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Interpreting Ladies: Women, Wit, and Morality in the Restoration Comedy of Manners by Pat Gill. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994. Pp. ix + 209. \$35.00.

The deliberate ambiguity of her book's clever title indicates the dual focus of Professor Gill's feminist examination of the Restoration comedy of manners. On the one hand, this book considers how male playwrights portrayed women on stage as the objects of male definition and desire—the ways in which “ladies” were interpreted by men. On the other, it attends to how male playwrights, particularly Wycherley and Congreve, imagined women as auditors, constructing “ladies” who actively interpreted the theatre and its representations of women. Though both types of “interpreting ladies” are male projections, Gill uses them to argue convincingly that the Restoration comedy of manners “revolves around the female figure as the prototype of problematic signification. . . . women are at once the perfect reifications of, and the destabilizing factors in, moral discourse” (19). According to Gill, a feminist critique of Restoration comedy is therefore crucial to an informed understanding of the satiric and dramatic significance of that comedy, and she concludes *Interpreting Ladies* with a consideration of the ways in which Aphra Behn provides provocative and revealing alternatives to her male colleagues' characterizations of female desire.

Freud plays a particularly important role in Gill's analysis of the issues raised by “interpreting ladies” on the Restoration stage. Using his discussion of jokes, Gill maintains that satiric comedy fuses Freud's two varieties of the tententious joke, the hostile and the obscene, creating a verbal seduction in which male aggression triumphs over female weakness. According to Gill, women can never perpetrate these jokes—indeed, “the woman becomes the necessarily excluded object of the joke” (11)—but can only be their victims, for the conclusion of manners comedy invariably depends on the public exposure of private female sexual activity. Women become the butt of the satiric joke that structures the comic plot, their vulnerability and passivity reinstating the masculine integrity, privilege, and subjectivity that have been questioned in the course of the play.

Gill also uses Freud to analyze male projections of their theatrical audiences. Looking at both Wycherley's dedication to *The Plain Dealer* and Congreve's dedication to *The Double Dealer*, Gill argues that “knowledge, especially sexual knowledge, is a gendered acquisition: only men are properly in possession of it” (p. 1). Both male playwrights imagine ideal female spectators as women who should be entertained by seeing themselves as objects of male desire, but who at the same time should not compromise their virtue by recognizing sexual innuendo or double meanings. Gill quite astutely recognizes that this impossible situation returns us to the scene of Freud's obscene joke: “It is the hostile verbal undressing—in the Freudian scenario, the revelation of (the lack of) genitalia—that puts the woman back in her place as object, a place that she, in the course of the joke, momentarily manages to escape by her initial temporary refusal of the sexual invitation” (12). Wycherley and Congreve ask for a female audience capable of responding to the playwright's jokes even while the women must be too “innocent” to understand them.

Gill presents her Freudian framework in the book's introduction, which is followed by individual chapters devoted to Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve, and Behn. Her attention to specific plays and playwrights allows Gill to refine the initial formulations of her introduction, and each chapter develops a number of exciting observations and insights. She uses Etherege, for instance, to reveal the way in which the heroine of the comedy of manners, by reflecting the hero's behavior, desire, and witty attitudes, functions as a "superb patriarchal fantasy" who acts primarily to produce and excite male desire. Her discussion of *The Country Wife* in chapter two persuasively argues that Wycherley's play has engendered contradictory critical responses because it exemplifies the very linguistic and moral ambiguities that it wants to condemn. Her extended critique of Congreve demonstrates how the links that playwright draws between loose women, illicit sexual activity, and the act of interpretation govern his failed attempts to define a "proper feminine discourse." Finally, Gill presents Behn as a "protofeminist" who illuminates a very different attitude to the conventions of Restoration comedy, for in Behn "chastity is not a criterion for female heroic status" (141), the "thematic of reciprocal enjoyment" (141) is primary, and "women's interpretive knowledge and skill are always a given and never an issue" (151).

Interpreting Ladies is a valuable addition to the critical literature on the Restoration comedy of manners, though I think it could have been even more useful and important had Gill been rather more ambitious and aggressive in formulating and developing her arguments. I lament, for instance, her decision to assemble the usual suspects, a line-up of Wycherley, Etherege, and Congreve enlivened only by the presence of Behn (who has herself achieved canonical status in the last five years). I must confess to a sense of *ennui* as I made my way, once again, through discussions of the standard plays by the standard playwrights. Even more problematic is the book's refusal to look beyond the Restoration stage, to establish a denser social and cultural context for the sexual politics that Gill wants to locate in the theatrical world. Early on Gill insists that the sexual tensions she will address "indicate a particular historical anxiety about the traditional definition of masculinity, an anxiety concomitant with the rise of the bourgeois class and the prospect of social mobility" (13). But her book rarely examines this "particular historical anxiety" or attempts to go beyond clichés about a rising bourgeois class. This book, in fact, can hardly address these issues since it so studiously ignores historical particulars; all four dramatists are treated as "Restoration" playwrights who appear to inhabit precisely the same historical moment. And the same theaters as well, for also absent from this book is any consideration of changing theatrical conditions. This seems particularly unfortunate in an argument that might quite usefully have considered women both as audience and performers, distancing itself from male projections and considering precisely how living women worked and took pleasure in the theatre.

