



## Book Reviews

**Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, (Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy), 1994.**

This most welcome addition to the philosophical literature dealing with fiction is an ample plum pudding of a book. It takes some time to get through, and rather more to digest. The authors have actually given us three books rolled into one. There is an account of the nature of truth, and the logical status of fictive utterance (Part I). Then there is a dissection and critique of the excesses of literary theory, especially the anti-realist excesses of what we might call 'textolatry' (Part II). In Part III there is an extended discussion of the nature and status of those fictions which are also literature.

### **The Nature of Fiction**

Throughout, the influence of Gricean approaches to the problems of linguistic meaning is apparent. The essence of Grice's treatment is to begin with the communicative intentions of speakers or writers, rather than taking the utterances themselves directly as the *locus* of meaning. A first example of this concerns the essential character of the fictive. It is by reference to distinctive authorial intentions that fiction is to be identified and distinguished from other kinds of communication.

This is to be applauded. The authors are not afraid of the classical concept of truth, and by no means regard it as a superstitious relic, as some post-moderns are prone to do. But as they point out, any attempt to identify fictional utterance *semantically*, by its unique relationship to truth, is doomed to fail. Fictions contain, in differing proportions, mixtures of truth, falsehood, irony, exaggeration, and metaphor. So do utterances of all other kinds. There is no unique relationship to truth which singles out the fictive.

Even more plainly, there is no *syntactic* mark which identifies the fictional. So far as surface appearances go, many of the very same sentences appear indifferently in works of fiction, history, biography, or sober prediction. And there is no future in the suggestion that each genuinely fictive sentence has an implicit marker such as 'It is fictional that'. Such a marker would identify fictions, but any sentence beginning that way would itself be a non-fictional truth (or falsehood), as in 'It is a Dickensian fiction that Mr Wardle lived at Dingley Dell (in Lincoln's Inn)'. The reason this way of attempting to distinguish the fictive is bound to fail is that writing fiction has at least this much in common with telling lies: every syntactic feature of true utterances can be present in lying versions. Otherwise lying would be impossible. The same holds for telling tales in fictive mode: the implicit marker 'It is fictive that' can be attached to sentences which are and remain themselves fictional.

Lamarque and Olsen are perfectly well aware of all this. They hold, rather, that the essential feature of fiction is *pragmatic*. It lies in authorial intention. The nub of the matter is an invitation to join in an extended act of make-believe. It is this which

unites the humblest of yarn-spinning, and bed-time story-telling, with the most exalted of novelistic and dramatic production.

There is an 'institutional' side to the matter. A culture must have a recognized place for such story making, and recognizable signals by which the invitation to suppose or to pretend is proffered. We learn by acculturation, first how to recognize and enjoy stories, then, perhaps, how to spin them ourselves. Culture mediates the collusion of author and listener/reader which constitutes the production and consumption of fiction.

I doubt that there are any cultures which lack the institution of story-telling, but if there are, then in their language there is no fictive utterance. What makes fiction fiction is thus a distinctive intention, made possible by an appropriate cultural setting. Apart from succeeding in identifying the target class of utterances, this account of the nature of fiction has two further advantages: it takes its rise from undeniable, and deep-seated, cultural facts, and it identifies the fictive without any appeal to matters of quality. It admits execrable fictions no less than others. Which, when it comes to definitions, is how it should be.

### The Ontology of Fiction

In what sense, if any, are fictional persons and places real? How, when reality is at issue, do *Anna Karenina* and the Mayor of Casterbridge differ from possible fictional beings about whom no-one has in fact told a tale? Lamarque and Olsen are properly sober in their treatment. They do not postulate 'Possible Worlds', alongside the actual one, as realms where unreal, that is, non-actual, places and people are to be found. Instead, they introduce the notion of a 'character'. A character is a complex of qualities and relations. Their example is Bertie Wooster. There is no human being Bertie Wooster. But the features or characteristics which go to make up that *persona* are familiar and perfectly real. There is such a thing as being young, rich, foolish, cheerful, sports-car-owning and London/Home Counties resident. Put all of these together, all the features Wodehouse manages to assign to Bertie, and you have the Wooster character. No real person has just this collection of features. That is what makes Bertie fictional rather than actual. Other characters, such as Napoleon, may figure in fictional contexts without themselves thereby becoming fictions.

So when we say 'Bertie Wooster is a fiction' we say something true, but which does not, contrary to initial appearances, commit us to an ontology which includes Bertie. We recast the sentence, and any others about Bertie and his adventures, as statements about the Wooster character, which does indeed exist, since Wodehouse created it.

So far so good. And there can be intermediate or doubtful cases. Is Dickens' London the actual London, partially and hyperbolically depicted, or is it a 'London city' character of Dickens' devising? We are in two minds about this, and the proposed treatment accurately reflects the actual situation.

Fictional 'characters' are non-actual selections from the great mass of actual qualities and relations which give the real world the nature it has. This is plausible and parsimonious, but leaves one undiscussed problem. The authors are clearly committed to a rather robust realism on the question of the nature and being of Universals. Their impulse is to be Aristotelian, and recognize only features which have some real instances in the ordinary, actual world. But is this possible? Fictions, especially science fictions, are apt to deal in 'characters' with elements actually exemplified nowhere and nowhen. To take a simple example: a man taller and

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fatter than any man ever. Or a man of one extremely specific height—between 1.6999999999999999 ... and 1.7 metres. What if no man, and no other object in the world, ever has just this length? Does this feature exist or not? It has no instances.

For their account of the ontological implications of fiction, Lamarque and Olsen need it to be a real feature nevertheless. So they seem committed to a Platonism about Universals, which recognizes as real even features with no instances. Which is somewhat less plausible and parsimonious than the account at first blush appears.

### **Literary Theory**

The calm sections in which some of the wilder claims of literary theory are dissected should be required reading for all with an interest in literary matters. These pages astonish by the way in which key arguments and conclusions are seen to evaporate when basic distinctions, such as that between a text and a work, are made and insisted on.

### **Metaphor**

There is an extended discussion of metaphor, its relation to fiction, its role in discourse, and its relation to truth. Here again, there is a careful and well-argued rejection of attempts to identify metaphorical utterance by either syntactic or semantic touchstones. And again, a Gricean pragmatic treatment: To speak metaphorically is *'to invite or encourage a hearer to think of, conceive of, reflect on, or imagine one thing (state of affairs, idea, etc.) in terms associated with some other thing (state of affairs, etc.) often of a quite different logical type.* (p.360. Their italics). Well and good, but this definition is so abstract and bland as to be scarce worth contending for. As the whole discussion makes clear to this reviewer, metaphor is a complex business, with all the rival theories latching on to some important facets of at least many metaphorical passages. Many philosophers have said things worth saying about metaphor. Why is it necessary or valuable to attempt to find a single formula which will cover all (and only) those multitudinous, and variously worthwhile utterances which we might usefully characterise as metaphors? What is the virtue in insisting on any essence for metaphor?

### **Literature**

Lamarque and Olsen hold that 'literature' is a normative concept. Their interest is in fictions, but little enough hangs on the question of whether biography or letters can count as literature. Fictions count as literature, for Lamarque and Olsen, not on account of any special novelistic, or moral, or social, or cultural *truth* that they display. The question is less specific. Literature is important because it treats a matter of significant human concern, but it need not yield the truth about that matter. Here I am in complete agreement. Great literature can rest on philosophic falsehood, as with Dostoevsky and the notion that morality needs a divine foundation.

All fictions have a story. Many have a subject. Many have a thesis. Literature has themes—and these themes are the human and cultural concerns which give literature its deepest appeal and greatest importance. So literature can be, and should be, profound, and enlightening. Much of the discussion centres on grand philosophic themes, such as the interplay of freedom and necessity in human affairs. This strikes me as overly solemn and restrictive. Literature can have less cosmic themes and insights. We do no dishonour to literature by pointing to its more quotidian roles of

refining human thought and feeling, revealing the range of human possibilities, and showing forth the impact of various kinds of behaviour.

As with metaphor, it is debatable how valuable the search for the true nature of literature is. It is especially debatable whether or not an explicitly normative approach is best. We do need, do we not, room for the concept of bad literature—a literature depraved, or superficial, or in other ways failed, yet genuine specimens of the category?

Further, the approach taken here does not successfully address the gradation problem. Works do not either belong to, or miss out on, the honorific 'literature'. They approach excellence more or less, and in different degrees in different aspects of their merit. Which reinforces the idea that 'Literature' is not itself a very useful critical category.

Yet the term designates its field serviceably enough, preparatory to our exploration of its many delights and disclosures. There is no need, except perhaps for local contemporary polemical purposes, to insist on building the value of the best fictive writing into the very concept of 'Literature'.

These are small enough cavils over a work which is a rich feast. Everyone with an interest in the philosophy of literature will gain from a reading of it.

*Keith Campbell*

#### **A Comment in Reply.**

One especially pleasing aspect of Keith Campbell's generous review is the way it shows that the book can have an appeal to those, like Campbell himself, whose principal philosophical interests lie beyond aesthetics and the philosophy of literature. This serves to acknowledge our attempt in the book to address a range of issues, notably about fictionality, in the wider arena of metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of language. Our polemical thesis is that much contemporary literary theorizing, particularly that which seeks to blur or 'deconstruct' distinctions between literature and philosophy or fiction and truth-telling, rests on invalid arguments or untenable assumptions in precisely these areas.

The view of literature advanced in the book might seem 'old-fashioned' to dedicated followers of post-modernism, in defending a conceptual connection between literature and e.g. humanistic values, thematic content (mimesis), and creative imagination. Nevertheless the novelty of our position, as we see it, is to pull apart the concepts of truth, fiction and literature, which traditionally (in the humanistic tradition) have been indissolubly linked. There is no essential connection, we argue, between any of the three pairs: truth (or falsehood) and fiction, fiction and literature, and literature and truth. What is curious about this position, as part of a defence of critical humanism, is that a near-identical stance might be endorsed by the anti-humanist camp we oppose. The point is of course that their reasons for rejecting the connections differ from ours, resting on a rejection of the concepts themselves (notably 'truth' and 'literature'—they usually work with an unanalysed concept of fiction). We retain a classical, and minimalist, concept of truth and advance detailed 'institutional' analyses of the other two concepts, thus showing, we believe, that there are positive reasons for keeping the concepts apart. While our position might pre-empt a familiar objection to humanistic defences of literature, that the association of fictional literature with truth only serves to weaken or make obscure the concept of truth itself, it also complicates a defence of the values (particularly cognitive values) of literature. We seek to show that what makes something literature is also the source of what makes it

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valuable: i.e. the special institutionally defined manner in which certain works can be seen to give imaginative realisation to humanly interesting themes.

