

Book Reviews

Scripture, Canon and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis. By John B. Henderson. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991. Pp. xii, 247. \$32.50.

John B. Henderson's new book is a welcome contribution to scholarship and a witness to its author's wide erudition, painstaking research, as well as a specialist's command of the Confucian textual tradition. Indeed, in some ways, he has given more than he promised, by setting the Confucian exegetical tradition in a comparative perspective that is not just "Confucian and Western." After all, if "Western" refers to Greek humanist, Christian and Jewish traditions, it does not necessarily include also the Islamic and the Hindu, both of which are included by the author for his comparative purposes. Within this wide-ranging context, the author wisely focusses his attention especially on two of the five Confucian classics (Book of Changes, Spring-Autumn Annals) and two of the Four Books (Analects and Mencius), without entirely neglecting the other texts. And even then, knowing how vast the object of his study remains, the author further limits himself to studying "the commentarial approaches to the classics in the Chinese Confucian tradition" (Introduction 19-20). He also explains why he prefers commentaries (products of the "silver age") over classics (products of the "gold age"), arguing that the commentarial traditions have themselves been apotheosized (ch. 3) and given the aura of the scriptures. The result is thus a sustained, scholarly essay on the Confucian exegetical tradition in a comparative East-West context. Readers may initially wonder at the inclusion of the Homeric epics (and of the Hindu epics) as "scriptures" with which to compare to the Chinese texts like the Book of Changes, a divinatory manual. Henderson quotes a friend here: "Drawing any meaningful comparisons between the two might seem as hopeless as relating Attila the Hun to a computer" (Introduction 5). But his justification is that while

such classical or scriptural texts differ widely from one another, the commentary traditions which evolved from attempts to interpret such share much in common, as the "very act of canonization" has systematic consequences that are independent of the so-called canonical texts themselves. Henderson's definition of canon or scripture or classic tends to be similar. The texts may be religious, literary, philosophical, the assumptions about them include especially their containing all significant knowledge and truth, their well-ordered and coherent structure, and their profound moral character (202-11).

Within this context, Henderson has presented a fascinating work including a chapter on the origins and antecedents of the classics, another on the canons—their integration, development and closure, and four others on the commentarial tradition: origins, assumptions, strategies, and the "death and transfiguration of the commentarial world views." This final chapter deals with the transition to modern critical scholarship which no longer regards scriptures or classics as "comprehensive and all-encompassing" knowledge (202).

However, the author has also offered a little less than the reader might expect, given his focus on classical or scriptural texts. While the emphasis is rightly on the convergence of the diverse commentarial traditions, he has not probed any of the differences between them, some of which stare us in the eye especially today. Mention can here be made of the importance of "fundamentalism" or the literal understanding of the words of scriptural texts. This is especially true of the Qur'anic case, where there is institutional exclusion by the Muslim world of critical studies of the Qur'an by its believers. Granted that scriptures and classics, whether Confucian or otherwise, have a normative character, which is also passed on to their commentaries, readers could rightly expect some discussion of the role of fundamentalism as an approach to the understanding of textual traditions, and the differences, whether in degree or in quality, of the kind of fundamentalism that developed in the diverse, if sometimes converging, commentary traditions. This is not to lessen the merit of the book under review. Henderson's work is excellent, and his comparative perspective might yet render the Confucian tradition more comprehensive and accessible to a wider scholarly circle.

***The New Republic: a Commentary on Book 1 of More's Utopia Showing its Relation to Plato's Republic.* By Colin Starnes. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1990. Pp. 152. \$29.95.**

This slender, elegantly written and organized, but arguably incomplete volume presents a revisionist interpretation of Thomas More's *Utopia* similar to those offered in recent years for Hobbe's *Leviathan* and Locke's *Second Treatise of a Government*, where the meaning and internal consistency of the text are developed from appropriately close attention to the historical, cultural and linguistic context. The result will leave most, if not all, readers wondering why and how any other interpretation could ever have been accepted as satisfactory, but also probably regretting that Starnes did not extend his analysis to cover the whole of the *Utopia*.

Presenting his thesis with disarming simplicity and understatement, Professor Starnes acknowledges that a link has often been made between Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia*, but that it seems never to have been closely examined. He goes on to say that, "I thought I saw what More intended . . . in the titles he playfully invented for the officials of Utopia" (viii), these terms never having been satisfactorily explained on etymological grounds: Starnes's own translation of *syphogantus*, for example, is "ruler of a pigsty." He argues that the *Utopia* is a "rewriting of Plato's *Republic* in which [More] answered its central question in a form relevant to his own day . . . the *Utopia* is the *Republic* recast in a new mould applicable to the demands of contemporary (i.e. early 16th century) Christianity . . . a Christianized *Republic*" (3).

Starnes accepts literally More's own description of the Utopia as "on the best kind of a Republic and about the new island of Utopia," attaching these two elements respectively to the text's two Books. His explicit concern is with Book 1 as a critique of the Platonic Republic, although the integrity of his thesis also requires some interpretation of Book 2; for he argues that the proper form of Plato's ideal state is found in Socrates's description of the Arcadian pastoral model, criticized immediately by Glaucon as a "city of pigs" because it lacked anything in the way of essential luxuries, and asserts that More offered his comparable Utopian model as containing features found in the communities of the early Christians (in Book 2, of course).