Interpreting Ladies, in short, is about literary texts and not theatrical scripts, and though I regret the absence of a more specific dramatic and historical context for Gill's argument, I nonetheless admire its liveliness, careful reading, and rhetorical sophistication. The field of Restoration drama has long lacked a sustained feminist critique and this book should prove a stimulat-

ing catalyst to arguments about the place of women in the comedy of manners.

University of Alabama

Harold Weber

Swift's Politics: A Study in Disaffection by Ian Higgins. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. xiii + 232. \$54.95.

Emphasizing the extremist and subversive elements in Swift's writings, Higgins makes an interesting and provocative, though less than convincing, case for Swift's having been, if not a Jacobite *per se*, someone with strong Jacobite sympathies and associations. The book's main strength lies in its skillful marshalling of passages from Swift's texts—both canonical and little-known—that serve to spotlight a powerful strain of disaffection with the status quo and an imaginative engagement with revolutionary alternatives. The emphasis placed on these aspects of Swift's writings helps to effectively counter the view, put forward in various recent (as well as not-so-recent) critical works, of Swift as a Whig and/or a political moderate who fully embraced the settlement of 1688 and who remained in essence a loyal supporter of established authority. The safely defanged and declawed public figure who emerges from these works is (happily, if not, alas, once and for all) put to rest by Higgins's insistence upon fixing our attention on those utterances of Swift's that landed his printers in court or in jail, that fell victim to censorship because of their inflammatory nature, or that functioned as dangerously provocative allusions to contemporary affairs. This study does a commendable job on the whole of supporting its contention that Swift was "an unsettling, extremist political writer" who "wr[ote] in the language of the dispossessed and proscribed" (45, 11). The question remains, however, whether these characteristics necessarily testify to Jacobite sentiments. Was Jacobitism, in other words, the only form of extremism in Swift's time, and were there no other ideological positions available to the period's dispossessed and/or proscribed? It is in considering such questions that we come up against the main weakness of the book's argument.

Not that this argument is easily summarized, given the way it shuttles somewhat uncertainly among a number of different formulations, ranging from highly tentative suggestions of Swift's possible Jacobite ties to unequivocal claims for the latter's existence. Thus we move from the admission that "Whether or not Swift was a Jacobite cannot be determined" (ix) and the cautionary observation that "If in fact he was a Jacobite, he did not commit explicit incriminating evidence to paper" (74), to the diffident conjecture that Swift "may have had, from time to time, conditional Jacobite sympathies" (45), to more forceful assertions about the existence of Jacobite Tory language in Swift's writings and to testaments to his advocacy of Jacobite causes: "Swift's tacit support for the Jacobite projects of military invasion and insurrection in 1715, 1717, and 1719 may be legitimately inferred" (84). One gets the impression that Higgins desperately wants to make the stronger case for Swift's Jacobitism—that, after all, is the *raison d'être* of his

book, and the conclusion toward which much of his argument irresistibly tends—but that he is too careful a scholar, and too sensitive a reader of texts (and contexts), to conveniently ignore the ambiguities of the evidence. On the positive side, this caution results in a more nuanced study that avoids the pitfalls of an overly narrow, inflexibly-imposed thesis.

A less positive result, however, is that when this stronger case *is* made, it is conveyed through insinuation and innuendo rather than through forceful argumentation that bespeaks authorial conviction. Thus Higgins invariably places the tag “Jacobite” or “Jacobite Tory” before the name of anyone he refers to who had even the slightest connection with Swift, subtly creating a “guilt by association” ambience in which Swift in effect stands “convicted” of Jacobitism merely because he knew many people who were either themselves Jacobites or (like him, and with equal inconclusiveness) accused of being so by various of their contemporaries. That Swift’s circle included a significant number sympathetic to the Jacobite cause is indisputable. The problem is that Higgins tends to ignore the fact that, especially given the specific configuration of Irish affairs, Swift formed bonds of alliance with men across the entire ideological spectrum, including ardent Whigs such as Archbishop William King and Lord Robert Molesworth, the latter of whose patriotic exertions on behalf of Ireland prompted Swift to declare, “I am not a Stranger to his Lordship; and, excepting in what relates to the Church, there are few Persons with whose Opinions I am better pleased to agree.” One would be hard put to imagine “Opinions” more at odds with basic Jacobite principles than those of this Anglo-Irish peer whose writings so greatly influenced the major architects of the American Revolution.