Campbell wonders why we bother searching for any essential (or defining) features of literature, and he fears that our essentialist enquiry might rule out the possibility of gradations of value (or gradations of literariness). The points bring to mind recurring debates in aesthetics about the wider concept of 'art'. However, it is a feature of our account that literary works are identified not by intrinsic but by relational properties, specifically by complex intentions and attitudes among people engaged in a determinate (convention-bound) 'practice' of writing and reading. This allows that literary works can take, as they clearly do, many different forms: drama, verse, prose, tragedy, comedy, epic, lyric. And it leaves room for matters of degree. Judgments about whether literary works are successful or otherwise, and even whether they are works of literature or something else, usually rest on a balance between aim and achievement. Paradigmatic literary works—those acknowledged as such by participants in the practice—both aspire to a 'literary' presentation of (what we call in the book) 'perennial themes' and actually succeed in rewarding a 'literary' interest in those themes so presented. Other works have a similar aspiration but for different reasons fall short in the 'pay-off'—these are works, which, although recognizably 'literary', one is less inclined to return to, for example, or which become 'dated', or which appeal at adolescence but lose their appeal in later life.

In Chapter 16 we offer an extended discussion of Malcolm Bradbury's novel *The History Man* to illustrate the distinction between 'perennial' and 'topical' themes. Our argument is not that Bradbury's novel is not a literary work (the intention or aspiration establishes that) but that it falls short in literary value precisely because it fails to transcend its merely topical themes. In contrast it would be tendentious to describe as poor or failed literary works those genres of writing—from Mickey Spillane to TV soap operas—which neither have a literary aspiration nor reward a literary 'stance'; they are best viewed as belonging in a different category from literature even though they might be highly valued under other classifications (entertainment, fantasy, fiction). Campbell doubts whether 'literature' is a very useful critical category. We believe it is useful at least to the extent that it identifies distinct and recognizable aims and attitudes.

Similar remarks might be made about metaphor, for which we offer a definition of a formally similar kind. Campbell thinks our account is too 'abstract and bland' to do much good and he again wonders whether the task of defining metaphor is any more use than that of defining literature. There are certainly gradations of metaphors, both on the good metaphor/bad metaphor scale and on the metaphor/non-metaphor scale. Our own 'minimalist' definition in terms of an invitation to pursue a certain kind of imaginative and intellectual thought-experiment might be bland but it leaves room for these gradations. Also, more importantly, in locating the phenomenon of metaphor in a theory of language use (pragmatics or speech acts) rather than in the context of an abstract semantics, it points up the similarities between metaphor and the other phenomena we are studying—fiction and literature—in a manner that strikes us as fruitful.

Our account of fiction aims to be ontologically frugal even while admitting the real existence of fictional characters, as abstract entities or sets of qualities. Campbell detects what he sees as a hidden Platonism in our view which makes it less parsimonious than might appear. Are fictional characters drawn only from properties that have actual instances in the world (i.e. are the universals involved in the

creation of fictions *universalia in rebus*) or, as Campbell believes must be the case in our view, can the defining properties be unexemplified (i.e. are they *universalia ante res*)? Although we do not commit ourselves on this ontological question in the book we do discuss, sympathetically, Hume's epistemological version of fictional constructionism. And that might be a guide worth following here. According to Hume our imaginative flights of fancy, however 'sublime', are in the end anchored to those actual perceptions which provide their original inspiration and material. We can entertain the thought of a golden mountain only because we have experienced initial impressions of gold and mountains. Although there is no such epistemological reductionism implied in the book, the spirit of Hume's componential account of fictional creation does carry over into our own ontologically based theory (in terms of universals). Fictional characters are compounds, and thus complex entities, constructed out of simpler elements. One line of defence against Campbell's charge of Platonism might be to hypothesise that where it looks as if a constituent element in a fictional character is an unexemplified universal in fact that element is itself a compound or derivative of further exemplified universals. The hypothesis if merely assumed might seem to beg the question and might be impossible to prove; no doubt also counter-examples could be dreamt up (not, we think, those offered by Campbell). But the grounding of fictions in real objects, just like Hume's a priori grounding of imaginative creation in actual experience, seems independently well-motivated.

Apropos this discussion perhaps it should be said, in conclusion, that although ontological (and metaphysical) issues clearly arise in relation to some concepts of fiction, one of our principal aims in the book is to extract literary theorizing from the grip of what we take to be irrelevant metaphysical speculation. It is common to find varieties of anti-realism (metaphysical and linguistic) invoked in arguments about the nature and even existence of literature (e.g. if there is no such thing as the 'real' world and all is 'construction' then the fiction-maker is on a par with the truth-teller—and if fictional works are in a continuum with non-fictional works there is no need to distinguish a separate 'literary' realm). It is partly to combat this line of thought that we offered our detailed analyses of the concepts of fiction and literature in institutional terms, travelling as light as possible in metaphysical baggage.

*Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen*

**Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (eds), *Platonism and the English Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.**

This should have been a book to inspire philosophers, historians, students of letters, or any liberally educated reader. Instead it is, on the whole, dull and disappointing. *Platonism* has considerable value as a source book, and there are chapters that surpass expectations, but several fundamental problems remain. For one thing the book is simply too ambitious. Baldwin and Hutton include thirty chapters on Platonism from Augustine to Iris Murdoch, but with the average chapter taking up only ten pages there is barely enough space to establish the influence of Plato or Platonism on an author, hardly ever is there room for adequate explanation. The ten-page outline format invariably forces contributors to oversimplify Plato and to smooth over questions of interpretation. Consider a typical example: M. W. Rowe ('Arnold, Plato, Socrates') informs us that, '[Matthew] Arnold could not assimilate Plato's influence because Plato's philosophy, even in its literary form, is pre-eminently social, public and political ...' (p.243). This is not an altogether false claim about Plato, but it is

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a distortion, an overemphasis of Plato's interest in the *polis*. To undermine it one only has to supply an opposite but similarly distorted observation: Plotinus and the Neoplatonists were able to assimilate Plato's influence only because Plato's philosophy is pre-eminently metaphysical, spiritual and other-worldly. Is it Arnold who oversimplifies Plato here? Possibly, but Rowe does not put it that way, and even if that is what Rowe meant the format of *Platonism* does not afford opportunity to investigate why Arnold came to such a conclusion.

The editors are aware of the 'source of danger' (p.xiii) posed by the book's enormous scope, and that may explain why they include some chapters with a narrow focus, such as 'Platonism in Spenser's *Mutability Cantos*' (Thomas Bulger, chapter 12), 'Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*' (A. W. Price, chapter 20), and 'Virginia Woolf and Plato: the Platonic Background of *Jacob's Room*' (Brenda Lyons, Chapter 26). Unfortunately, the resulting mix of articles is unsatisfying. Caught between introduction and expertise, readers are left treading water. The one case where this is not so provides a good example of what might have been accomplished by a larger volume (or by several smaller volumes). I mean the treatment of Shakespeare in Part III, which combines introductory remarks by Sarah Baldwin with a general article (John Roe, 'Italian Neoplatonism and the poetry of Sidney, Shakespeare, Chapman and Donne') and a more specialised piece (Stephen Medcalf, 'Shakespeare on beauty, truth and transcendence'). This approach by immersion ought to have been the model for the whole book.

In addition to problems of scope and focus, *Platonism* also suffers from problems of aim. Nowhere is this more evident than in the statement, iterated three times (front inside jacket cover, advertisement page, p.xiii), that the book will show 'how every age has reconstructed Platonism to suit its own understanding of the world'. On a generous reading this is just a loose way of trying to state the obvious: Plato has been interpreted in various ways. Or, if we take it literally, the statement implies that every age arrived at its own understanding of the world before encountering Platonism. But even if that were so, the project of the book would be no more interesting. *Platonism* would then be not about the history of ideas (since the ideas were antecedently formulated), but about history merely. On either reading, the question why so many different ages have been tantalised by Platonism remains unanswered. The truth is, unfortunately, that *Platonism's* explicit aim is either a careless or a false generality, and whichever it is, it exempts editors and contributors alike from trying too hard to explain the continuing hold that Platonism has had on the English imagination.

*Platonism* is thus essentially a collection of independent historical comments. Some articles establish little more than the fact that certain authors found Plato's stock of metaphors congenial to their purposes, a few others try to explain, contrary to the book's stated aim, how Platonism actually shaped an author's understanding of the world. Some contributors carefully observe a distinction between Platonism and Neoplatonism, while others ignore it (unfortunate because here lies the first key to the continuity of the English imagination, namely that Neoplatonism exerts on the whole a far greater influence over English authors than Platonism does). Some of the articles are concerned with philosophers and mystics (e.g. Plotinus, Proclus, Walter Hilton, Ficino, The Cambridge Platonists), some with rhetoricians and apologists (e.g. Augustine, Alfred, Thomas More, Arnold, Pater) others with poets and authors (e.g. Milton, Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Yeats). Of course these categories are artificial—many of the persons just mentioned also fall into one or

more of the other classes—but that does nothing to disturb the observation that Plato is being put to different uses in a philosophical treatise, a sermon, and a poem—and *Platonism*, precisely because it is essentially a collection, is silent about the differences.

There is another side to the difficulties about the aim of *Platonism*. The book is supposed to be about the ‘English imagination’ (so here is a potential source of continuity), but it is never satisfactorily explained what all of the articles have to do specifically with the imagination (as opposed, let us say, to the intellect). In her introduction to ‘Plato and the Neoplatonists’ (Chapter 1) Anne Sheppard provides a useful overview of Plato’s views about imagination, including, as is not often done, his views from the *Sophist* and *Timaeus*. But all we are told about the authors to be discussed in the book is that they ‘found in Platonism a spur to literary creativity and poetic imagination’ (Sheppard, p.12). This is too general a sense of ‘imagination’ to be a hub for all the chapters of the book. Few contributors bother to probe the matter further, but it is crucial for understanding how English writers conceived of their activity in relation to Platonic philosophy to know what they thought of imagination *per se*. For Plato, we must remember, distinguishes imagination from other cognitive abilities and places it among the lowest (*Republic* VI 511e); never, to my knowledge, does he praise it. Many authors have wanted to differ, but rarely have they provided articulate suggestions of their own (for an exception see Poe’s treatment of the imagination in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Philosophy of Composition*).