This analysis contends further that, like other humanist colleagues and friends, More rejected the by-then sterile medieval conception of human society as a christendom divisible into two universal, co-ordinated jurisdictions of church and state, and inserted into the pre-Christian Platonic literary conceit a description of ideal political and social arrangements based on the simple virtues practised in the first Christian communities, where decision-making was achieved by consensus, and all were equals in an essentially pacific and pacifist society. In this, the argument runs, More showed himself to be a "modern" political thinker like Machiavelli, breaking from the tradition of accepting the primacy of the institutional Christian church in the political sphere, his position called modern in the sense that it uncoupled church and state, and expressed political ideals in rational judgments grounded in experience rather than by an appeal to religious values. One of Starnes's telling points in this connection is that the two "Utopian" views seemingly most dependent on Christianity, acknowledgment of an omnipotent God-creator and acceptance of the notion of personal immortality, were both considered by More and his fellow humanists to be rationally defensible truths.

This is not to say, of course, that More himself rejected Christianity or the institutional Church of his day; his choice of martyrdom over Henry VIII's new fusion of church into state made this clear. But the ideal life of the Utopians did not idealize the life a Christian cleric or member of a religious order for every individual, even though it did not deny such a life to anyone who would choose it. But neither did it reflect Plato's "luxurious" republic that required class divisions into workers, guardians and philosopher-rulers, and accepted warfare as an integral feature of political life. Starnes is particularly effective in showing how More's spokesman for the Utopians, Raphael Hythodeaus, criticized the Platonic doctrine of the philosopher-king by rejecting any role for the "wise person" even as adviser to political rulers. For More, what was needed was an emphasis on the values espoused by current Christian humanist thought, but without the chauvinism and self-aggrandizing tendencies touted by too many Italian writers like Machiavelli in their promotion of *virtù* and glory.

The brevity of this work makes it easy to criticize for material dealt with too summarily or not at all; but this would be unfair to what seems to have been Professor Starnes's modest purpose that originated in a

classroom need to address inadequacies in existing interpretations of an underused but pivotal text in the transmission of western political thought. One negative comment might be in order, however, as regards the quantity of argument found in footnotes relative to the length of the regular text itself; and there are several printing errors: minor misprints at p. 35 ("seem" should read "seen" at l. 23), and p. 106 ("by" should read "be" in footnote 1, l. 28), and missing wording at p. 52, line 32 that obscures the meaning.

Appreciation should be expressed to Professor Starnes for the clarity and conciseness of the conclusions in this little work, as well as the hope that he will provide more extensive analyses of other important texts in our literary tradition comparable to his recent fine commentary on the *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

Saint Mary's University

A. P. Monahan

***Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime.* By Vincent Arthur De Luca. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991. Pp. 238. \$32.50.**

Although Blake himself proclaims the sublime nature of his art, until Vincent De Luca's study no systematic effort has been made to examine Blake's sophisticated and subversive use of prevailing eighteenth-century notions of sublimity. De Luca's *Words of Eternity* clearly achieves its purpose to "demonstrate that Blake's relation to the sublime is not superficial but profound" (3). At first the reader may suspect he or she is about to begin another reductive, old historical search for sources. But the book immediately becomes instead an enlightened exploration of Blake's textuality and sublime poetics which offers students of Blake a crucial perspective on his aspirations to redeem through language the reader's fallen vision. The reader works through *Words of Eternity* much as does the reader of Blake's poetry—with faculties aroused, juggling contrapuntal views, and attaining a well-earned apotheosis in De Luca's analysis of *Jerusalem's* intellectual sublime.

Within Blake's style and themes, De Luca locates a central dialectic between Burke's materialist, mysterious, antihumanistic sublime and Blake's own notion of the sublime as visionary and intellectual,

determinate, and humanistic. The book's thesis and structure are established firmly in the beginning, and, De Luca's focus—the interplay between the Burkean sublime and Blake's appropriation of it—is fully sustained through the book's three main sections on theory, style, and theme. While Blake may reenact elements of Burke's sublime, his art develops a "sublimity beyond the Burkean confines" (79), that addresses the Intellectual Powers. For Blake, the sublime "resides in a power of mind" and is a "flight from the corporeal" (27). Throughout his dense and exacting exposition, De Luca grounds his arguments in specific, often problematic passages in Blake's poetry, elucidating vexing particulars of his verse within the wider context of the sublime. For example, the much debated vortex passage in *Milton* gains new meaning as Blake's attempt to effect in readers his "sublime moment" (84). The text itself becomes the vortex, enacting stylistically the sublime experience of being freed from the Corporal Understanding.

De Luca gives most attention to *Jerusalem* which represents the culmination of Blake's developing sublime poetics and is not only a "kind of discourse on the sublime" (141), but the "sovereign and embracing find word, as the fully articulated embodiment of the sublime of the text" (142). In *Jerusalem*, Blake's "countersublime" emerges as "visionary textuality" (134), a "sum of the resources of language available to make the operations of intellect visible and determinate" (135).