Another example of the book’s “conviction by innuendo” may be seen in the inordinate importance given to the accusations of Swift’s alleged Jacobite affiliations circulated during his lifetime. Through almost imperceptible slip-pages in tone and emphasis, such accusations at times themselves assume the primary burden of evidence for Swift’s Jacobite leanings. That Swift “was regularly convicted of Jacobitism in the press” (92) and that “his Whig adversaries came to regard him as ‘a great Jacobite’” (ix) is certainly true—but then, the judgments made by these “adversaries” and by the (predominantly Whig) press were by their very nature biased against Swift and intended to smear his reputation. To invoke them as evidence of Swift’s political stance is tantamount to using items from *The Craftsman* to construct a well-balanced picture of Walpole’s administration, or like citing the insinuations of the House Committee on Un-American Activities during the early 1950s to prove that someone was a Communist. Higgins is clearly aware of the problem and makes some effort to navigate around its pitfalls, but there are too many places where he seemingly can’t resist the temptation to press the statements of Swift’s enemies into the direct service of his argument. Higgins’s endeavor in this regard is not helped by the fact that Swift was acutely aware of this very problem (i.e., of mere accusation being made to function as proof of guilt, especially vis-à-vis the political aspersions levelled by the Whig establishment against its opponents), and interspersed his writings with scathing, often satirical exposures of this practice. In *An Examination of Certain Abuses, Corruptions, and Enormities, in the City of Dublin*, for example, he mercilessly mocks his foes’ ability to find evidence of Jacobitical

utterances and activities in even the most mundane, innocuous aspects of Dublin life. These pointed critiques have the effect of placing all arguers for Swift's Jacobitism—whether in his own time or in ours—at risk for being perceived as legitimate targets of his angry protests or ridicule.

Higgins is most successful at eluding the line of Swift's critical fire when he formulates his claims in the following manner: "Attention to the possible polemical provenance and resonance of some of Swift's political statements allows us to understand how a contemporary might have construed Swift's political discourse as the speech act of a disaffected Tory" (26); "Swift's 'Revolution-principle' is not without certain ambivalence and could easily be construed as covert Jacobite politics if readers felt the present grievances were insupportable" (82). These observations raise important issues deserving of lengthy and careful consideration. But to do full justice to them, one would have to move away from the somewhat less-than-productive question that occupies center stage in this study—Was Swift a Jacobite, and what evidence can we use to prove it?—and instead address ourselves to other, potentially more fruitful questions: What is it about Swift's political prose that appealed so strongly to the disaffected in his society? How did the different kinds of political grievances held by his diverse readership produce disparate understandings of his writings? To what extent was Swift able to consciously control and shape the polemical resonance of his statements? How responsible was he for the way in which his readers interpreted his texts? To attempt answers to these questions would require a degree of theoretical reflection that is (unfortunately) absent from the present study, with its apparent assumption that empirically-oriented historical investigations are sufficient by themselves to explain matters of textual politics, meaning, and interpretation.

Higgins is on firmer ground when he turns for substantiation of his thesis to certain rhetorical and thematic parallels between Swift's political discourse and Jacobite writings. His comments in this regard yield some revealing insights into Swift's marked attraction to ideas of regicide and tyrannicide, as well as to notions of justified rebellion and assassination. On various occasions, Higgins's juxtapositions of Swift's radical utterances alongside those of contemporary Jacobite polemicists do indicate points of unmistakable congruence. Yet here too there are problems with the kinds of conclusions drawn from the evidence presented. For one thing, it is possible to understand such congruence in light of the fact that, as Higgins himself puts it, "Jacobitism provided a political rhetoric of militant opposition that could be appropriated and deployed in [Swift's] political satire" (166-67)—quite conceivably for *non*-Jacobite ends, just as in the 1720s "Jacobite Tory appropriation of Old Whig languages" (33) was used to promote a largely non-Whig agenda.

Moreover, J.G.A. Pocock's analysis of eighteenth-century political discourse, showing how ideological opponents often invoked the same ethical norms and political ideals for very different ends—not to mention the recent spotlight thrown on right-wing militia groups whose anti-government diatribes closely echo the liberationist rhetoric of 1960s' left-wing activists—should remind us that neither rhetorical parallels nor the appeal to similar political concerns necessarily reflects membership in the same party (literally

or figuratively speaking). By the same token, that Swift shared certain grievances and interests with Jacobite writers does not automatically attest to his embrace of their basic ideological assumptions or political agenda. Thus Swift's belief in legislative defeasibility and his monarchomach rhetoric would have been at least as appealing to "left-wing" elements as to "right-wing" ones (I am, of course, using these admittedly anachronistic terms very loosely, merely as a form of shorthand due to time and space limitations). Indeed, a generation earlier, the radical Whig Algernon Sidney—executed for sedition in 1683—had forcefully argued for the legitimacy of popular revolt against an unresponsive monarch, articulating ideas that were eagerly taken up throughout the following century by a variety of republican and revolutionary thinkers. It is telling (and hardly coincidental) that Swift, speaking as the Drapier, chose to include Sidney as one of the "dangerous Authors" who inspired his own political protests because they "*talk of Liberty as a Blessing, to which the whole Race of Mankind hath an Original Title; whereof nothing but unlawful Force can divest them.*" Passages such as this one remind us that Swift's "extremism," assuming a variety of forms throughout his writings, could appear in contexts that had greater affinities with radical Lockean ideas than with the aggrieved feelings of High-Church Tory Jacobites.

All of which helps to point up what I see as the main problem with the book's argument: i.e., its apparent assumption that during this period Jacobitism was "the only show in town" when it came to expressing political disaffection, resistance, and/or desire for change, and its consequent inability to so much as imagine any other conceptual framework(s) for Swift's subversive attitudes. In the world presupposed by this study, revolution is equatable with reaction and all radical political articulations are necessarily backward-looking, founded on the hope of a restored past rather than a reconfigured present or a newly-created future. I would argue that such an assumption ignores the range of dissident and counter-hegemonic views during Swift's time—more specifically, fails to recognize the existence of *progressive* forms of political critique and resistance (as documented most notably in Caroline Robbins's pioneering study on "The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman").