A final problem affecting *Platonism* is the uneven quality of the essays. Admittedly, the standard entry is at least informative, and the notes are uniformly helpful. But in addition to constant oversimplification, there are a significant number of oversights and bad inferences, and too many minor mistakes and irritations. Here are a few examples. Yasunari Takada (‘Chaucer’s use of Neoplatonic traditions’) does not even mention Chaucer’s couplet appealing to the Platonic principle of word and deed [‘Eek Plato seith, whoso can him rede / The wordes mote be cosin to the dede’, *Canterbury Tales*, Prologue, 741–2]; yet to my mind this is one of the most important observations in the history of Platonism. Or again, when discussing a passage in Traherne’s *Christian Ethicks*—the ‘one occasion,’ we are told, when Traherne ‘names Plato as the source’—Sarah Hutton suggests that Traherne has Plato’s analogy of the sun in mind (she quotes *Republic* 508d but mistakenly cites it as 509d. See Chapter 15, ‘Platonism in some Metaphysical Poets’, p.172). Admittedly, Traherne’s statements remind one of *Republic* VI, but caution is needed here. What Traherne says is:

Plato makes him [God] the very *Light* of the understanding, and affirms, that as three Things are necessary to *Vision*, the Eye rightly prepared, the object conveniently seated, and Light to convey the *Idea* to the Eye; so there are three things required to compleat and perfect Intelligence, and understanding Eye, an Intelligible Object, and a Light intelligible in which to conceive it. Which last is GOD. (Traherne, *Christian Ethicks*, as quoted by Hutton, p.172)

If Traherne has *Republic* VI in mind he has made an outrageous blunder, for Plato is explicit that light is *not* a metaphor for the good (or God for that matter):

But as for knowledge and truth, even as in our illustration it is right to deem light and vision sunlike, but never to think that they are the sun, so here it is right to consider these two their counterparts, as being like the good or boniform, but to think that either or them is the good is not right. (509a, Shorey translation)

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Probably Traherne was confused, but either he was a terrible reader of the *Republic* or he is getting his Plato from some other source; either way Hutton makes no comment about the mistake in this singularly important passage of Traherne.

For bad inferences consider Dominic Baker-Smith's claim that Thomas More's perception of Plato 'as a creative, questing intelligence who challenges his readers to engage in a dialogue that extends beyond the text' is 'implied in the full title of [his] most celebrated book ... *Of the best state of a commonwealth and of the new island of Utopia* (Chapter 9, 'Uses of Plato by Erasmus and More', p.93). Or consider John Roe's interpretation of the following stanza from Donne's *The Ecstasy*:

So must pure lovers' souls descend  
To affections and to faculties  
Which sense may reach and apprehend,  
Else a great Prince in prison lies.

(Donne, *The Ecstasy*, ll. 65-8, quoted p.115))

Roe argues as follows:

If the lovers' souls are *already free and eager to assist*, then the 'great Prince' still seeking his liberty *must be* either the body, awaiting release into a superior evaluation, or some compound of body and soul which differs from the usual idea of the transcendence [Roe's spelling] of the one (body) by the other (soul). And this compound *must surely be* love itself, which Donne in another Neoplatonic lyric describes as needing to *take or occupy* a body rather than merely existing (p.115, my italics)

Roe may be right in his conclusion that the great Prince is love, but his logic is peculiar. On what grounds we should accept that the lovers' souls are 'already free and eager to assist'? Roe suggests, fallaciously, that if they *can* assist in the process of liberation, they must be free. Even if we grant that, however, how does it then follow that the great Prince 'must be' either the body or some compound of body and soul? (And if the Prince *in prison* is a compound of body and soul, how can the souls be already free?) In addition to this, the step by which we move from the disjunction 'body or compound' to compound alone is never supplied, and it remains mysterious how the compound of body and soul 'must surely be love itself' if love itself is something that needs to *take or occupy* a body.

Among the mistakes in *Platonism* are Anna Baldwin's claim that Socrates recommends study of the revolutions of the world at *Timaeus* 90d (the speaker is Timaeus), Thomas Bulger's specious identification of Saturn with Chronos (p.128, the Greek counterpart to Saturn is Cronus), and Stephen Medcalf's claim that the Good is 'in fact what Plato implies by *to kalon*, although it is inadequately translated as "the Beautiful" ' (p.117; although they are very similar, Plato clearly distinguishes between the good and the beautiful, see *Republic* 507b, *Philebus* 64c-65a). And then there are irritations like Peter Conradi's overstatement, 'The West owes to Plato the invention of the soul' (chapter 30, 'Platonism in Iris Murdoch', p.330), Brenda Lyons' paradoxical claim (p.292) that the problem of truth is the 'subjective object' of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and Angela Elliot's ostentatious sentence, 'Consequently, British, Irish and American writers share a communality of culture that is reflected in the heightened intertextuality of their English works.' (Chapter 24, 'The twentieth century', p.274).

For all its problems, however, Platonism is an indispensable compendium. There

is simply no more comprehensive study of its subject. And there are some excellent contributions, among them Janet Bately's all too brief discussion of Boethius and King Alfred (Chapter 4), Andrew Louth's account of Platonism in the Middle English Mystics (Chapter 6), Jill Kraye's investigation of Platonic love in the Italian Renaissance (Chapter 8), and Keith Cunliffe's splendid essay on Coleridge (Chapter 19). Bately conveys Alfred's personal and political circumstances with such sensitivity that one is inspired to read Alfred directly and Louth shows considerable insight in weaving together scant and obscure source materials to give us a sense of the English Mystics. I am indebted to Louth, in particular, for his intriguing discussion of spiritual and physical senses, in which he discloses Origen's remark, 'that soul only is perfect who has her sense of smell so pure and purged that she can catch the fragrance of the spikenard and myrrh and cypress that proceed from the Word of God and can inhale the grace of the divine odour' (p.62). In respect of the senses Origen shows himself to be a better Platonist than even Ficino (who writes, 'What need is there for smell? What need is there for taste or touch?'; Roe, p.101). For, contrary to the usual view, Plato disparages none of the senses, but attempts instead to elevate and purify all of them—and he is explicit about the sense of smell in the *Philebus* (51e), a dialogue Ficino knew well.

Kraye's discussion of Platonic love is easily the best history in the volume. She deftly recounts the 'transformation of Platonic love from an embarrassing liability into a valuable asset' (p.76) in the course of one century. The Renaissance Platonists, Kraye shows, almost wilfully bent the subject of Platonic love to their own purposes. Like the Neoplatonists, they tended to allegorise Plato's discussions of love, and they were remarkably heedless of the bland non-eroticism of Plato's *Gorgias*, *Philebus* and *Laws*. Kraye is to be congratulated for showing both how idiosyncratic the Renaissance Platonists were (see her discussion of the doctrine of the *mors osculi* or 'death of the kiss'), and how important their idiosyncrasy ultimately was to the transmission of Plato's dialogues.

Cunliffe, for his part, shows how exceptional was Coleridge's understanding of Plato, better than that of most authors, much better in fact than that of most philosophers. Cunliffe draws on Coleridge's verse, critical studies (especially the *Biographia Literaria*), notebooks, letters, and philosophical lectures to reveal a man deeply impressed by Plato's genius. In Plato Coleridge found a philosopher-poet who anticipated the shortcomings of Humean empiricism ('One excellence of the Doctrine of Plato ... is that it never suffers ... its Disciples to forget themselves, lost and scattered in sensible objects' *Notebooks*, quoted p.210). More importantly he found in Plato a thinker who, by means of an exquisite dialectic, demonstrated 'the inadequacy of the discursive understanding' (Cunliffe, p.209). The passages Cunliffe cites in connection with this 'inadequacy' clearly show that Coleridge was no shallow mystic (nor did he take Plato for one). They show instead that Coleridge recognised the inestimable value of conversation for revealing, clarifying and sharpening what it is not possible to make explicit in words. This is the paradox of Plato's dialogues, his 'luminous gloom' in Coleridge's excellent phrase; it is in this that Plato's greatness as a philosopher chiefly lies.

In sum, then, while there are parts of *Platonism* that inspire and provoke, this is not a book that will fascinate the general reader, nor, sadly, will it delight the expert. It is, however, an effective tool for anyone who wants to explore the history of Platonism in English literature.

Eugenio Benitez

**Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, (trans. C. Porter) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.**

It is not difficult to understand the attraction that this work holds for contemporary scholars in the humanities, especially for those who feel (as the present writer does) that the proliferation of publications on genre as applied to various areas of contemporary expression conceals a worrying lack of systematic reflection on the concept of genre itself. Todorov's book addresses this problem up front, as it were, by offering a theoretical construction of the concept of *genre*, distinguishing it from related concepts such as discourse, text and narrative. This task is accomplished admirably in the first two chapters, 'The Notion of Literature' and 'The Origin of Genres'. The argument begins strategically by discussing the term *literature*, whose status is systematically put into question as each of the properties habitually attributed to it (its fictionality, its enjoyment value, its formal structure) are shown not to be exclusive to literary texts. Because of the absence of formal linguistic or communicational properties which are exclusive to literature as such, the classification of texts as *literary* loses its relevance, and needs to be replaced with a concept encompassing the whole of human discourse. What then is *genre*? Todorov's answer is succinct. *Genres* are classes of texts that are recognized as such because of the institutionalized forms of discourse they contain. They are first and foremost utterances which are given a specific status in society, to the extent that this status—for example as polemical, informational or autobiographical texts—determines the meanings of the utterance. While it is true that *genre* is a social construct, because 'society chooses and codifies the acts that correspond most closely to its ideology'(p.19), it is also associated with the 'recurrence of certain discursive properties'(p.17) which may be observed and explained in terms of the linguistic transformations they contain. *Genre* prefigures in this way a 'general poetics' involving a linguistic as well as social component. It constitutes a method of analysis whose object becomes the entire area of human discourse.

The theoretical discussion of the first two chapters gives us an instrument of analysis (*genre*), and outlines what appears to be a complete programme called genre studies, of which literature is a part. However, the following eight chapters do not carry through this exciting project. Indeed, the argument more often than not does little more than rehearse the breaking down of the traditional literary genres of novel and poetry. This is particularly the case with the subsequent three chapters, 'Reading as Construction', 'A Poetic Novel', and 'Poetry without Verse', where binary oppositions such as literary/nonliterary, narrative/non-narrative and referential/non-referential are repeatedly posited before being invalidated on the strength of evidence drawn from a variety of textual forms. Apart from the disappointment one feels at seeing the strong conceptual position outlined in the first chapters frittered away on such marginal concerns, there seems to be a fundamental weakness in Todorov's method of argumentation. It is not intellectually satisfying to be led through a study of the categories of literary poetics, only to learn of the disqualification of those categories through reference to marginal cases. And it seems unproductive to pose repeatedly the problem of literary discourse in terms of its formal categories, if the outcome is invariably to be the negation of these same categories via a belated shift of focus onto their social and historical determinations. For the argument to carry weight, the historical and social component of discourse should be problematised at the outset and worked into the formulation of genre studies, and not simply invoked at the end, as if it were a last saving force of a faltering structuralist regime.

The reasons for these shortcomings are sometimes obvious. As the author points out in his prefatorial note, the work is a collection of short texts written over a period of six years, and as such represents much less a definitive position on genre than a series of attempts to grapple with specific questions related to literariness. A worthy exercise nonetheless, he claims, in that it demonstrates the risks, along with the inconsistencies and shortcomings, involved in the process of developing a theoretical position on genre. This does not suffice however to explain the hesitancy of the author in the way he works through the problem. He does not appear to know how much to let go of his strong structuralist bent in his description of genre, nor how far to delve into considerations of the social implications of textual production. The result is, one might say, an uneasy truce proclaimed by a disaffected structuralist. While trying to avoid the extremes of 'impressionistic writing' and 'terroristic formalism', Todorov knows that in 'trying to have it both ways', he is doomed to 'losing out on both counts'.