Some deconstructionists and new historians might object to De Luca's more traditional historical approach and his critical *modus operandi* that would tend towards what H. Aram Veeser terms the "totalizing or atomizing methods" of "earlier" literary historians (*The New Historicism*, New York: 1989, xii). De Luca confronts the possibility directly and defends his "more conservative approach" (9), as one "advisable" in a "first extensive study," but which he chose while conscious that the "sublime ideology is a historically situated phenomenon like any other" (9). De Luca acknowledges that modern critics are themselves historically situated and that recent notions of textuality have "sensitized" him to comparable aspects of late eighteenth-century theories of the sublime (9). Most readers of Blake already know that his preoccupation with language and poetic discourse that postpones, disconnects, and plays by Derridean-like "turns" and "tricks" have strong similarities with the postmodern. De Luca's study, however, links these elements in Blake's verse to the sublime theories of the period.

Positing further that the "terminology" of recent theory is a "belated sublime rhetoric, hinting at its intellectual roots in the same strands of post-Enlightenment dialectical thought that gave rise to theories of the sublime" (10), De Luca makes pertinent connections between the eighteenth-century sublime and poststructuralist thought that valuably look both ways. For example, De Luca contends that the deconstructionist theory of reading as an "abyss structure" has some "affinities" with Burke's "artificial infinite" (65). At other times, De Luca differentiates, citing, for instance, Blake's departure from the Derridean opposition of "transcendental subjectivity and the autonomy of the signifier" (222). While *Words of Eternity* is "conservative" in its methods, it is nonetheless fully informed with modern theory.

De Luca's book is foremost a profound study of Blake's poetics. But it is valuable also as a response to those readers wondering how literary criticism can successfully blend conventional historicism with contemporary theoretical assumptions.

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Norma Greco

***American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition.* By Russell B. Goodman. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. Pp. x, 162. \$34.50.**

Goodman's thesis is that there is an American philosophical tradition which runs from Emerson to John Dewey and which is, above all, concerned to reveal the concrete world which is frequently hidden by artificial thought forms. Logic, grammar, science which focusses on theoretical objects, and language itself, can compress experience into artificial forms which destroy its excitement, disguise its continuous novelty, and impair its ability to sustain genuine human values.

The "Romanticism" of the title is essentially tied to the notion that experience contains "more than just the atoms of sensation postulated by many empiricist writers." Goodman sympathizes with those Romantic writers who speak of "a blend of thought and feeling" and who conceive of "experience not just as given but as something we mold" (19-20).

This line of thought he thinks is a rebellion against the press-ganging of human experience into tidy structures which, though useful for some

kinds of organized thought, ultimately not only reduce the world to dreary boredom but separate human beings from one another. A constant theme throughout the book is the problem posed by kinds of knowledge which separate human beings from each other—whether it be the kinds of sceptical empiricism which seem to imply that all our knowledge is confined to the contents of our own heads, or the kinds of attachment to abstract objects as the real sources of knowledge which seem to make knowledge of other people impossible. Goodman finds in Dewey's metaphysics of nature a substantial and effective response to our separation from nature and from each other. Dewey's metaphysics, he says, depends on the notion that our experience is not inside our own heads but is itself a part of the world within which we act. "The world does not live in us, but we in it" (111).

Goodman is certainly successful in showing that one can trace a line of thought from Emerson to James to Dewey. And he establishes not only the inherent interest of the project of restoring the concrete world to its rightful place as a source of knowledge, but also its importance as a human endeavor. Along the way, he does much to rescue John Dewey from the popular misconception that he was a sloppy thinker who promoted the kind of sleazy "pragmatism" to which Richard Nixon confessed his dedication.

But Goodman is less successful at showing how, for those who want reliable claims to knowledge, the kinds of thought-processes his philosophical heroes champion can become viable alternatives to those preferred by mathematical physicists. The negative critiques offered by proponents of the kind of "Romanticism" he favors have always been impressive. So have their positive claims that poetry as well as science is a source of knowledge. But if one says that *all* poetry conveys knowledge, then one needs criteria for determining what counts as a poem. Such criteria are not easy to come by. If one allows that anything claimed to be a poem is a poem, one needs some way of deciding *which* poems provide knowledge. Goodman doesn't tell us much about that.

Part of his problem is that he rather underplays the extent to which Emerson and the American transcendentalists were looking for something genuinely *transcendent*. They took it for granted that, though much organized religion is nonsense, the way in which religious notions constantly turn up in human experience is evidence that there is some truth buried in them. Goodman notices that the transcendentalists used

Neoplatonic concepts to make superficially confusing religious experience intelligible, but he does not provide much critical analysis of the Neoplatonic scheme of things, placing his hope instead in a Deweyite analysis of experience. He admits that Dewey had to have a real metaphysic of his own, one which goes beyond the simple "givens" of experience, but he does not explore its details.

Goodman is right to draw attention to the connection between Dewey's view that we help to make our experience and Coleridge's notion of a creative imagination which genuinely enters into knowledge. He is right, too, to imply that association with Coleridge makes Dewey's claims more plausible.

But this poses two problems for him. One of them is that Coleridge's standards for what counts as such knowledge are not separable from his own poetic practice or from the standards for poetry which he derives from a study of his own work and from that of his contemporaries, especially Wordsworth. If we are to accept Coleridge's conclusion we have to accept Coleridge's view about what poetry is or show that we have another and better one. In fact, Goodman does endorse some of Coleridge's claims, and he devotes a major part of his book to him. (Coleridge appears on some 25 pages of a book whose text, apart from its notes, index, and introduction, has only 129 pages, and Wordsworth makes nearly as many appearances). But he is not writing a book about Coleridge or about British literature and philosophy, and so he necessarily stops short of a complete analysis of Coleridge's philosophy and often only uses him as a way of introducing points from Kant and Hegel.