This problem is closely related to the other major shortcoming of the book: its application of political labels and analyses that have much more specific relevance to English affairs of the time than to the situation in Ireland. To his credit (and unlike many other writers on Swift), Higgins does acknowledge Swift's Irish milieu and makes some attempt to weigh its possible effect on Swift's outlook as an Anglican churchman. Nevertheless, his singleminded focus on Jacobite contexts—along with his frequent deployment of interpretations and scenarios by now familiar from the "Jacobite industry"'s treatment of Pope and his circle—cannot escape bringing a decidedly Anglocentric perspective to his treatment of Swift's politics. Particularly damaging is the way this treatment excludes any serious consideration of the nationalist and anti-colonialist dimensions of Swift's thought and writings, hence fails to show how even those attitudes Swift shared with Jacobites could in his case convey a very different set of nuances and assume genuinely revolutionary, rather than just radically reactionary, significance.

Thus, for example, Higgins is quite right to insist on the often barely suppressed hostility Swift revealed toward King William III and the Glorious Revolution, despite the well-known instances (such as in his January 10, 1721 letter to Pope) where he firmly declared his adherence to the Revolution principle; and obviously this hostility was a characteristic he had in common with Jacobite sympathizers. But what is left out of this picture—as his *Maxims Controlled in Ireland* makes amply clear in its scathing portrayal of the Williamite Wars as a “contention of the British empire” that ravaged the Irish countryside, turning it into a “desert”—is the fact that, as an *Irishman*, Swift had particular reasons to be critical of both William’s militaristic adventures and of the Revolution: reasons that must be understood quite separately from the ones put forward in Jacobite literature. Similarly, Higgins’s insistence that we view Swift’s obsessive concern with “loyalty” in a Jacobitical context, while it can conceivably offer some useful insight into, say, *The Memoirs of Captain Creighton*, overlooks the ways in which it functions in his sermons and Irish tracts as a specific call to Irish patriotism: a demand for fidelity, not to a dethroned monarch or sacred royal line, but to “the Life and Being of [one’s] Political Mother,” abused and threatened by a powerful, unscrupulous neighbor. Then there is the book’s treatment of the passage in *Gulliver’s Travels* depicting the Lindalinians’ revolt. Higgins sees this depiction as one of the many instances in which the work “entertain[s] recognized Jacobite alternative options—[in this case] ideas of resistance and tyrannicide,” the passage having remained unpublished during Swift’s lifetime because “it would have appeared militantly Jacobitical to the English Whig authorities” (171, 158). However, as a veiled allusion to Ireland’s successful opposition to the English authorities in the Wood’s halfpence affair, the representation of the Lindalinians’ triumphant rebellion would likely have been deemed inflammatory for reasons having more to do with Anglo-Irish power struggles than with Jacobite politics, and its “ideas of resistance and tyrannicide” might well have seemed prophetic of a future upheaval more threatening even than Jacobite unrest (which had, after all, been decisively quelled in all the previous instances it manifested itself militarily). One could point to a number of other examples—the treatment of the motifs of rape, prostitution, and cannibalism in Swift’s writings, for instance—where imagistic elements central to Swift’s texts are divested of their Irish nationalist contexts (not to mention their anti-colonialist rhetorical force) and assimilated to an exclusively Jacobite script.

These shortcomings in the book’s argument are particularly regrettable in light of Higgins’s success in presenting a persuasive, at times eloquent reminder of the extent to which Swift was a profoundly destabilizing and unsettling writer whose works exerted at the time of their initial publication (just as they continue to exert today) a peculiar resistance to all attempts at moderating their extremism and bringing them into the bounds of propriety. However, the reductive application of a Jacobite framework—ultimately designed, like the interpretations it attacks, to impose tight definitional control over the intractable energies of Swift’s texts—is hardly the way to do justice to this fundamental insight. What is called for, instead, is a receptivity to the multiple layers of Swift’s subversive vein, which include his demystifying reflections on *all* kings (not only the post-Stuart ones), his withering denunci-

ations of militarism and empire-building (not merely of the standing armies that were the *bêtes noires* of Tories and Jacobites), his satiric exposures of the fundamental grounds of social hierarchy, and his trenchant attacks on England's policies vis-à-vis Ireland.

University of California, Riverside

Carole Fabricant

The Life of Walter Scott: A Critical Biography by John Sutherland. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995. Pp. xi + 386, 13 illus. \$34.95.

The conjunction of biographer and subject here seems promising: John Sutherland, respected analyst of the nineteenth-century publishing trade in fiction, meets Walter Scott, whose hugely popular Waverley Novels changed the way in which fiction was not only written but published in the last century. One expects a detailed sense of the workings of the trade in Scott's time, shrewd insights into the significance of innovative publishing forms like the "three-decker" or the "collected works" pioneered or established by the Waverley Novels, and in general a more thorough awareness than in most literary biographies of writing as a particular—and complicated—business. But one gets little of this. Something seems to have gone wrong in this biographical encounter, and the book that has resulted displays few of the strengths of either Sutherland or Scott.