Another reason for the shortcomings of this book is the editorial decision to leave out of the English translation an entire section of the French original devoted to nonliterary discourse. One cannot but wonder whether the analyses of word games, riddles, magical incantations or witticisms which form the final section of the French text, would not have given the English edition the social and historical depth promised in the beginning but never actually attained. It seems that this edition does the reader a disservice by truncating the French original of its seemingly most novel and ambitious elements. One is finally tempted to muse over the timing of this publication, which appears in translation long after the French original ceased to have an impact on the French literary scene. Recent publications by Todorov, who is now more committed to pursuing political and moral questions such as racism, nationalism and ethnicity, have spurned the spirit in which his structuralist writings of the 1970s were produced, claiming that they effected an unwarranted compartmentalization of their subject matter by virtue of a falsely objective methodology which tended to separate 'between one's life and one's words, between facts and values'<sup>1</sup>. In the light of the fierce questioning to which *Genres in Discourse* and other texts are now subjected by their author, one might deplore the absence of an introduction to the English edition spelling out its current significance to scholarship in the humanities.

#### Notes

1. T. Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought*, Cambridge, Mass., 1993, p.x .

Peter Poiana

#### **John Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.**

Amidst a plethora of books whose titles all contain the same words in different configurations, this one stands out partly because it's home-grown (Australian as opposed to British) and partly because of John Docker's inimitable style.

The book is a personal and idiosyncratic account of what postmodernism is and where it came from. There are three sections, on modernism, a pseudo-postmodernism which is apparently more modernism in disguise, and the 'real' postmodernism which, according to Docker, resides in the carnivalesque inversions of popular culture.

The material of the first two sections of the book, the cultural history of

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modernism and postmodernism, has been covered in numerous other guides. John Storey's *Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (1993), for example, tracks an almost identical terrain—from Leavis through Williams to Derrida and Baudrillard—and readers are not required to make allowances for the author's ego.

Docker's contribution to this well-worked field is a silent redefinition of the terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' to signify that most basic of all binary oppositions, between textual readings which seek to retrieve a single absolute meaning and those readings which presuppose plural socially-constructed meanings. According to Docker's interpretation of the terms, 'modernism' signifies the bad old days of structuralist and elitist reading practices, while 'postmodernism' signifies texts and reading practices which are unpredictable, fertile, flamboyant, and, basically, lots of fun.

There is no reason, of course, why Docker or anyone else should not interpret the terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' however they choose. What seems contradictory in Docker's book is the implicit message that his interpretation is the only possible one, that this is what the terms 'really' mean—an example of just the kind of textual practice which, under the label of 'modernism', he is rejecting.

In the Docker scheme of things, people are either single-minded modernists who lamentably fail to appreciate popular culture in any of its forms, or relaxed and fun-loving postmodernists who recognise the rich play of meanings in popular culture, a bit like Docker himself we find, watching television with his son or enjoying the aesthetics of the Sydney monorail. Anal-retentive modernists, a group which seems to include more or less everyone except Bakhtin and Docker, persist in looking for the 'dominant', the single meaning or underlying structure or unifying principle which explains everything there is to know about a text. This is how both F. R. Leavis and Stuart Hall can be dismissed as 'modernists': while Leavis wished 'to establish a true way, a single comprehensive standard for all English literature' (p.17), Hall insists on 'underlying unity, dominant ideology, dominant discourses' (p.62).

The trouble with Docker's idiosyncratic definition of modernism is that it includes not only the 'one right answer' merchants like Leavis, but anyone who expresses a coherent point of view. Derrida's *Of Grammatology* is dismissed for 'swimming in the wake of early twentieth-century high modernism' (p.145) because it 'presents Western thought as a relentless uniform totality, a monolithic structure' (p.139). While some aspects of Derrida's work, like Barthes's, are more structuralist than post-structuralist (and Docker is by no means the first person to have pointed this out), it is too simplistic to dismiss either of them as anti-mass-culture 'modernists', in Docker's meaning of the word. Derrida, Barthes, Stuart Hall and others are all swept away as 'modernists' because they commit the unforgivable sin of setting out a coherent position. This is not the same as the Leavistite and structuralist project of retrieving the single meaning of aesthetically significant texts.

Docker's critique of Leavistite ideology and its elitist disdain for popular culture is unobjectionable as a commonplace of cultural theory. But his appropriation of the term 'modernism' to cover a long and still-continuing history of textual criticism is both reductive and confusing. He bandies the words modernism and postmodernism, structuralism and post-structuralism, about as if they were all part of the same thing.

But there's a confusion here between practice and interpretation. Modernism and postmodernism, like realism, surrealism, cubism and so on, are aesthetic movements

or stylistic practices, types of production, as Docker recognises when he talks about modernist architecture or extols the virtues of the postmodernist Darling Harbour. Structuralism and post-structuralism, like New Criticism, Marxist criticism, deconstruction and so on, are analytic and interpretive methods, ways of talking about texts or artefacts. So a modernist poem can be subjected to a deconstructionist analysis, for example.

Docker jumbles all these terms together indiscriminately, using a 'discourse of certainty' which he cannot tolerate in others. Many of the wonderful features he claims for the 'real' postmodernism are more usually associated with post-structuralism, as in his opening description (p.xvii), which reads like a post-structuralist manifesto, not a description of postmodernism. And yet Docker explicitly damns post-structuralism with the dreaded 'm' word, saying that it 'has clearly associated its historical project with high modernism, particularly in terms of a continued contempt for mass culture' (p.145). This represents a serious misunderstanding of post-structuralist criticism, which has been one of the main mechanisms by which the split between 'high culture' and 'popular culture' has been dismantled.

The book's dependence on its own self-generated definitions of critical and theoretical terms is revealed during an extraordinary attack on John Fiske. This character assassination goes on for nearly eight pages, contrasting the 'regulation modernist mass-culture theorist, reflectionist, functionalist, structuralist' of Fiske's earlier writing with the 'New Fiske' of the late 1980s, represented by his book *Understanding Popular Culture*. In this book, says Docker, Fiske attempts to grapple with a postmodern view of popular culture as subversive and contradictory, but ultimately fails to make the leap. It continually falls back on the 'modernist' strategy of setting up oppositions and categories, and engages in 'a kind of rampant structuralism' (p.163) which finds a single ideological meaning for popular culture.

Because Fiske's book fails to conform to Docker's own definition of 'postmodern', it is rubbished, despite its contribution to the debate about popular culture. Docker even claims some credit for the birth of the 'New Fiske', in a cringingly unprofessional anecdote which suggests that Fiske was reluctantly converted by one of Docker's own conference papers (pp.159-60). Why is it decent and manly of John Docker to confess to modifying his own critical position since 1984 (p.129), but laughable and derisory for John Fiske to do the same?

The third section of the book describes Bakhtin's work relating to popular culture, in particular his book on the Renaissance, *Rabelais and His World*, and applies many of Bakhtin's ideas to contemporary mass culture. The dual role of fool and trickster is traced through carnival, vaudeville and on to present-day comedians such as Graham Kennedy, and to the genre of detective fiction. Docker argues that the figure of the detective, like the comedian, is ultimately an outsider, someone who works within society and comments on social practices but who is obliged to operate according to different sets of social conventions. The traditional demeanour of the fool, as both trouble-seeking trickster and sad philosopher, is realised in these major generic figures of modern popular culture. Similarly, farce and soap opera are related to carnival and melodrama in terms of their ability to parody or overturn accepted values, constructing a moral order where there is no closure of meaning or claims to absolute truth.

This section depends on Docker's main thesis that popular culture must be approached through postmodernism because only postmodernist readings can take account of the self-parody and inversions of mass-culture texts. We are confronted again with Docker's own interpretation of 'postmodernism' as an absence of single

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absolute meanings, a fairly basic theoretical position which does not really require the weight of the preceding sections to justify it. The argument that by reading popular culture as forms of Bakhtinian carnival we can acknowledge its polysemy and its potential for social criticism and change is persuasive; but the attempt to identify this position with 'postmodernism' merely creates a simplistic binary opposition—'good' postmodernism versus 'bad' modernism—of the kind Docker himself claims to reject.

A real concern for readers is Docker's implicit message throughout the book that, by embracing postmodernism, he has discovered the universal truth about popular culture, that he has redeemed popular culture as an intellectually significant and challenging site of multiple meaning, while everyone else persists in viewing it, with 'modernist dismay' (p.281), as commercial and passive. The reductive opposition between inflexible 'modernism' and Docker's own brand of endlessly signifying 'postmodernism' is theoretically weak and denies the work of other cultural theorists, such as Meaghan Morris, who have already set about the political contextualisation of contemporary mass culture. It also denies the long history of post-structuralist thought which arrived some twenty-five years ago at the position which Docker is now claiming for the 'real' postmodernism.

It would be easier to acknowledge the validity of Docker's cultural criticism if he wasn't so ready to assert that he alone has succeeded in understanding what popular culture 'really' means, when everyone else has got it so wrong. His interpretation of popular culture as carnivalesque, while workable and convincing, comes perilously close to the single ideological meaning which he so loudly denounces in the work of Fiske and others.

*Helen Fulton*

### **S. L. Goldberg, *Agents and Lives: Moral Thinking in Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.**

Sam Goldberg died in 1991. *Agents and Lives* was published posthumously in 1993. Whether he left any more writings to be published after his death I do not know. If that is not the case, it seems reasonable to consider this book as his final testimony to his conviction of the centrality of evaluative literary criticism to the humanities.

*Agents and Lives* argues for the thesis that literature is the expression of a special kind of moral thinking. Goldberg wishes to affirm the moral import of literature against two opposing views. On the one side his opponent is aestheticism, which he sees as merely formalist. On the other side his opponent is a moralism which holds that the moral interest of literature is merely didactic or exemplary. The 'aesthetic' critic will abstract formal qualities from the substance of a literary work, and so will produce criticism that is superficial and trivial. The moralistic critic will be concerned only to abstract rules or moral lessons from literary works, and so will be 'judgmental', and make himself or herself obnoxious. Goldberg is looking for a mean to avoid these two extremes.