The other problem for Goodman is that he has really written a book which shows that the American philosophy of which he speaks is a direct offshoot from British and other sources. One could write a different book showing how James and Dewey depart from the thinkers who created the "Romantic" movement, but it is precisely Goodman's intention to show that even Dewey is closer to Coleridge and Wordsworth than one might think.

The American theme is short-circuited by Goodman's unexplained decision to exclude Josiah Royce, George Holmes Howison, and the St. Louis Hegelians. Royce chose a quotation from Emerson to end the most famous chapter in all his books—the chapter called "The Possibility of Error" in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin 1885, rpt. New York: Harper 1958)—and often enough pro-

claimed his debt to Emerson. Furthermore, Royce like Goodman wanted to downplay the pursuit of the truly transcendent and to find his Absolute in experience. Had Royce been included, Goodman could have shown how an important branch of the American tradition in fact struggled to incorporate a logical structure in experience. Presumably, Goodman ignored Royce precisely because he did not want to become involved in the analysis of logical structures. This leaves his book with a puzzling title and surely weaker than it need have been.

Goodman's avoidance of Royce and company probably has something to do with his acknowledged debt to Stanley Cavell. Cavell's interest in the themes of the book is a result of his examination of Wittgenstein's efforts to free us from the linguistic traps which separate us from the concrete world and impede our understanding of one another. The study of Wittgenstein breeds caution about speculative philosophy. But Wittgenstein did not suppose that he had finally freed us from all our traps. In the end, he emphasized our inability to escape completely from our linguistic commitments and many of his followers have taken him to suppose that different ways of looking at the world are only different "language games." By way of escape from these difficulties, Goodman cites with approval Hilary Putnam's "insistence on the supremacy of the agent point of view" and also Putnam's notion that "moral images" are essential to understanding (125-26), but his account of how we are to defend these positions would have been less misty had he gone back to back Royce.

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Leslie Armour

***Speaking of Equality: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Force of 'Equality' in Moral and Legal Discourse.* By Peter Westen. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990. Pp. xxi, 318. \$39.50.**

Peter Westen has written a scholarly work, detailed, thorough and subtle in its discussions and arguments. Its audience is other scholars in the field, but its purpose is in part pragmatic. Westen's general argument is that there are features of the concept of equality which make the language of equality ambiguous. This ambiguity obscures the substantive issues

that are being discussed. Equality is an important concept in present and past political discourse. Different groups have used it to explain and convince others of the justice of their particular cause. But often groups use equality to argue for opposite claims. For example, arguments for and against racial quotas are given in the name of equality. Thus, "while people seem to share the concept of equality, they have very different conceptions of equality" (xv). This is the first paradox of equality, that the word appears to have both one meaning to all people and at the same time different meanings to different people. The second paradox is that although equality is almost universally used as a "virtue word," one that says that some state of affairs is desirable, it is not an evaluative term. Equality does not mean something right and good. This is shown by the fact that a person can condemn particular equalities as unjust without in any way contradicting herself (xvii). The fact that there can be bitter disagreement over a substantive proposal for equality and yet agreement that equality is desirable is paradoxical. The solution to the second paradox cannot be to say simply that there are different meanings because this would fail to address the first paradox, that equality has both one and many meanings.

Methodologically, the muses of this work are the ordinary language philosophers such as R. M. Hare whom Westen cites in several places. Such an approach analyses the use of equality and equal in ordinary discourse in order to establish the central features of the concept. This is the logic of a concept (130), a determinate set of characteristics which must be present in each significant use of the word. These characteristics provide a normative standard for analysing particular uses of equality. Philosophical problems, such as the paradoxes of equality, are the results of philosophers getting entangled in the rules of the language of equality. So, by a careful investigation of ordinary language, we will find the rules that govern the use of equality and both explain and dissolve the paradoxes. Proponents of this approach have usually claimed that there is no essential connection between the logic of a concept and any substantive meaning. But this is controversial and has been debated (Foot 1967). However, Westen does not discuss this issue which is central to his argument.

Speaking of Equality is divided into four unequal parts. The first part is approximately one half of the book and establishes the analysis of the meaning of equality, the other three parts are applications. In Westen's

analysis of the sometimes, but not always, evaluative equality, every particular instance of its use has descriptive meaning. Westen argues that there is a generic semantic formula of equality that requires the concept of identity but is not equivalent to it. Equality is a comparative relationship between two or more people or tangible objects. It requires a standard of comparison by which people who are otherwise distinguishable are described as identical with respect to specified traits or treatments. The standard of comparison is descriptive if it sets out criteria for establishing that people are identical in respect to features they possess. The standard is prescriptive if it sets out a relationship of identity between people with respect to a rule of conduct, how they ought to be treated. Prescriptive equality requires descriptive criteria to establish the relevant traits of the people to whom the rule applies.

The test of such an analysis is whether it can solve the problems which initiated it and clarify problematic statements and debates about equality. With the semantic formula developed in Part I, the first paradox is dissolved. The concept of equality established a relation of identity, but the particular conceptions will vary as the different standards of comparison are specified. Parts two and three discuss whether there is particular normative content, whether any one of several rival conceptions of equality, that has a privileged relationship to the concept of equality.