In part the problem may be a matter of genre. Sutherland's volume is in the series of Blackwell Critical Biographies, a series based on already published biographical material and not on original, archival research. This means that the Blackwell biographer has to carve out a space for the new biography from the old biographies, in itself a matter of delicate critical negotiation. In general, such reorientation is most usefully achieved in one of two ways: one may bring into play a new theoretical model of life-and-works or one may move into the foreground a substantial rereading of the works, effecting in the process some redefinition of the accepted connection between this author's life and works. The Blackwell series as a whole has opted for the second option, its general blurb (printed on the back cover of Sutherland's text) making the point that the volumes offer "substantial critical discussion" of the works and "intelligent criticism within a well-researched biographical context." Sutherland himself, however, seems to have a rather different sense of what a "critical biography" might mean. His discussions of Scott's works are brief and reductive, and he concentrates instead on criticism of existing biographies or, more precisely, on criticism of the laudatory image of Scott constructed in the standard biographies of John Gibson Lockhart and Edgar Johnson, deriving much of his own ammunition from Eric Quayle's embittered *The Ruin of Sir Walter Scott*.

This kind of approach constitutes a third option for the second-order biographer, a debunking generated by the impulse of demystification (rather than, say, by the discovery of new information). Such an impulse can produce fresh and exciting work, but it can also (as in this case) appear carping and mean-spirited, a straining after negative reading. In his account of Scott,

Sutherland depends heavily on hypothetical and conditional formulations (the prose is filled with "may have's" and "would have's"); on sly inferences (as in the hints that Scott's son Charles may have been gay); and on insinuation (formulations like "It would be unkind to suggest"). Accordingly, his arguments tend to be arguments-by-contamination, as in the analysis of a potential collaboration between Scott and the poet Tom Campbell in 1805. This particular story forms part of a more general account of Scott's relations with editorial collaborators early in his career, an account whose main purpose is to undercut Scott's well-established reputation for literary generosity. The Scott-Campbell relationship is set up by an unpleasant story regarding Scott's displacement of Edward Forster's edition of Dryden: first he lured Forster away from his own project by proposing they jointly edit Dryden, then he engineered the erasure of Forster altogether, so that the Dryden edition came out under only Scott's name. Whatever the merit of these allegations, the symptomatic point is what follows, for Sutherland goes on to claim that what makes the Forster affair even worse is that "at exactly the same time [Scott] did much the same thing with Thomas Campbell" (129). He is referring to Scott's proposal to Constable for a multi-volumed edition of British poets when Campbell had agreed to a similar project with another publisher. Campbell withdrew from this other project, and accepted Scott's proposal for a collaborative venture, but the edition of poets never materialized since the publisher lost interest. Sutherland, however, insists on completing a guilty parallel with the Forster case: "But had [Scott] gone forward as originally planned in 1805, one cannot but think that Campbell would have gone the way of Forster" (130).

Such eagerness to "get" Scott (and his standard biographers) is rather puzzling. If Sir Walter Scott still has a halo, it has long been obscured by layers of cobwebs; Lockhart's errors and biases are well known; and Edgar Johnson's humanistic brand of biography was old-fashioned even when the Scott biography appeared twenty-five years ago. This does not mean that the question of received constructions of Scott need not be raised. On the contrary. The field of romantic fiction is currently being redrawn under the pressure of new critical questions and new models of history. And as the field is being redrawn, the *Waverley Novels* are once again becoming visible as significant and complex fictions. Substantial chapters on Scott, for instance, are appearing with increasing frequency in studies of the period. Hence a re-thinking of the whole shape of Scott's career in the context of its own time is very much a timely project, but Sutherland seems to have little interest in this kind of re-thinking. For him Scott's career is pretty much a product of the nastier qualities of both the writer and his readers: personal opportunism and ruthlessness on the one hand, and British vanities, prejudices and smugness on the other. While there is something to this, it is not all there is to it, and the limitation of Sutherland's book is that it is so intent on rewriting Scott as exploitive, sycophantic and self-serving that the fiction becomes simply a reflex of such qualities. Thus Sutherland reads *The Heart of Midlothian* as primarily a product of Scott's "addiction to things 'royal.'" Drawing attention to "a greasily obsequious tone" in the sections dealing with Queen Caroline, Sutherland identifies as the motive for the entire novel Scott's desire to build an "elaborate compliment to his monarch's grandmother" (209).

A similar reductiveness marks the literary commentary throughout. *Waverley* elicits sarcasm about the hero's comfortable survival; *A Legend of Montrose* generates much play about turncoats ("Scott himself . . . had become an English knight—Sir Walter Turncoat," 227); while *Ivanhoe* leads to the comment that in this novel "Scott sowed the paranoid seeds for any number of twentieth-century conspiracy fantasies" (232). The biography does include a smattering of statements about Scott's generic innovations, prodigious literary energy, and historical significance, but such statements are perfunctory and bland. Nor is the negative commentary much more coherent, for it too seems rather scattershot. The book fails to convey a firm sense of Scott's cultural achievement, not only in the positive sense (which does not seem to interest Sutherland very much) but also in the negative sense that interests him more. If Sutherland offers suggestions and hints on this matter, he offers little in the way of sustained argument. Given his knowledge and experience, the failure is all the more regrettable. The Tory advocate from Edinburgh who set in motion a profound literary revolution deserves a more considered analysis, and the "critical biography" of Scott for our time remains to be written.