To perform this task Goldberg distinguishes between two kinds of morality—'conduct morality' and 'life morality'. Conduct morality is what we usually understand by morality: that is, rules prescribing certain actions as right, and proscribing other actions as wrong, plus the related assumptions that all individuals are equal and identical before these rules, and that individuals will choose to obey or disobey these rules as voluntary agents. Life morality is something much more complex, and has

more the nature of an interest that we take in people. When we make life-moral judgments about people we are no longer thinking about particular actions, or about the rules bearing upon those actions, or about people as voluntary agents. We are thinking about people as 'lives' (hence the title, *Agents and Lives*). This means several things. It means seeing people as individuals in all their uniqueness rather than as equal and identical examples of some universal. It means seeing people's living as involving more than thinking, choosing and willing, as involving feeling, desiring, suffering, sensing, perceiving, understanding, and so on. It means recognising the spontaneity in people as well as the deliberation. It means being aware of the unconscious as well as the conscious dimension of their life. It means seeing their personality as a whole rather than as a mass of particular traits. And it means seeing their whole life as a path or trajectory, a pattern that unfolds. Generally, it means seeing people as organic totalities involved in a process of self-development in interaction with others and with the conditions of their life. Consequently, it means thinking of people in terms of potentialities, actualisation, self-realisation, activity, ends, *entelechies* (the debt to Aristotle is obvious, but Goldberg is not very inclined to acknowledge it).

The connexion with literature is established in two ways. First, it is contended that literary fictions are concerned with people in a life-moral as well as a conduct-moral way. Second, literary works themselves, it is suggested, are best understood and appreciated if they are viewed, by analogy, as manifestations of 'life'. This dual connexion enables Goldberg to argue that literary critical judgments should be considered either as life-moral judgments (on the characters or episodes of a work, or on a whole work), or as judgments on the adequacy of the formal organisation of the work to express or embody the life-moral interests of the author (or, if one prefers, the work).

This account of literature and literary criticism is constructed in relation to an account of moral philosophy. Where life morality is concerned, Goldberg suggests, literature and literary criticism are superior to philosophy. Philosophy, he asserts, is incorrigibly concerned with what is universal, abstract, general, conscious, deliberate, and so on, and so disables itself from approaching the individuality, concreteness, particularity, spontaneity, etc. of real human living. Goldberg offers to support this claim by commenting on the recent work of some Anglophone moral philosophers, viz. Rorty, Williams, MacIntyre and Nussbaum.

What are we to think of all this?

Goldberg is undoubtedly at his strongest when he is directly concerned with *literature and literary criticism, and with the relevance of what he calls life morality* to them. He distinguishes clearly between evaluative criticism and other kinds of literary study. He expounds persuasively the inseparability of understanding and evaluation in a critical judgment, and exposes the hidden values in allegedly 'value-free', 'scientific' criticism. He does not reject non-evaluative kinds of literary study altogether, but shows how they are analogous to certain ways of 'making sense' of people, i. e. explaining the behaviour of people by thinking of them as functioning systems, or as effects causally determined by 'factors', or as voluntary agents. Thinking of people or, by analogy, literary works in these ways will produce real, if limited, results, but all these ways are to be counterposed to thinking of people and literary works as 'lives'. This involves not merely understanding but response, as the life of another individual, or of a literary work arouses the life in oneself. To this extent the book is a persuasive defence of humanism in literary study against the 'theoretical

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anti-humanism' that has achieved hegemony since the 1960s.

Goldberg also analyses acutely the difficulties of teaching English Literature as an evaluative discipline in an age where confusion about the nature and force of moral judgments prevails. He recognizes the drift away from moral judgment on individuals to political activity to change social conditions. But he also sees how widespread belief in the subjectivity of moral judgments leads paradoxically to both the belief that anyone can make moral judgments, and the belief that no one should do so (because, it is held, they conceal attempts to dominate). In this climate of opinion any teacher offering to equate literary critical judgments with moral judgments (whether life- or conduct- moral judgments) will be faced with students profoundly reluctant to explore this approach to literary study.

Goldberg supports his positive case with subtle and complex analyses of particular works by a variety of authors from Shakespeare to Joyce, but in all cases he is concerned with the relation of literary works to ideas. He convincingly shows that great literary works do not simply present the ideas of their day. Rather they offer a special kind of criticism of them by way of an exploration of concrete human realities on which they bear. Goldberg's readings of George Eliot and Pope from this standpoint are especially valuable. He shows how Eliot's dramatisation of the story of her characters represents an understanding of them and their situation that is at odds with what Eliot consciously thinks she thinks about them. In this way Goldberg succeeds in explaining what many readers have felt to be an inadequacy in Eliot's relation to her own fictions. The account of Pope is amongst the best criticism of Pope I have read, far more perceptive and stimulating than most specialist studies on Pope. This is undoubtedly because Goldberg has a general interest in literature of all kinds, such that against the background of similarities he can throw into relief the differences between authors. And so Pope and George Eliot set each other off, their individuality emerging from the profound similarity of all great writers, through the very different features of their genius and conditions of life, all of which Goldberg elucidates.

Goldberg is strongest in literary criticism. He is weakest where he most approaches philosophy. His problem is that he wants to dissociate literary criticism from philosophy, and cannot avoid engaging in philosophical discussion in order to do so.

Several basic philosophical issues of epistemology, ethics, aesthetics and logic arise out of his approach to literary study, and in my opinion he leaves all of them in obscurity. He wants to consider literature as a form of moral thinking. But why confuse the issue by analogizing literature to thinking, especially if, like Goldberg, one wants to dissociate literary works from concepts? What is needed is a theory of the imagination as cognitive in its own specific way. Moreover, Goldberg contrasts the cognitive and the affective dimensions of literature, but he cannot provide any account of how these might be related. A theory of imagination would seem to offer the best chance of making this mediation.

He sets up the opposition of life morality and conduct morality, and has almost nothing to say about how they are connected. All he says on a few occasions is that conduct morality may be a part of life morality. But if both these are to deserve the name of 'morality', and yet be quite different from each other, then a rather more probing investigation of their relations needs to be made.

A similar failure to connect occurs in the discussions of conscious and unconscious, and spontaneous and deliberate behaviour. The antitheses are set up, but the connexion

between the two terms is not made. We are left with just two givens that are destined to remain in perpetual antithesis. This seems odd coming from a Leavisite. I cannot help thinking of the sensitivity and percipience with which Wilbur Sanders (another Leavisite) traced out the connexions between these modes of life in Macbeth (see *The Dramatist and the Received Idea*, Cambridge, 1968, chs 13 and 14).

Goldberg is totally confused about the relations between individual, particular and universal. He seems to think that an individual cannot have any relation to a universal without losing its individuality. But this is just a logical error. He also fails to distinguish between an abstract universal, a purely logical entity, and what Hegel called a concrete universal, a real principle of life and development.

Generally, he moves back and forth between recognising and not recognising the relation of literary critical discourse to philosophical discourse. Because of this uncertainty he fails to acknowledge his own philosophical debts adequately (Aristotle, Bernard Williams), and he cannot see what philosophical resources he needs to tackle his problems. It seems to me symptomatic that the list of thinkers who, he claims, have influenced our ways of thinking about literature (from Plato to Freud) does not contain the names of any of the German Idealists (except Kant's). And yet these are the Western thinkers closest to Goldberg's concerns.

There is a radical problem here. Goldberg's notion of philosophy is absurdly narrow. When he thinks of philosophy, he thinks of the Anglophone analytical tradition from Hume to the present, with the usual additions of Plato and Aristotle (Gadamer is in the notes but not in the text). By identifying this tradition with philosophy, or even 'the philosophic mind' Goldberg helps to reinforce the analytical philosophy whose defects he deplores, and prevents himself from finding the philosophical assistance that he needs.

He confuses the formal universality of philosophical discourse with its content. He seems to think that because philosophy abstracts and generalises, it cannot take as its subject-matter individuality, concreteness, particularity, and so on. But this is just an error. What Goldberg wants and needs is a philosophical discourse that can discuss individuality, organisation, development, totality, opposition and so on. In view of the fact that such a philosophical tradition, stemming from Hegel, has been in existence for two hundred years, Goldberg must appear either ignorant or wilfully provincial. What he continually complains about in Anglophone philosophy is what Hegel called the 'finite understanding', but Goldberg is just as much stuck in the finite understanding as the philosophers he criticises.

The philosophical deficiency is connected with an ideological stance. Goldberg's version of Leavisism tends towards moral individualism. The life of an individual or a particular literary work calls to us only as individuals. We remain in an ethical dimension removed from real social forms and conditions. This is a marked retreat from the early Leavis' conviction that forms of living inhere in definite social conditions, and that literary criticism must extend out towards projects of social change. To this extent I think it is fair to identify Goldberg's position as right-wing Leavisism (as distinct from the left-wing Leavisism of the early Raymond Williams).

Goldberg recognises in the abstract that former modes of life and life moralities were connected to specific forms of society, but he fails to locate his own life-moral concerns where they clearly belong, in the social transformations of the last two hundred years. If he were to do so, he would be faced not only with the challenge of philosophy, but also that of historical sociology and politics.

David Brooks

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**Tom Furniss, *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology: Language, Gender and Political Economy in Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.**

Furniss's *Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology*, is a work neither of nor about 'aesthetics' itself. It, or its first part, 'Aesthetics for a Bourgeois Revolution', is about how Burke's aesthetic doctrine, as worked out in his early *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, functioned as 'ideology'. In light of this, Furniss is not interested in Burke's aesthetics *as* aesthetics; rather, his interest is in it as an instrument of *politics*. Furniss's discussions here often come across as crudely reductionistic, replete with the type of heavy-handed attribution of an author's 'real' (although perhaps unconscious) intentions, reminiscent of the crudest versions of Marxism. Burke was, it seems, no more interested in aesthetics than Furniss himself. What he was *really* trying to do was to 'recruit the sublime as a means for establishing a particular image of middle class selfhood' (p.49) or create 'an ideological and theoretical mythology' (p.78).

Burke's politics were, of course, explicit in that later work for which he is most well known, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and it is this work which is the focus of the second part of Furniss's book. Here the link with the earlier theme of aesthetic ideology is maintained in a variety of ways. At one level, Furniss is concerned with the way Burke has to renege on some of his most basic ideas in the *Enquiry*, in particular, his championing of the sublime as a type of masculinising sentiment, appropriate for the industrious emerging middle class of the eighteenth century. But in the later work, the revolution he so vehemently opposed has the look of a 'sublime' event, forcing Burke back to defend as 'beautiful', the features of the old, now threatened order.

Furniss's account of Burke's back-pedalling on the value of the sublime, his attempts to separate out a 'true' from a 'false' sublime, and his entanglement within the twists of his own rhetoric, is probably the most convincing part of the work. One can see how the complicated and intertwining skeins of rhetorical tropes found in a work like the *Reflections* can cause problems for a writer attempting to enlist them within a particular campaign. Once philosophers and intellectual historians didn't pay much attention to what they saw as merely the way in which ideas were expressed or packaged. But here, I feel, what we have is the equally one-sided inversion of that earlier one-sidedness.

