analyzed ad nauseum leapt to new life with this portrait of the poet behind Acorn's blustery persona. Thirteen years after his death at age sixty-three, Acorn's image persists—the irascible, stogie-chewing champion of the working class, permanently dressed in a plaid workshirt. But as his biographer proves, Acorn was more: a "fabulous myth-maker, A1 bullshitter, self-aware wit, and ingenuous devotee of his Maritime heritage" (240).

"Myth," wrote Roland Barthes, "deprives the object of which it speaks of all history." And so it would seem Acorn's persona was his most durable construct. Despite his preoccupation with the Island's past from a perspective that blended revisionism and nostalgia, Acorn was careful to gloss, even hide, his own "bourgeois" heritage, except where aspects of it could be embroidered to suit his purpose. The son of a Charlottetown civil servant, Acorn grew up in middle-class comfort and enjoyed the distinction of a blue-collar trade only briefly while working as a carpenter.

With tough admiration and equal parts humour, empathy and good sense, Lemm dispels myth to expose a life that teetered between joy and misery, love and resentment—the tensions behind Acorn's finest work. Throughout his career Acorn battled depression and alcoholism, and an often self-destructive allegiance to the downtrodden. Yet through his poetry he survived; and in such anthems as "I've Tasted My Blood" and "I Shout Love" his voice endures. By cutting through Acorn's most public blather, Lemm privileges us with his merit.

The biographer, a poet and English professor at the University of Prince Edward Island, establishes Acorn's stature in the continuum of Canadian poetry, and as a seminal figure—despite his essentially romantic view of the Island—in Maritime realism. Like that of contemporary Alden Nowlan, Acorn's poetry transcended its "regional" roots to become part of a national canon. Acorn's Governor-General's Award-winning collection, *The Island Means Minago*, challenged the cultural hegemony of central Canada, Lemm says, by empowering Maritimers to consider our history and culture "just as vital and rich as those of the cosmopolitan centres" (192).

In a career spanning three decades, from the mid-fifties until his death in 1986, Acorn consorted with the cream of Canadian poets: his longtime friend Al Purdy, Dorothy Livesay, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen, as well as younger writers like Patrick Lane. He was married briefly to the immensely gifted Gwendolyn MacEwan. Drawing on a wealth of sources and anecdotes, Lemm structures the book on Acorn's migrations from Charlottetown to Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, and his revisitation of Acorn's associations makes for a compelling read.

Largely self-taught, and the recipient in 1970 of his peers' now legendary "People's Poet" award, Acorn couldn't have found himself in livelier or more generous company. And while he made much of selling his carpenter's tools to earn a living writing poems, he succeeded as most writers in this country do—with the help of grants, honorariums and the patronage of others decidedly "bourgeois." (In one typical anecdote, Lemm describes how Acorn put a curse on a Toronto venue which refused to pay its performers.)

While Acorn owed much of his success to friends like Purdy, as Lemm reveals, it was his mother Helen, Acorn's earliest and most patient mentor, on whom he depended most heavily for moral and financial support. Not surprisingly, it's in the poet's Island roots that we most vividly encounter the individual behind the iconoclast, the vulnerable soul behind the rhetorician. Some of the most engaging revelations are those recalling Acorn's Charlottetown experiences, his youth and his years there following a final return in 1981. Here Lemm resurrects the man known best to his siblings and Island friends and acquaintances—a man who spent his last days sleeping in the rain outside his Charlottetown apartment house—and finally lays to rest some of the "whoppers" Acorn struggled to personify.

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*Seamus Heaney*. By Helen Vendler. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. xvi, 188 pages. \$22.95 US.