University of Ottawa

Ina Ferris

Imageless Truths: Shelley's Poetic Fictions by Karen Weisman. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, Pp. xii + 227. \$35.95.

Shelley's Satire: Violence, Exhortation, and Authority by Steven Jones. Normal: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994. Pp. xiv + 215. \$30.00.

Shelley's early critics thought of him as a poet both in and in some way out of "the world." Modern critics do so as well, but they understand this dualism differently, and in their vocabulary Shelley's poetry meditates on the possible autonomy of its own language, while claiming also language's grounding in the social and material realities it both mirrors and enriches.

Though Shelley scholars today are a diverse lot, since the early 80's two general approaches have come to dominate. In one view, for the Romantic lyric to claim to speak of a "world created by language" is to conceal rhetorically language's inability to create much beyond endless iterations of its own conventions. If language is to articulate its own autonomy, clearly a number of paradoxes ensue, not least of which is the lack of real autonomy of the actual speaker from the given world or the conventions of form. In that case, language can only claim but never realize autonomy: how could autonomy from the given world even be *thought* outside the language needed to express it? Thus one group of Shelley scholars sees Shelley's career as a continuing struggle over his poetry's need to point beyond itself, to express its world while also suggesting something greater, truer, *not* given in ordinary experience. As Karen Weisman puts it in *Imageless Truths: Shelley's Poetic Fictions*, Shelley comes to perceive "expressibility itself to be so large an issue that he claims it as the chief occupation of his life" (83). If this itself seems

like a large critical claim, it is one consonant with the interests of recent scholars like Tilottama Rajan and Jerrold Hogle. Shelley's career is seen as a series of dislocations, some radical in their revision of traditional theologies, literary genres, or theories of language; some truly disorienting, obsessive, haunting. As Rajan has recently written of *Alastor*, "the complications of (self)-representation produce a fear that what underlies language may be an abyss of meaning. . . . it oscillates between positing a transcendental signified accessible through lyric or allegory and seeing language as subtended only by a vacancy" ("The Web of Human Things: Narrative and Identity in *Alastor*," in *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth Century Views*, ed. G. Kim Blank [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991], 107).

At the same time, language is clearly a social act. Weisman herself summarizes the emphasis of a second group of Shelley scholars when she remarks that "language as we normatively experience it . . . exists only insofar as it is actualized . . . and that actualization is only possible because communities publicly subscribe to certain shared assumptions about sounds and signs" (83). While this view of language is not her own emphasis, she does understand this as a central *practical* concern of Shelley's. For those critics who begin with these more pragmatic concerns, the origin (such critics are more willing to speak of origins) of Shelley's obsession with language was his need to bring utopian vision or a hint of some ultimate good into the public sphere. There, without recourse to didactic reasoning, poetry might engage the heart and energize the will to act. Karen Weisman and Steven Jones represent these two diverse approaches to Shelley's career, and both of their books are filled with original, sometimes even startling insights.

Karen Weisman's ambitious study explores these complex issues of language and fictionality through which their multiple permutations across Shelley's career, from *Queen Mab* to *The Triumph of Life*. For Weisman, Shelley is pulled in the opposing directions of fiction making and fiction unmaking, of questioning the very process of figuration through which poetry claims to point to a truth greater than, more intense than, more beautiful than, given experience. Some of this project will seem familiar to scholars aware of the work of Paul de Man, David Simpson, Rajan, and Hogle. But the distinctive strength of Weisman's book is in her shrewdly dialectical sense of Shelley's commitment to that given, "quotidian" experience which grounds all metaphoric elaboration. For Hogle, for example, Shelley's shifting imagery and self-referential metaphor is an element in a metaphysical project to undermine all fixed conceptual loci, the better to destabilize radically even such categories as "subject" and "object" in a continuing metamorphic process of representation, concealment, and displacement. Weisman, however, while presenting a view of Shelley's imagery similar to Hogle's, attempts to be more sensitive to what she calls "the pressures of dailiness," Shelley's real urge to celebrate that fixed and determinate "thingness" through which we all move. "He could experience considerable anxiety over his troping of the world without oversimplifying the philosophical cruxes pertaining to the ontology of reality" (2). Though I think this is inelegantly written, it is a clear first premise leading to the other pole of her dialectic: that it was in fact Shelley's desire to transcend the empirical world and figure forth that transcendence which itself so often produces his sud-

den guilt for and embracing of the everyday with its fixed and clear objects beautiful in themselves. Shelley, then, struggled "at once with both the actual and its problematizations" (2).