I have described Furniss's approach to aesthetics as 'reductionistic', but this is not quite true, because it is not the case that there is a clearly defined realm of 'politics' to which Burke's aesthetics could be reduced. Inheriting much of the 'structuralist' and 'antihumanist' legacy of the sixties and seventies, Furniss shifts the focus from Burke's ideas, whether political or aesthetic, to his 'texts' and the 'effects' they produce. And it is here that considerations which, if not quite 'aesthetic', then at least broadly literary or rhetorical, are reintroduced, as it is the *figurative* dimensions of Burke's writing that are seen as that which causes the relevant 'effects'. Consonant with this, the somewhat structuralist-Marxist feel of the analysis is overlaid with a more poststructuralist or deconstructivist one. When we focus down on this level, what we see (it is claimed) is the relentless operation of Derrida's 'logic of the supplement',—a process in which the very techniques with which Burke tried to sew up his case work to unravel what had already been stitched together.

The idea of this peculiar logic is one whose genealogy pretty clearly stretches back through the Marxist 'dialectic' to its own Hegelian ancestor. Marx, of course,

thought that the problem with the Hegelian dialectic was that it represented a process which went on within the realm of 'ideas' and left out the 'real world', the material world of the economic reproduction of a specific form of social existence. For the most part, however, here the dialectical process has been shifted 'upstairs' and lodged at the level of the written works 'produced' within the society in question. But if this sounds like a return to the Hegelian realm of 'ideas', the 'materialist' feel is saved by not treating the writing in terms of the 'ideas' it contains but as something apparently more tangible—as a network of 'rhetorical strategies' at work in this form of 'production'. Furniss typically writes not 'Burke claims x about y', but rather 'Burke figures x as y'. But such figures have the tendency of running out of control and turning back on those who employ them, so regardless of Burke's conservative intentions, his texts may produce quite different effects.

With both his eyes on the rhetoric of Burke's texts, Furniss seems to neglect the fact that texts can still have 'effects' by giving readers reasons to take their claims to be true. With the older, Marxist concept of 'ideology', there was at least a connection with the idea that ideology was in some sense 'false' (in contrast to the claims of Marxist theory itself, which were 'true'). But from the new perspective this all seems to have been swept away—at least on an overt level—to be regarded as premised upon a naive approach to language understood as a medium for 'representing' things, events and processes in the world, rather than as a process of 'writing', a process of endless and self-deconstructive 'effect' producing 'figurings'.

In fact Furniss finds this break with a naive representationalist idea of language in Burke's own aesthetics. Poetry for Burke is innovative rather than imitative, it 'exploits and supplements nature in order to generate the surplus value of the sublime'. This power of language results from its being unleashed from the function of representation, and this, for Furniss, means that the norms governing the correct use of words become simply social or political. But on the evidence presented here, Burke's theory of language does not imply that conception of language to which Furniss adheres. The Lockean conception of language, that Burke started from, is taken by Furniss as unproblematically 'representational', but, as he points out, for Locke what words primarily signify or stand for are 'ideas' in the mind rather than things in the world (p.97). Where Burke departed from Locke was in his criticism of the mentalistic idea that the effectivity of words was necessarily mediated by the 'forming of pictures of the several things that would be present in the imagination' (p.101). This Furniss seems to understand as amounting to some general denial that our words can refer: 'Burke is arguing, then, that language in general works independently of referents or concepts—that it is a non-*representational* medium' (p.101 emphasis in original). But why not think that Burke was restoring the everyday sense of representation, where we think of words as referring to things rather than to some Lockean intermediaries—'ideas'? In fact, it could be argued that it was precisely Locke who had 'subverted' the ordinary idea that words can refer to things and events in the world and that Burke was restoring this idea by criticising Locke's mentalistic assumptions. Sadly, Furniss seems locked into an embarrassingly restricted theory of language. It is as if, the issue of '*différance*' aside, after reading Derrida, he had definitely read 'the last word'.

A couple of decades ago the humanities in the English speaking world received an invigorating jolt from what seemed like a revolution being played out within Parisian humanistic culture. But challenging ideas can turn into lifeless dogmas, and turns of phrase designed to make us question presuppositions can come to be taken as

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providing *answers*. While a familiar Derridean maxim has it that there is no 'outside' of language, ironically Furniss's approach seems exactly one of insisting on a location 'outside' of Burke's language, in the sense of outside the scope of his linguistic address—outside the scope of his *claims* (about the beautiful, the sublime, the events in France, and so on). Such refusal to accept the address of a text is manifest in the almost parodic self-image of scientists whose orientation to their object is one of rigorous and detached analysis: 'To read Burke's texts as discourse is to analyse how their rhetorical strategies function, how they engage in intertextual dialogue with other discourse, and how they intervene in and have effects on the way political events and texts are discursively constituted and read' (p.7). Burke's texts may have engaged in 'intertextual dialogue', but Furniss's does not 'engage' with *them*. Neither did the more scientific forms of Marxist analysis engage with the ideas/ideology of rival views, but they at least made the *claim* of being 'science'. It was the poststructuralists who helped puncture *that* claim, but, ironically, the very undialogical critical orientation which the claim *justified* continues unabashed here.

Paul Redding

Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London: Routledge, 1993.  
John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

*The Cultural Studies Reader* begins with a valuable essay by Professor During on how this field of study emerged. According to his account, it began with a twin focus on 'the individual life' and 'social inequality' (p.2). The founding texts were Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), as a personal account of a working-class life, and Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (1958), as showing that "culture" was not an abbreviation of "high culture", assumed to have constant value across time and space' (p.2). This is seen as a counter-movement to the ideas of F. R. Leavis, and the early development of cultural studies involved a reevaluation of 'mass culture', rescuing such forms as film and jazz from their unprivileged position, and paying attention to the concept of cultural 'hegemony' associated with Gramsci. 'Hegemony is a term to describe relations of domination which are not visible as such. It involves not coercion but consent on the part of the dominated' (p.5).

The influence of the French theorists in the 1970s—Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault are singled out—is seen as reorganising this analysis in terms of 'fields' and 'imaginaries'. Individuals live in such 'fields' as family, work, and education, each with its own 'imaginary', its 'promise and image of satisfaction and success' (p.11). This led in due course to cultural studies based on race, gender and ethnicity, seen increasingly in global terms. More recent preoccupations are with 'cultural populism' and its context of market forces, and with 'cultural policy studies' in their context of governmental structures.

The texts which occupy over four hundred pages of the *Reader* illustrate these phases of development. Professor During sees cultural studies as uncertain of itself as a 'discipline', constantly shifting ground, never clearly demarcated among the social sciences. Yet the selected passages do little to suggest any sense of disquiet. Is it at all symptomatic that the deconstructionists do not get a hearing? We have the Barthes of *Mythologies*, but not the Barthes of the 'Inaugural Lecture' (1977), dealing with literature as the representation of 'the real', and as 'the implicit model of the human'. This may be—as the selection of passages itself tends to confirm—that

while cultural studies began in the field of literary studies, it has now left them behind. It is not clear what the student reading the *Reader* will eventually study. While attention is directed to such things as the Madonna phenomenon, and the study of shopping centres, it seems that a course in cultural studies will consist mainly in studying the opinions of theorists.

It is also limiting that Professor During endorses the view that cultural studies is 'more particularly, the study of *contemporary* culture' (p.1). Colin MacCabe has lately fixed on this as one of the two principal elements threatening 'the failure of cultural studies' (*Times Literary Supplement*, 26 May 1995). He finds it strange that at a time when there is such concern with preserving the National Heritage, cultural studies should switch off from the past. 'The analysis of contemporary capitalist forms of culture', MacCabe observes, 'is almost always divorced from the analysis of traditional forms, to the detriment of both ... We will not begin fully to appreciate contemporary forms of cultural production until they are situated in a long-term historical perspective'. The achievement of such a perspective, in MacCabe's view, calls for 'a very serious engagement with the established disciplines', but for him this is where the second Achilles' heel of cultural studies is to be found, that 'for the most part interdisciplinarity has failed to deliver'. The reader of the *Reader* may be left wondering whether anything is being done here that might not be done more rigorously in economics, sociology, political science or literary criticism.

These perturbations are felt in Professor Frow's book, which is in some respects an agonising reappraisal of the whole enterprise of cultural studies, and of the terms of his own commitment to it. It is keyed into such questions as 'What do we teach? ... Do we teach a canon, or expand the canon, or dispense with a canon altogether—and how would this be possible? Are some texts better than others—is it possible for us *not* to believe this, but if we do, what grounds do we have for such a judgement?' (p.15).

In Chapter 1, Professor Frow argues that the distinction between 'high culture' and 'low culture' is now untenable, as is the correlation of either with social class. Chapter 2 is occupied with revising 'The Concept of the Popular'. It is a concept which is untenable to the extent that it depends on an opposition to 'high culture', and to the extent that it is offered as experiences of 'the people', undetermined by the hegemonic influences that determine everything else. One possible way for the survival of the concept could be 'to argue that "the people" is not a given entity which precedes cultural forms, but is rather entirely the product of cultural forms ... The corollary of this is that contemporary culture industries work hard to construct their audiences as "the people"' (p.84). This leaves some doubt whether 'the popular' is still a useable concept.

Chapter 3, 'Class and Cultural Capital', an exacting review of the concept of class, is also concerned with redefining 'the intellectuals' as 'the knowledge class', with one wing deriving from 'the intelligentsia of letters' and the other from 'the technical intelligentsia' (pp.120–21). There is a reconsideration here of the role of the intellectuals in speaking for others, which does not however extend to the question of who appointed them to that task in the first place. The recommendation is that intellectuals must now declare themselves and their politics, and speak from that position.

The fourth and last chapter, 'Economies of Value', explores what seems to me a major dilemma of cultural studies: that having taken its origin from a repudiation of the values thought to be entailed in humanism or aesthetics, it continually feels the

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need of a total system, yet can never subscribe to one. The alternative of a plurality of value-communities having been set aside, Professor Frow puts forward the concept of a 'regime of value'. A regime is not tied to any social group, but is constituted of the interlocking institutions (e.g. school curricula, media, academic credentials) which at any time organise the reader of any text and govern his or her relations with it. The notion of a 'regime of value' is argued with an intellectual strenuousness which cannot be reproduced here, though Professor Frow acknowledges that it is not very different from the existing concept of the 'reading formation' (p.145), or (one would have thought) from any normal (i.e. ideological) encounter with a text. He argues that it leaves the social group some way behind, along with 'high' and 'low' culture as formerly conceived, and also race and age and gender. 'It stresses the point that ... class and race and age and gender are always to an important degree imagined (but not imaginary) structures' (p.150). 'The concept of regime', Professor Frow also contends, 'expresses one of the fundamental theses of work in cultural studies: that no object, no text, no cultural practice has an intrinsic or necessary meaning or value or function; and that meaning, value, and function are always the effect of specific (and changing, changeable) social relations and mechanisms of signification' (p.145).

*Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* is written as a debate between Professor Frow and himself, in an effort to clarify his position. There is a good deal of 'As Jostein Gripsrud argues', 'Christa Bürger writes elsewhere', and 'I shall draw, with some diffidence, on a central concept in the work of Nicos Poulantzas; and with somewhat more confidence on the work of Adam Przeworski'. Frow has difficulty in stating his position except as a qualification to a statement by someone else, so that his text is less accessible than it might be. He obviously makes a considerable investment in the concept of a regime of value, but (for me) cannot entirely dispel the possibility that this is another construct, like the constructs of class, gender and race which it supersedes. It may be a more serviceable construct—or possibly life-raft?—for the moment, but that is all.

I have two concluding reflections, going beyond the book itself, but prompted by the unremitting candour of Professor Frow's exposition. They both have to do with systems and absolutes. In a skilful intervention in the debate over Keith Windschuttle's *The Killing of History* in the Higher Education Supplement of *The Australian* on 30 November 1994, 'John Frow' assailed the notion of 'a truth which would be independent of any of the conceptual and interpretive frameworks through which it can be known'. Tethered as we are to these conceptual and interpretive frameworks, can we say *anything* about what may lie outside them? Or is this statement itself made from some mystical ground beyond? It is interesting that the theory of regimes of value commends itself to Frow partly because it transcends other explanations, and at the same time that he should be unhappy with the idea of an infinity of regimes of value which would be incommensurable. He seeks opportunities for interaction and overlapping—in the search for a synthesis?—and recommends the study of texts from different historical periods to this end, pointing to the availability of an existing model of hermeneutics for the purpose.

The second reflection is on the claim that 'the concept of regime expresses one of the fundamental theses of work in cultural studies: that no object, no text, no cultural practice has an intrinsic or necessary meaning or value or function'. What to me separates literary criticism from cultural studies is the intent of the critic to bring out the individuality, even the uniqueness, of the text, not to see it as just illustrating some pattern. This is in part delusory, but it is no greater a delusion than thinking that

the text is an event in 'language' (or whatever), and nothing more. Can cultural studies accommodate such a view of the text? Frow's statement of 'one of the fundamental theses of work in cultural studies' again has an absolute quality about it. I suppose it would be an absolute for the deconstructionist that every thing is undecidable, that a text must not have stability, as it would be an absolute for a new historicist that where there is an inequality of power, the moral superiority must belong to those with less. To speak of 'fundamental theses' at all, as something to be secured, never to be surrendered, would seem to preclude any further development for cultural studies in that direction.

G. A. Wilkes

**Lola Sharon Davidson, S. N. Mukherjee, Z. Zlatar (eds), *The Epic in History*, Sydney: Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1994.**

We learn in S.N. Mukherjee's *Foreword* to this collection of essays, the eleventh in the series 'Sydney Studies in Society and Culture', that the workshops in which the various pieces were first presented came from an idea of Zdenko Zlatar, the 1993 editor of *The Epic Circle*. His suggestion was that epics from many different periods and places should be read 'in connection with' and 'in opposition to' each other, following an idea of Gian Biagio Conte. This may very well have been a feature of the actual workshops, but the final essays do not show much evidence of this principle. It would perhaps have been a good idea to incorporate at the end of each essay a selection of the most important comments and exchanges engendered by the workshop discussions (which are said in the *Foreword* to have been 'often fierce and emotional'). Zlatar's original purpose would have certainly been better served by such a procedure. The reader also senses a certain degree of politicking that must have gone on behind the publication of the final text. One wonders, for example, why works on the Indonesian and Indian epics, as well as the Icelandic Sagas and Byzantine epics 'had to be omitted'. Not for want of space, surely, as Dr Davidson has two separate articles, both with reference to dreams in the Middle Ages, included in the collection.

What we are offered is an essentially disparate collection of essays with several quality items amongst them. Some essays, it must be admitted, address a specific text as representative of a particular type of epic and are aimed at an audience already familiar with that type (for example, Helen Fulton's, 'Cultural Heroism in the Old North of Britain: The evidence of Aneirin's *Gododdin*'). Others are more general and could serve as a competent introduction for the non-specialist reader wanting an overview of, say, the German epic (for example, John Clifton Everest's 'The *Nibelungenlied*: Epic vs Romance'). Some indeed have attempted to show what relationship there exists or does not exist between the epic under discussion and the epoch in which it was composed. Others seem to dismiss the 'history' part of the subject from the beginning, then treat their epic from a point of view which suits them.

The articles seem to have been proofread satisfactorily except for Irene Harris's contribution on the *Draco Normannicus* and Mukherjee's piece on the *Mahabharata*. In the latter essay, subject does not always agree with verb (e.g., for 'all these works including Kalhana's chronicle was considered'); the author of an important text is once referred to as 'C. H. Philips', at another time 'C. H. Philip'; and the German word '*geschechen*' should surely be '*geschehen*'. As well, the reader may well wonder what the following sentence means: 'They, like the *Mahabharata*, would entertain

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and doctrine of *Karma*.' (pp.8-9).

In spite of the poor proofreading for this article, '*Mahabharata: an Ideal Itihasa (History) of Ancient India*', it is true to the stated theme of the essays and so informative as to provide an excellent introduction for any reader unacquainted with this domain of epic. Sanskrit terms and titles of texts are all glossed lucidly. The important stages in the recording of the *Mahabharata* are traced, including a detailing of those periods when the *Mahabharata* was used politically to shore up a dynasty. The current importance of the tradition in India is indicated through personal anecdote.

Helen Fulton's piece on the Welsh poet Aneirin's *Gododdin* is well documented and closely argued. She seems right in rejecting the Chadwicks' established ideas of the 'heroic age of British poetry' to give the *Gododdin* a culture-specific interpretation. The theoretical problems involved in looking at the relationship of epic and history are clearly stated and their implications heeded in the argument. Towards the end, however, Dr Fulton becomes bogged down in a technical discussion about the differences in meaning between '*gosgordd*' and '*teulu*' (both meaning some sort of warband) and the possible relationship in meaning of each of these words to the Latin '*comitatus*'. Here the non-specialist readers may well find their attention waning.

In his contribution, 'Flyting and Fighting in the Irish *Táin Bó Cúailange*', Bernard Martin has drawn on results of Ward Parks' research as published in *Verbal Dueling: The Homeric and Old English Traditions*, Princeton, 1990. Martin realizes that non-specialists may be among his audience and so refers the reader to Thomas Kinsella's translation of *The Táin* when he discusses that text. Martin's piece is lively and sometimes almost colloquial in tone, still showing some signs of its being composed for oral delivery. The quoting of detailed examples of flyting, that is to say boasting, from both extant versions of this Irish text ensures that the specialist reader as well as the general one will find matter of interest in the article. Such flyting is a feature of much epic literature and has its counterpart of course in the famous *gabs* of the Old French *chanson de geste*, *Le Voyage de Charlemagne*. Reflecting on the historical reality of the boasting episodes in Old Irish literature, Martin suggests that the flyting behaviour of the Gauls, as recorded by ancient authors such as Diodorus Siculus, may well have been continued, albeit several centuries on, as a feature of Irish society at the time of the composition of the *Táin*.

Lola Sharon Davidson has provided for the book an Introduction which is informatively solid in offering useful, concise and usually correct summaries of each of the essays. She also publishes two contributions in both of which the principal theme is dreams and their function in medieval literature. In the first of these, '*Aeneid VI and Medieval Views of Dreaming*', her main focus is on the use of Virgilian dream imagery and its interpretation by various commentaries on Virgil. Epics and histories are shown to use dreams similarly in the Middle Ages. In Dr Davidson's second essay, '*Dreams, History and the Hero in the chansons de geste*', the contrasting status of dreams in the *chansons de geste* and romances is shown to be a function of the contrasting realities they present. The author unfortunately seems to rely heavily on translated texts rather than the originals, and often her secondary source material seems poorly integrated into her own text. Both her contributions are well documented, so the reader is at least nicely placed, by referring to the footnotes, to establish an up-to-date bibliography on the attitude to dreams in the Middle Ages.

In an article reaching almost monographic proportions, 'The Function of the Epic in Latin Culture: The *Waltharius* and Carolingian Attitudes towards Marriage', John O. Ward makes an original contribution by examining what was involved in the

act of translating a Germanic folk/vernacular poem into a Medieval Latin epic. A separate 'Bibliography' at the end of the article fills five pages. First, however, in a section entitled 'The Epic Inheritance', Ward traces the tradition of epic, especially Virgil's epic, as it was passed on to the Middle Ages, noting on the way how there had always been a problematic relationship between the literary form of the epic and themes of importance to contemporaries. Then comes the section on the *Waltharius* itself. The workshop theme (epic in history) is definitely not lost in this contribution. The paper is most learned, though is in places somewhat tentative, giving the impression of work still in progress. Thus Ward cites in footnotes opinions of other scholars who have read his typescript, or who have written him letters explaining their points of view on certain contentious issues. Ward's conclusion about the *Waltharius* is that we are dealing with a poem that has been carefully and symmetrically re-crafted by a skilled Latin-speaking Christian cleric in imitation of Prudentius, Statius and Virgil. This epic seems to have been written as an exercise in the exploration and probing of public and private values in the aristocratic world of the day.

In the course of 'Stephen of Rouen's *Draco Normannicus*: A Norman Epic', Irene Harris informs her reader that the Latin text discussed is not so much an epic as a piece of propaganda designed to encourage Henry II of England to assert his continental rights. Harris emphasises the historical interest of the poem whilst pointing up the fact that the genres of epic and history in the Middle Ages often overlapped. The material she presents is interesting, but as in the case of Mukherjee's contribution, she has been ill-served by the proof-reader. There are several incomplete references to sources in the footnotes, misspellings (for example, for *Litteratur* read *Literatur* (we are dealing with a German title) and for 'laudatory' read 'laudatory'. As well, there are unfortunately several unsupported statements in the piece which detract from an otherwise sound piece of work. On two occasions the author employs 'etc.', a practice that always arouses suspicion in what purports to be serious scholarship.

In Bernadette Masters' article, 'The Oxford *Roland* as an Ahistorical Document: A Tale of Ghosts or a Ghost of a Tale?', there are frequent allusions to alchemy—*prima materia*, *logos*, *sublimatio*. A thread of almost mystic interpretation seems to run through her text. We are urged to be like the receptor who 'is released from the urge to draw lines of demarcation around the individual characters, and is caught up in the ebb and flow of the language itself.' From the outset, we are told that it is futile to attempt to recuperate historical facts from Medieval literary texts. Masters aligns herself here with the so-called 'New Philologists', citing a work by Gabrielle Spiegel published in *Speculum*, 1990. For the contrary view, namely that there is a reflection of contemporary society in French epic, the reader should see the work of Bédier ('L'Histoire dans les *chansons de geste*', to be found in Volume IV of his monumental *Les Légendes épiques. Recherches sur la formation des chansons de geste*, Paris 1929) and of Frappier ('Réflexions sur les rapports des *chansons de geste* et de l'histoire', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 73, 1957). Masters' aim, however, is to have the reader accept a new interpretation, not only of the *Chanson de Roland*, not only of the *chansons de geste*, but indeed of all Medieval literature as being subject to what she calls the 'formulaic or iconographic process'. Lovers of *res novae* will be delighted. There are some excellent insights into the *Chanson de Roland* itself. The idea of the 'choir' voice in the *Roland* and the interpretation of its role strike this reader as aesthetically satisfying. In the course of this article, Dr Masters expects her readers to accept certain credos which will induct them into the society of those who really understand Medieval literature in which the principles

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are, according to Masters' thesis, closely allied to those underlying the Mass and even Romanesque architecture. Readers who attempt to read Medieval literature without the benefit of these insights are likened to that poor fellow who attempts to listen 'to early polyphonic music, or the compositions of Buxtehude or Bach, without any understanding of counterpoint.' Has Masters succeeded in her quest to restore '... Medieval literary objects like the Roland to their cultural context alongside other ritualised forms such as the Mass and contemporary art and architecture'? I must leave individual readers to decide for themselves.