There are a lot of interesting and clarificatory details in these sections. However, the problem with Westen's analysis is that because he never discusses his methodological assumptions, he seems to come to foregone conclusions. In each part, the analysis follows the same pattern. There is a strict separation between the generic formula and specific conceptions of equality. This is the meta/object language separation in which the meta-language is neutral or indeterminate in respect to the range of choices of a substantive concept. Thus it is not surprising when he argues that there is no privileged normative content for equality. But putting circularity aside, if we accept his assumption about the strict separation between meta and object language, we can still ask if this approach is fruitful. The answer is, "Yes, in part." It enables Westen to clarify what is at issue in substantive debates over equality. These debates cannot be about the meaning of equality because it is normatively neutral. Arguments, for example about different conceptions of equal opportunity, have to present moral arguments that independently establish a rule of conduct.

The language of equality will not determine which specific concepts are morally superior.

Where the analysis fails to be convincing is in the explanation of the rhetorical force of equality. Let's accept the fact that equality has an inherent ambiguity in its meaning in which its commendatory force hides the fact that individuals disagree about their conceptions of equality. This explains how the rhetorical use of equality can create a unanimity. It can be used prescriptively without focussing on potential differences. Also, opponents of specific proposals can easily be put on the defensive by claiming they are advocating inequality rather than a different conception of equality. These are good points, but they do not explain why equality does have such commendatory power. People often recognize that they disagree over their particular conceptions of equality, but nevertheless they believe that equality in some way refers to an ideal in human relationships. Westen does not have a place in his schema for ideals because, although very abstract and in continual need of articulation, they are not descriptively and normatively neutral.

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June Blair

***Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics.* By Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1990. Pp. xx, 530. \$49.50. Paper, \$14.95.**

The dust jacket to *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* claims that this is more than a bio-critical study. A reading of this lengthy book proves this claim true. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, both longtime editors and critics of Bakhtin for his Western audience, have performed an important service in revising their own and the reader's understanding of this elusive entity Bakhtin, perhaps the most popular thinker of the last decade.

Emerson and Morson's study of Bakhtin is both thorough and thoroughly organized, as a glance at the contents indicates. Rather than approach Bakhtin in a sequence of periods or works, the authors have partitioned their subject into three segments: I. Key Concepts and Periods, II. Problems of Authorship, and III. Theories of the Novel. Part I is

further subdivided into "Global Concepts: Prosaics, Unfinalizability, Dialogue," "The Shape of a Career," and "The Disputed Texts." Similarly, the section on Bakhtin's understanding of authorship is divided into "Metalinguistics: The Dialogue of Authorship," "Psychology: Authoring a Self," and "Polyphony: Authoring a Hero." Morson and Emerson subdivide their look at the novel into chapters on genre, prosaics and the language of the novel, chronotope, and laughter and the carnivalesque. Moreover, each of these subdivisions into chapters is further partitioned into numerous carefully titled sections each less than seven pages long. The result is a book that traces and relates Bakhtin's ideas as they developed.

Morson and Emerson present, then, in *Creation of a Prosaics* a number of related key ideas, but each is subsumed under their basic purpose of providing an *exposition* of Bakhtin's thought rather than an *application* of it. They seek to present, describe, explain, comment upon, and trace Bakhtin's major ideas as they appeared and changed through time, and to show the relationships between those ideas. The end result is a book on Bakhtin's "developing ideas" and "global concepts" (prosaics, unfinalizability, and dialogue). As Emerson and Morson explain,

We have sought above all to communicate our sense of Bakhtin the thinker, in all the rich strangeness and surprising fruitfulness of his intellectual career. Yet we did not want to write an intellectual biography, which would treat his works in chronological order. Rather, our aim is to introduce readers to his key ideas—with their reformulations and inconsistencies intact. We began by asking ourselves how best to understand a thinker's career, how to understand, without exaggerating, its unity, and what constitutes the open development of an idea. Without turning "shortcomings into virtues," how should we describe the "unity of the emerging (developing) idea"—and ideas—in Bakhtin's life. (7-8)

Essentially, the authors test out Bakhtin's understanding of nonmonologic unity on Bakhtin's own life and works. As they proceed to explicate Bakhtin's concern with the dynamics of the creative process, the nature of ethics, and the value of work, Morson and Emerson stress repeatedly the unstable unity of his thinking. They suggest that "when, by whatever means, Bakhtin arrived at an idea, he judged it by how well it contributed to solving his recurrent questions and how well it fit with or helped to

enrich his global concepts—which were themselves always evolving" (11). The relationships between Bakhtin's thoughts on prosaics, un-finalizability, and dialogue thus stand out as the focus of this study.

A second, related thrust of *Creation of a Prosaics* is the authors' re-evaluation of Bakhtin's present status and the canon of his writing. They accomplish this task by examining, first of all, the debate over the disputed texts, namely *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (Pavel Medvedev), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, and *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch* (both by Valentin Voloshinov). Arguing that Medvedev and Voloshinov of the Bakhtin circle were likely the sole authors of these books, Morson and Emerson in fact carry on a pointed debate with Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark, whose *Mikhail Bakhtin* (1984) has provided the dominant picture of Bakhtin's life and ideas to date. In addition to this argument, Morson and Emerson reevaluate Bakhtin by examining recently translated early works on aesthetics and ethics, demonstrating his fundamental concern with both freedom and responsibility, speech and action. The authors emphasize, moreover, the concept of prosaics (their term, not Bakhtin's) by examining carefully the prose-poetry, prosaics-poetics antagonism on the surface of Bakhtin's thought, and they address the popular carnival version of Bakhtin by demonstrating how his emphasis on carnival in *Rabelais and His World* was essentially an exaggeration of one key idea, a utopian version of un-finalizability, an exaggeration that he subsequently tempered in his revised Dostoevsky book.