In a sense this is a more pragmatic focus (on Shelley's real problems with visionary articulation) than we find in earlier linguistic-rhetorical critics, though in Weisman it is elaborately theorized. She offers a *purpose* for all the making and unmaking of fictions, namely, to disclose a more lucid relation between Shelley's imaginative forming and the world he would embrace. If this seems a paradoxical or self-nullifying career choice, that is because it is. Weisman's predecessors, as she is well aware, see Shelley's poetic language hanging over a void of its own creation; but in Weisman's account it is his poetic career, his progressive development of this problem, that seems to flirt with self-consuming annihilation—as the poet himself confesses in Weisman's reading of *Epipsychidion* ("Shelley goes with [Emily] to annihilation because he too has been consumed in his fiction of union" [131–32]).

This reading follows a dialectic similar to that she had initiated with her analysis of *Alastor*, where Shelley's Poet figure "consumes himself into annihilation by over-indulging his desire to transcend the spiritual aridity which, he believes, is the defining feature of the mutable world" (21). I found myself wondering, in later chapters, why after the triumphant mythologizing of *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley himself would fall not so much into pessimism (for which there could always be a psychological explanation) but rather into the same epistemological culs-de-sac as in the poetry of four or five years before? From Weisman's critical perspective, the answer is the instability of the resolutions of *Prometheus Unbound*, which may always unravel.

Her analysis of this poem is, I think, the book's central achievement, and while I find her conclusions not entirely satisfying they do represent an ingenious development of her argument and a shrewd sense of her place in the contemporary debate. She focuses on speech and speaking as the central obsessions of the play. Yet much of that speech is—unspoken, reported, or only imagined by the "audience"/reader. While critics like Rajan and Susan Hawk Brisman have focused on this problem, Weisman's approach is more dialectical: she sees the paradoxes of represented speech here as a parallel problem to the dual nature of Prometheus himself, as spokesperson for humanity (Everyman) and as mythic construct. The poem acknowledges that the great truths may be ineffable, yet we must nevertheless construct, self-consciously, those fictions that may hint at "the wonder of our being," the obscure Promethean possibilities of the human. Thus the self-consciousness of our fiction making cautions us against (mis)taking our myths for immutable truths. The paradox is, of course, that our myths *do* tease us out of thought, that fixed interpretation is inevitable to us. So Shelley still feels he must warn us, even amid the celebrations of the play's final vision, that "we are all, finally, unsure of the efficacy of our stories and of our response to stories" (111). This uncertainty is yet a virtue, is socially liberating because in this poem's "qualified celebratory mode" there is "room for song and hope in the very midst of our frailty" (112). The unmaking of fictions may, after all, be the beginning of a new reverence for the truths we cannot capture and a new chance for a revitalized world.

Then again, unmaking may be just unraveling. If the strength of Weisman's book is its consistent scholarly sense of itself in the contexts of linguistic critical debate, if it advances that debate usefully by reminding us of the recalcitrance of the everyday as an *inherent* (not epiphenomenal) element in Shelley's rhetorical practice, this focus is also the book's limitation. For in Weisman's insistence on the "quotidian" (as she obsessively calls it) lurks a crypto-idealism that often has her raising issues first developed by Earl Wasserman, for whom Shelley's career was a persistent struggle with epistemological problems. Weisman's "quotidian" is to begin with a rather "hollowed out" it-ness, presumably referring to a life uncluttered by figuration, or self-conscious epistemological quests. How could we know this "it"? Or speak it? To speak in poetry of that world is inevitably to figure it forth and in a sense to know it less for what "it" is than for what it might offer as an occasion for artifice. Weisman's Shelley is troubled by the problem that what "is" may itself never be apprehended without being actively figured by human activity. But is this a rhetorical or an epistemological problem? Or a moral, biographical, or pragmatic (the need to write a consistent poem) problem? Is seeing a poet's career as a continuing "problem of the problem" the most satisfying or edifying critical stance?

Weisman does not make these distinctions clear enough, I think, because she often slides between figuration as an aesthetic act and as a mental act. "Fiction" for her is both a kind of "trope" of art, an element of texts, and a mental process of poets and readers. Except at certain points (notably her discussion of utopianism in *Prometheus Unbound*), the transition of "fiction" from mental act to *public discourse* is one problem she poorly traces, suggesting this but rarely pursuing it. She seems to find comfort within the Moebius world of Shelley's endless epistemological problematics.

It may seem like carping, but I found her Shelley wearisome. He worries endlessly about the narcissism of refiguring the world into "his" fictions, but then (fearing the obduracy of the world as much as loving its beauty) embraces those fictions, however insubstantial, often as his only comfort. It is hard to know whether this portrait is not itself a fiction following rather inevitably on the cleverly consistent but narrow focus of the book. In that sense the book is an ounce too clever. It is also a pound or two overwritten. Some, at least, of the ambiguity I mention above stems from the overuse of the term "trope" (as noun or verb, by my pedantic count, 78 times in 211 pages). Even in this book relatively free of jargon, many of her sentences are turgid: of the opening of "Mont Blanc," we hear that the first lines

would have it that "things," and their effect on the mind, form the poet's point of departure; however, it quickly becomes obvious that the universe of things is a trope for the Arve River and that the mind is a trope for the ravine of Arve—a strange situation given that the entire Arve scene is itself a trope for many of the philosophical conceptions of the poem, and indeed its actual presence, as a member of the real "universe of things," is wholly appropriated to stand for that which transcends the universe of things. (58)

I am not sure the situation is quite so hopeless in these opening lines, or that

this improves on readings from Wasserman to Frances Ferguson. Possibly some of the epistemological problem here lies in the critic's use of the term "trope," since she uses it both for mental act and rhetorical form (does mind really trope the way river tropes?).