'The *Nibelungenlied*: Epic vs Romance' is John Clifton-Everest's contribution to this collection. The reader is informed that it is difficult to make the distinction between epic and romance genres in Medieval German literature and so the *Nibelungenlied* participates in both genres. It does so in such a way that epic and romance elements are played off against each other, creating dramatic tension. In the course of tracing the origins of this epic-romance from its Icelandic origins, Dr Clifton-Everest mentions how events and characters in the text reflect contemporary societal attitudes. He argues that such innovations as the Cluniac order, the dominating power of the church, the conventions of chivalry, the consolidation by law of feudal structure, the crusades and the love cult are all reflected to some extent in the *Nibelungenlied*.

Michael Wilding has contributed an essay he has entitled "'Their sex not equal seemed": Equality and Hierarchy in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*'. The correct interpretation of the quoted line from Milton's epic is what is discussed throughout this subtly argued piece. Wilding points out that the assertion of women's equality was as contentious in the seventeenth century as it is in our times. Furthermore, a writer in the seventeenth century risked far more than he would to-day if he could be accused of heretical opinion. In determining the true signification of Milton's words, Professor Wilding asserts, we must take into account also the narratorial voice. Although ambiguity pervades the whole episode discussed, it seems that a careful reading will find that Milton believed in egalitarianism.

Finally, Zdenko Zlatar presents and compares two Slavic epics, one from the seventeenth century, the other from the nineteenth, in his 'Slavic epics: Gundulic's *Osman* and Mazuranik's *Death of Smail-Aga Cengic*'. Despite the centuries between the composition of these two epics, it is shown that they share a common theme. In this case the historical correlative is the liberation of the Balkan Slavs from the yoke of the Ottoman Empire. The reader finds a solid introduction to the influences on Gundulic (Tasso seems most important here) and an historical background to the liberation is provided by Zlatar who also quotes verses to illustrate the important 'wheel of fortune' theme manifesting itself in both poems. According to the author, it is this theme, which promises the ultimate fall of every tyranny, that unites the epic writers Gundulic and Mazuranic on a moral plane. The article is well supported by the ample bibliography indicated in the notes.

Max Walkley

**Peggy Fitzhugh Johnstone, *The Transformation of Rage: Mourning and Creativity in George Eliot's Fiction*, New York and London: New York University Press, 1994.**

*Autre temps, autre moeurs*, and we are again in a critical climate that permits, even encourages, the reading of authors' lives in relation to their works, and vice versa. In

the case of George Eliot, it is a question of various lives, variously designated. 'George Eliot', of course, was a name chosen for a particular purpose, the pseudonym adopted by Marian Evans, journalist and translator, common law wife of George Henry Lewes, for the publication of her first work of fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, in 1858. By the time of her death in 1880, George Eliot had achieved a reputation that was enshrined by her widower John Cross in *George Eliot's Life as related in her letters and journals*, that of a sybil to be venerated, an influence to be imitated or resisted by subsequent novelists. But 'George Eliot' was not the only name chosen by the woman whose given name was Mary Anne Evans, modified by her to Mary Ann and then Marian. She was addressed in different contexts as Polly, Pollian, Mutter and Madonna; and known for years as Mrs Lewes before she became Mrs Cross in the last year of her life. Such self-inscriptions have been attended to particularly by feminist critics, interested among other things in the woman writer's deployment of the male pseudonym. Peggy Fitzhugh Johnstone is much concerned with George Eliot's sense of self, but she does not engage in such speculation: her 'George Eliot' is the author of seven novels where Johnstone identifies the working out of trauma in childhood and adolescence.

*The Transformation of Rage: Mourning and Creativity in George Eliot's Fiction* is a document of the rehabilitation of psychoanalytic criticism, one of the first in a new series on Literature and Psychoanalysis. At first glance, its title may seem shocking, given the familiar image of George Eliot's wisdom and tolerance. But Johnstone is able to propose that George Eliot very early internalized aggression: the effective withdrawal of her mother from her life after the death of newborn twin boys when Mary Anne was only sixteen months old set up a pattern of sense of loss. Her thesis, based particularly on the theories of Otto F. Kernberg and Heinz Kohut, and reinforced by Margaret S. Mahler's work on the process of separation-individuation and John Bowlby's work on attachment and separation, is that 'George Eliot's fiction writing was her constructive response to unconscious mourning over the loss of her parents' (p.3).

I think it is all gain to be presented with a George Eliot wrestling with her passions. Moreover, Johnstone's claim that there is a 'connection between the artistic flaws in the novels and the author's personal conflicts' (p.2) is one that she makes good - though the phrase 'artistic flaws' is a clue to the traditional critical framework within which she is rather clumsily working. This book is responsible, clearly written, and at times illuminating; but its premise reduces George Eliot's writing to the basis for a clinical case study. The exposition of the texts is pretty literal, however, paying no heed to such matters as the rhetorical complexity of the role of the narrator and the quicksilver adjustments of subject position that distinguish George Eliot's narrative.

In places the analysis opens fresh perspectives: the account of *Adam Bede*, for instance, makes Hetty Sorrel and her transgression central to the novel. Johnstone's discussion of Hetty Sorrel as scapegoat reconfigures generalisations about the dynamics of community in the novel, and leads into a demonstration of the effects of the lack of parental support in all the characters, the upright Adam and Dinah Morris as well as the errant Hetty and Arthur Donnithorne, that provocatively suggests affinities among them. In particular, the proposition that Dinah is 'a character with unresolved needs expressed in destructive interactions with Hetty' (p.35) underpins a new reading of this seemingly idealised figure, though it ignores the argument that Dinah too is a scapegoat, a woman with a public voice as a preacher who is silenced in marriage.

*Adam Bede* was Eliot's first full-length novel, and it is not surprising that a

psychoanalytic reading based on displacement of juvenile aggression should get a firmer grasp on works that demonstrably proceed out of childhood recollection and family history than on later novels like *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. Another instance: *The Mill on the Floss* has frequently been read in terms of the author's self-idealisation in the character of Maggie Tulliver, and her working out of her relationships with her father and brother. Johnstone's distinctive contribution is to see in Maggie Tulliver a misuse of sexual power in her relationships with Philip, Stephen, and Dr Kenn (she might have added Bob Jakin) as a consequence of unresolved childhood rage (Maggie's, and George Eliot's). She moves from the fiction to explore the 'forbidden' relationship of George Eliot's life, her liaison with Lewes. This long section both discounts a good deal of the novel, and selects uncritically from George Eliot's biographers. Though she makes good use of Cross's accounts of what George Eliot had told him about her early years, she naturally relies mainly on Gordon Haight for data, not recognising the tendentiousness of his version of George Eliot's dependence.

As she progresses through the novels, Johnstone's interpretations always give pause: though the argument that *Silas Marner* depends heavily on anniversaries (in the fiction, and in the author's life) is strained, it is not implausible; the workmanlike account of *Romola* includes interesting work on Bacchus, and on the ending; her reading of *Felix Holt* complements that of Judith Wilt in her bold article 'Felix Holt, the Murderer' (*Victorian Studies*, 1991). The limitations of her readings can best be illustrated by comparison.

It so happens that I came to *The Transformation of Rage* just after I had read Rosemarie Bodenheimer's *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot Her Letters and Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), probably the most important book on George Eliot since Gillian Beer's *George Eliot* in 1986. Bodenheimer's project is to read George Eliot's letters along with her fiction, in order 'to suggest some ways in which George Eliot's works may be read autobiographically, as meditations on and transformations of the most intimate paradoxes of her very paradoxical experience' (p.xv). The strength of this procedure, compared to Johnstone's, is that it does not depend on a single key to all George Eliot's mythologies: rather, it is a dynamic process which develops subtle and devious readings of the life in the work.

A good comparison of Johnstone and Bodenheimer is provided by their discussions of George Eliot's most extraordinary novel, *Daniel Deronda*. Johnstone, who is committed to a linear notion of the development of George Eliot's art, suggests that 'by the time *Daniel Deronda* was completed, she had experienced in herself at least a partial resolution of the sense of loss that she portrays in her character Gwendolen' (p.179). In addition, she seems to regard the Jewish part of the novel as somehow not amenable to 'psychoanalytic insights', and hence diminishes the book considerably. None the less, she usefully discusses the invocation of the Narcissus myth, discerning psychological doubles in the brother and sister, Mordecai and Mirah, and in Gwendolen and Grandcourt. She finds a source of the unity of the novel in the psychological situation of the characters: 'Each must find a way to leave behind old, disappointing parental images and find replacements that will be sustaining throughout adult life' (pp.177-8). At best, I can manage a 'Yes, but ...' in response to this lowering version of a potent and problematic text.

For Bodenheimer, on the other hand, a number of George Eliot's anxieties (including some about women and ambition, and parenthood) make their way into

the novel, and particularly into the characterisation of Deronda himself, who in finding his Jewish parentage finds identity and vocation. Her account connects the novel unequivocally to George Eliot's literary eminence in the 1870s, and to the author's sense of responsibility to her readership especially as it was personified by disciples like Elma Stuart and Edith Simcox. She reads *Daniel Deronda* in terms of mentorship, scrutinising the mutual compulsion and coercion of Deronda and Gwendolen, and offering a startling insight, that 'the superiority of the confessor is a form of deception, a self-withholding which allows others to make mistaken projections of their desires' (p.259). Her summation is richly compelling: 'Once she had deconstructed sympathy, the fictional form she had shaped was as obsolete for her as it would be for the writers of the next generation' (p.265).

The comparisons could be continued, the balance always in favour of Bodenheimer as a flexible and fluent reader whose account of George Eliot's self-writing at once defines obsessions (with choice, and self-justification, for instance) and demonstrates their shifting shapes. Johnstone's singlemindedness has its rewards, but its limitations are sadly evident in her cosy final paragraph, which signs off with the confidence that through her creative work George Eliot gained release from her mourning. Johnstone does not maintain the rage.

Margaret Harris