This reevaluation of Bakhtin's thought and criticism of his ideas point to the major strengths of Morson and Emerson's book: *Creation of a Prosaics* challenges the assumptions of previous readings and points to alternatives. For the past decade, literary criticism in the West has mixed adoration and appropriation of Bakhtin's thought and terms. Morson and Emerson challenge this effectively. First, they explore and explain the shape of his career, his central concerns, and his manner of thinking, pointing out his habit of elaborate classification and exposing the inconsistencies of his and his critics' thought on carnival, the optimism of the concept of dialogue, and his blindness to some issues in Dostoevsky. Unlike previous critics, Morson and Emerson conclude, moreover, that Bakhtin is in fact "an apostle of constraints," for without "constraints of the right sort, he believed, neither freedom nor creativity, neither un-finalizability nor responsibility, can be real" (43). Secondly,

they place Bakhtin in the context of other thinkers, both inside (Medvedev and Voloshinov) and outside his circle (Marx, Freud, Kant, Bergson, Heraclitus, Vygotsky, Wittgenstein, and Fernand Braudel, among others). Third, Emerson and Morson define many of Bakhtin's difficult, usually simplified terms and concepts (polyphony, dialogue, and utterance, for example) with effective explanations and analogies. "Much of Bakhtin's fame today rests on a few neologisms and new uses of existing words that have rapidly been reduced to cliché," they write, adding that one of their purposes is then "to offer an interpretation of Bakhtin's key terms, their relation to each other, his evolving and at times inconsistent use of them, and, especially, the questions they were formulated to answer" (10). And finally, Morson and Emerson accomplish this in a highly organized study that challenges those already familiar with Bakhtin to rethink their reading and use of him and allows those unfamiliar with him access to his thinking. While the heavy organization can be obtrusive at times, it does make *Creation of a Prosaics* useful for all Bakhtin readers. In the end, the challenges of the book accomplish two things: first, they force the reader back to Bakhtin's own writings, and second, they paradoxically enhance Bakhtin's reputation by making him human, part of and not above the dynamics of his own thought.

Challenging various readings of Bakhtin, making his ideas highly accessible, and prompting continued and further interest in Bakhtin's own writings, Morson and Emerson have succeeded in enriching Bakhtin criticism. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* rescues its subject from both purely relativistic and purely deterministic readings, as its authors intend it to do.

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John Van Rys

***A Different Point of View: Sara Jeanette Duncan.* By Misao Dean. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1991. Pp. x, 191. \$34.95.**

This short book deftly surveys Duncan's "Canadian," "British" and "Indian" writings and traces the origins of Duncan's ironic viewpoint to her marginalized perspective as a colonial Canadian, a woman, and a nineteenth-century British idealist writing into the twentieth century. The

word, "marginalized," makes me think of the powerless and the excluded, but Dean shows Duncan to be powerfully inclusive as Duncan draws upon the nineteenth-century idealism of Carlyle, Arnold and Watson, and Canada's special political juncture between Britain and the United States, between the old-world monarchic tradition and the new-world "tradition" of freedom and individualism. From this "margin"—or is it, after all, a centre?—Duncan's irony is not, then, remote but immediate in its joining of the separated peoples together. Here Dean emphasizes the importance of Duncan's feminine perspective—her "double consciousness"—her showing the way of self-realization through relationships with others, her metaphors of marriage and family, her reconciliation of "warring extremes" (80) and her opposition to partyism or partiality—and surely, in a similar vein, her "reconciliation of eternal principles and diverse local conditions" (119).

Dean does not assign all "linkings" to women; she points repeatedly to the mediating disposition of Duncan's Canadians. Nor do I believe that Dean really intends the "double consciousness," the subversive but mediating ironies, of a T. C. Haliburton or a Stephen Leacock, to be understood narrowly as feminist—though she refers to Duncan's view that "to write as a colonial in an international context is to write in a feminine voice" (5). Indeed Dean makes clear that Duncan herself was a feminist with a difference: Dean's Duncan insisted not only that women must be granted the legal privileges of adults but also that women must themselves be clear-headed and responsible adults. Furthermore, Dean avoids imposing present-day feminist expectations upon Duncan's writing: instead Dean's Duncan is a writer who believes in the moral superiority of women, who employs family and marriage metaphors in her political writing, who celebrates [feminine?] imagination and sympathy even as she insists upon [masculine?] self-control, logic and practicality, who criticizes the imperial mainstream or "malestream" even as she remains attached to its hierarchy and norms—even as she believed woman to "be formed for marriage" (60).