Long before the publication, in 1991, of Desmond Fennell's mean-spirited pamphlet *'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing': Why Seamus Heaney is No. 1*, many readers of Heaney had at least a notion of the role played by Harvard University professor Helen Vendler in the Irish poet's rise to international literary prominence. Introduced to Heaney's work in 1975, Vendler quickly became his champion in North America, by introducing his poetry to a vast audience through high-profile reviews and essays in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Review of Books*, and other high-circulation periodicals and journals. In Fennell's mind, the attention afforded by Vendler—attention premised on her valuing of a "poetics" emphasizing, in his paraphrase, "A private musing addressed, pain-

fully, to the self, and expressed in active language" (34)—seems adequate to explain Heaney's trajectory (which of course reached its zenith with his being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995). Presumably the ever-bergrudging Fennell, convinced that his countryman's critical acclaim and popular celebrity owed all to the American academic establishment, subsequently saw Heaney's dedication to Vendler of his first post-Nobel book of poems, *The Spirit Level* (1996), simply as after-the-fact ammunition for his misfired broadside charge.

A more impartial interpreter of Heaney's gesture, however, might conclude that it reflected the poet's unabashed appreciation of, arguably, the single most attentive reader of his poetry qua poetry. As Vendler proposes in her essay "The Function of Criticism" (included in her book *The Music of What Happens* [1988], whose title she borrowed from a line in a Heaney poem), ideally, the critic "is the artist himself in a moment of dispassionate inquiry; at second best, he is the artist manqué" (18). In her first book-length study of Heaney, she proceeds accordingly, engaging intimately with his work not just poem by poem or volume by volume, but at times line by line and even word by word. Perceiving Heaney as quintessentially a lyric poet, Vendler establishes in her introduction the parameters of her discussion relative to commentators like Fennell: "Heaney's adversary critics read the poems as statements of a political position, with which they quarrel. To read lyric poems as if they were expository essays is a fundamental philosophical mistake; and part of the purpose of this book is to read the poems as the provisional symbolic structures that they are" (9).

For Vendler, recognition of the "provisional" nature of Heaney's poetic vision proves crucial to the very structure of her book. Presenting his work essentially chronologically, she organizes her reading of the poet's various evolutionary stages in chapters entitled, somewhat artificially (if not quite arbitrarily), with words beginning with the letter "A": Anonymities, Archaeologies, Anthropologies, Alterities and Alter Egos, Allegories, Airiness, An Afterwards. Yet concluding each chapter with Janus-like "Second Thoughts"—illuminating glances both backward and forward in Heaney's career—she provides an appropriately complicated sense of the poet's metamorphosis. As she hints in the last of these gloss-like double takes, her strategy throughout the book may even be mimetic of Heaney's own continuous self-questioning: "His steady incorporation of his past into his present, and of first thoughts into second thoughts, makes the task of truth-telling harder, and the finding of language more arduous, with each decade" (175).

The consistent strength of Vendler's book, though, involves her remarkable ability to dissect and to explicate—to analyze—Heaney's poems as "symbolic structures." While glancing occasionally into the background of individual poems, Vendler prefers to keep text in the foreground until, as in her reading of the title sequence of *Station Island*, the crystallized details of her scrupulous analysis demand a crystallizing summation:

'Station Island' ... brought Heaney firmly into the domain of the demotic. The spellbound trance of isolated child-contemplation, the oracular dark of the silent Iron Age bodies, and the domestic sequestration of Glanmore have all been banished by the crowding and voluble personages of Heaney's past. It is as though, by means of the victims and writers in 'Station Island', Heaney's vocation has become clarified. He cannot neglect these present visitants who haunt his mind: he cannot retire into fantasies of being a marginalized servant or mummer. He must actively regard the present crisis, must let the contemporary victims 'speak for themselves' in ordinary colloquial English through his (often abashed) mediation, yet must retain an intellectual and moral independence—symbolized by the work of Joyce—which resists the deflection of art by either politics or pity. (98)

Vendler has undertaken not at all to praise Heaney but simply to read him. While neither the first nor the last word on Heaney, her book testifies to the intrinsic pleasure of engaging closely with the subtleties and the complexities of this major lyric poet.

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