Dean also defines Duncan's political perspective through Gad Horowitz's metaphor of the "red tory," the small "c" Canadian conservative and socialist, who believes in order, hierarchy, restraint, state intervention, and orderly change (16). While Duncan may in part write, then, as a "riddling" outsider who "covertly criticizes the assumptions of the ideological centre" (20), she also takes on the ironic perspective of the

nineteenth-century British idealist for whom the truth is not yet fully manifest and of the new-world idealist who knows that truth is yet to be reconciled with the actual and practical. By the way, Dean does not pretend that Duncan escaped altogether the racism or jingoism of turn-of-the-century British imperialism, but she does show Duncan's magnanimous hope for a life larger than that of the old nationalist, imperialist, and racial stereotypes.

I wish that Dean had worked more closely with the supple thoughtfulness of Duncan's narrative voice. While Dean neatly sets off Duncan's realism from Howells's realism of the commonplace, and from modernist realism which is narrowly subjective or materialistic, and while she relates Duncan's realism to the idealism of Burke, Haliburton, McCulloch, Roberts, Leacock and Grove, and her allegorical realism—her carefully typical detail—to Henry James, Dean does not finally show how Duncan's voice itself is distinct. So I am left wondering how it differs from the integrating "double consciousness" of a Henry James or a Haliburton—or from the wayward ironies of a Leacock or a Hawthorne.

Yet I find, for example, Dean's handling of Duncan's double stranded ending of *The Imperialist* to be exact and richly suggestive: the triumphant and practical marriage of the Canadian Advena Murchison and the Englishman Hugh Finlay shows up, for the present, the failure of Advena's brother, Lorne Murchison, the idealistic male politician, to bring about a new imperialist union of Britain and Canada (114). Surely, part of the reason that Dean sorts this kind of problematic ending out so deftly—making it all seem so obvious—is that her feminist reading *does* serve her well in opening up and illuminating further possibilities in Duncan's writing.

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R. D. MacDonald

***Olive Schreiner's Fiction: Landscape and Power.* By Gerald Monsman. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1991. Pp. xv, 201. \$45.00.**

Gerald Monsman's new critical study of Olive Schreiner's fiction is an exciting contribution to Schreiner scholarship, and should delight everyone who wishes to see her fairly represented. His sympathetic close

readings fill in the middle ground of Schreiner studies, which have been dominated either by biographical detail, or single studies of *The Story of an African Farm*, though Joyce Berkman's recent book (*The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner*) drew together Schreiner's leading ideas and a detailed commentary on the fiction. Like Berkman, Monsman sees Schreiner's responses to landscape as central in her contestation of a racist patriarchy and in her own identity formation and writing. Unlike Berkman, though, he situates Schreiner's self-integration and her political achievement in her fictional use of the symbol. Whereas Berkman's book is apt to project late twentieth century expectations onto Schreiner's thought, Monsman's analysis is steeped in Victorian critical ideas, and a close knowledge of the literature of the period, especially Samuel Butler, Wells, Dickens, and Eliot. He uses Walter Pater's thought particularly illuminatingly, but also Wells's *War of the Worlds* as a foil to Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897). Monsman's reading of *Trooper Peter* in conjunction with Schreiner's fine Anglo-Boer War story "1899" breaks completely new ground.

Monsman's thesis is that, for Schreiner, "the political structures of society and the aesthetic structures of art organize themselves analogously around forces that enslave or powers that liberate"; "the artist . . . is either imprisoned by the idolatry of a mechanical dogmatism or liberated by the polysemous symbol." These linkages allow the political and aesthetic dimensions to be integrated instead of being considered separately, as they usually have been in Schreiner criticism, with adverse effects.

He selects three short stories to read critically alongside the three novels: *African Farm*, *Trooper Peter* and the unfinished *From Man to Man*. This method works extremely well, providing new insights into the stories and the novels (though Schreiner's "Prelude: The Child's Day" has a different status, being written much later than *From Man to Man* and incorporated into the plan of the novel). His insights come from close critical reading, attention to semantics, names, allusions and recurrent image clusters, the kind of detailed work that has not been done extensively, and certainly not done as well. Monsman's work on the names of the leading characters, and the ways in which the feather of Schreiner's famous allegorical white bird of truth turns back upon the writer's quill pen in *African Farm*, is particularly striking. He has persuasive things to say about fictional structure and the relevance of the allegorical and didactic sections of the novels.

He calls *African Farm* an autobiographical novel, *Trooper Peter* a political novel (though satire seems a useful term for *Trooper Peter* too) and *From Man to Man* a novel of ideas. His critical readings draw on South African history and politics briefly but relevantly, and his feminist sympathy is subtle and flexible as he traces Schreiner's lifelong quest for female autonomy, and the various forms of entrapment and alienation experienced by her heroines and herself within colonial society. He is also excellent on the Christian iconography (again, his comments are thoroughly steeped in a rich context). He reveals exactly where Schreiner was recasting the messages of Christianity to forge a critique of deterministic dogma and the hypocritical social morality of a colony where racial abuse of power has always been common.

If anything, Monsman underplays the racial element of colonialism, and I think he underestimates the vestigial force of Christian renunciation (particularly of sensuality) in Schreiner and her writing. Though his reading of *From Man to Man* is quite wonderful, he sees Rebekah as successfully negotiating many of the hazards which destroyed Schreiner's early heroines. This is true, but though she does negotiate a form of autonomy, she does not negotiate a successful bonding with the only man who has ever offered her both intellectual companionship and passion, and there is no compelling reason for her renunciation. One could call Rebekah's final position a hardwon separateness, or see in it the traces of what Havelock Ellis called Schreiner's charnel-house Puritan ancestry. Neither Schreiner nor Rebekah was good at claiming her due in terms of relationship, and this was possibly a more real challenge for both than autonomy, though the hazards of early dependency had made Schreiner very sensitive to its dangers, whether within marriage or without. Here some more biographical detail would have been constructive. There are points, too, where Monsman seems to be suggesting a conscious use of semantic levels, whereas most of the wordplay seems to be an instinctive achievement.

This is an elegantly written, succinct and beautifully appropriate critical study of Schreiner's fiction, concluding with purposeful definitions of the individual will and history which reach out to a much wider world than Schreiner's art:

. . . the individual's awareness of relations points Schreiner . . . towards a conception of history and nature not as a mere including system, but as

a relater of parts, a unifier of things and souls. . . . Schreiner's art and her heroes are tied directly to the substance of history, epitomizing an infinite companionship that pervades and shapes reality.

How good to have these things so forcefully said; how good to have Schreiner's sense of historical actuality and her commitment to justice come into their own as they deserve, in an attention to the imaginative texture of the world she created.

Schreiner's fiction, despite its fragmented state, set a standard for subsequent South African writers seldom superseded. Though many have patronized her work, few have equalled her dual commitment to moral passion and artistic integrity. Many of her predictions have been realized; many of her challenges have yet to be met within the South African political scene. Her pacifism came into its own in a new way during the recent decades of resistance to conscription within South Africa for instance. The principles she enunciated were profound and far-reaching, and they were not separable from the luminous prose and the aesthetic shapes into which she cast them. Monsman uncovers in his analysis the repercussions of "iron laws" in Schreiner's life and texts, the laws of patriarchy, race and culture, and the central image for the country: the blood-soaked land as the only ground for new growth. J. M. Coetzee's fine new novel, *Age of Iron*, demonstrates that these central myths have never lost their relevance in South Africa. You still have to be prepared to die in the country in order to live in it, or live on in a kind of dishonor. Monsman's work does justice to the writer who first expressed the iron laws of the country.

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Cherry Clayton

***Mru: Hill People on the Border of Bangladesh.* By Claus-Dieter Brauns and Lorenz G. Löffler. Translated by Doris Wagner-Glenn. Basel: Birkhauser, 1990. Pp. iii, 248. 112 color and 120 black and white illustrations. \$46.00.**

The Mru people described in this book, who numbered 20,000 in 1981, may no longer exist as a distinct society. Since the Chittagong Hill Tracts

(located in the southeast corner of Bangladesh bordering India and Burma) were closed to foreigners in 1964, little is known about the fate of the Mru and neighboring indigenous groups, estimated by the authors to number 455,000. Under the paternalism of British rule the hill area was protected from the influx of land-hungry, lowland Muslim Bengalis. In contrast the present government has encouraged migration to the "empty" land of the hills, displacing the indigenous peoples through a combination of armed invasion, massacre, harassment, and land grabbing, which have caused thousands to flee into India and forced others into guarded settlements and plantation labor.

With the exception of an epilogue recording the horror of recent conditions in the hills, the images and text relate to the period 1955-71. The photographer, Brauns, sees his work as "a monument to the Mru." The color photographs reflect his fascination with a tribal culture "still closely tied to nature" and his desire to convey "those exotic and romantic sentiments which the Mru can awaken in occidental people." There are scenes of farming, festivals, and family life but the predominant image (forming also the book's cover) is of young, half-naked girls, adorned with beads and flowers, pensive and graceful as they go about their daily work. The author, Loffler, conveys his admiration for the Mru through detailed descriptions of their knowledge and skill in house-building, basket and textile production, swidden agriculture, trapping, personal adornment and ritual practice. The style is that of a conventional (perhaps, in the postmodern era, somewhat quaint) ethnography in which the author states his intention to "report . . . the facts as far as possible." He does not spare the grim details, noting that there are leeches, snakes and steep and treacherous mountain paths. Hygiene arrangements are not what a German might expect at home, but are described as practical and even ingenious under the circumstances. Mru men, he notes, are no gentlemen, and women undertake the heaviest labor, daily hauling water and fuel wood and pounding rice, as well as working in the fields and carrying loads to market.

The historical section of the book is well researched, if somewhat dense for a lay reader. It describes the movement of groups of people through the mountains, and the distinctions of language, history and lifestyle that characterize the various communities. It does not address the dynamics of the distinction process itself, made famous by Edmund Leach in *Political Systems of Highland Burma*. The kinship section is

very clear, describing the position of wife-giving and wife-taking clans in relation to each other while indicating that, as in so many of the indigenous cultures of Southeast Asia, individualism and lack of compulsion (even between genders and generations) tend to characterize Mru social relations.

The book is a mixed genre: coffee table photos, ethnographic text and a plea to the world community to recognize the harm done to the mountain peoples through "development" aid which only serves to strengthen those forces that are already powerfully arrayed against them. Is the mixture effective? Text and photos work to convey distance. The photos, as noted, stress the exotic, while the text reads at times like a nineteenth-century gentleman's travelogue, noting frequently that "they" do not think or behave in the way that "we" do (begging the question of who "we" are). The contrasts drawn, however, are unfailingly sympathetic, evoking both curiosity and admiration for the "other" whose humanity is so evident yet so needlessly jeopardized by government policies, both ours and theirs.

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Tania Li