For all Weisman's attempt to inject into Shelley criticism a healthy respect for his devotion to the everyday, we see little of what that struggle more broadly meant in the real everyday. Shelley's dilemma over fictions was not only their, well, *fictionality*, their ontological emptiness, but also their very public fullness. He knew long before Marx did that the myths of the rulers become the ruling myths. Shelley did worry over language, but that often meant, in the everyday, that he worried over his audience. From another critical perspective, Shelley's relation to his audience as a kind of moral trust was one of his chief concerns. Steven Jones has written a less ambitious but in many ways more original work, studying Shelley's relationship to the socially sensitive genre of satire, itself a surprising topic.

One does not think of Shelley as a satirist. In fact, we do not even think of him as a wit or as having much sense of humor. Indeed the common wisdom is that for satire in the romantic era we must look to Byron—and this is perhaps his least "romantic" side. Steven Jones has changed this perception, reminding us that humor is not quite the same as satire. It is rare for a book in Shelley studies to be so utterly surprising, so revealing of some of the poet's most urgent concerns, by focusing on what had seemed a peripheral, even failed, portion of his work.

Jones reminds us that satire is a mode of verbal aggression. If his Shelley is as conflicted a figure as Weisman's, it is over the moral ambiguity of his satire, in which he well knows that his "(self-)righteous anger fueled by personal aggression is often just below the surface" (5). The ways in which that anger is expressed/concealed in his poetry is bounded within "a particular social context," like a gesture, whose form is meaningless outside the concrete conventions of particular social life. "All satire is relational, public poetry, in particularly delimited and irrecoverable ways" (7). Here Jones's perspective is essentially anthropological, drawing not only upon Historicist critics but also upon the work of Clifford Geertz, of social historians, and literary historians of the classical genre of satire. The result is a fascinating and informative mix that tells us much about Shelley's conflicted expressions of social (and sometimes personal) anger. It also is a highly suggestive example of a criticism of concrete origins; since—without being an influence study—it reminds us that a rhetoric of concealment or duplicity may be inexplicable apart from a study of local shared conventions of gesture, like curses or duels.

From the point of view of either rhetoric or anthropology, satire is a mode of cursing, and Jones reminds us that from Shelley's very early (and angry) youth the moral ambiguity of the curse was almost an obsession. Scholars have long understood the complex reflexivity of Prometheus's curse on Jupiter; Jones generalizes this motif throughout Shelley's work. For the curser is cursed himself—in the Romantic version cursed by *social* isolation. The curser, says Jones, "is bent on protecting *himself* against a curse he already feels," the curse of being an outsider "with inside knowledge, crying out in isolation" (21, 29). Jones sees this pattern in some of Shelley's most

"personal" lyrics, often attack pieces like "To the Lord Chancellor," or "Lines to a Critic." He finds that even Shelley's Romantic obsession with Narcissism is not fully explained as a kind of self-regarding hyper-idealism. Narcissus was, after all, cursed (through Nemesis) to love himself impossibly as the price of having coldly rejected his suitors. Shelley associated him "with artistic self-knowledge and a radical autonomy based on alienation from the community" (30). Like the most instructive of critics, Jones makes his choice of critical perspectives seem inevitable.

Jones's historicism gives us, then, a refreshing look at Shelley's rhetorical dilemmas, portraying him struggling with anger and alienation in the context of the social forms and gestures through which he wanted to be understood but which he hoped his love ethic might transform. Shelley was, it seems, as troubled a satirist as he was an idealist. What will be the effect on the social world of his satire? In his complex treatment of the figure of the Devil in Regency satire, Jones points out that the "scourge" of satire may vent anger only to sow hopelessness and violence, since satire's "moralistic scourge is at odds with Shelley's program of reform" (54). The Regency was a time of fierce competition within the elites of England in the period of post-Napoleonic expansion. Shelley knew himself to be, like his Devil in *Peter Bell the Third*, a gentleman in exile from the Hellish city of London. The "quotidian" (43) in that social world conceals the evil of class distinction and the oppressions of a growing imperial capital. How can Shelley play at this game of satire, how deploy its gestures and linguistic conventions and avoid its taint? One can sup with a long spoon but not write with one.

That Shelley retained many of his class's attitudes towards violence and revenge even while he struggled to repudiate them is elegantly demonstrated in Jones's chapter on dueling and Shelley's quarrel with Southey—one of the best treatments of this issue in Regency literary circles that I have seen. Jones explores what surely was Shelley's deepest moral qualm about a literature of personal attack, that it employs a rhetoric of revenge and deterrence by fear rather than a rhetoric of moral suasion. To convert such personal anger into a social movement is the political motive of Shelley's most accomplished satire, *The Mask of Anarchy*. In his important treatment of this poem, Jones takes the poem as a typically Romantic mode of satire, combining as it does the violent imagery of the era and its corrupt politics with the hope that a representation of truth—like the age's iconic spirit of Liberty—can exhort the nation to transform itself.

Jones's book is learned and informative on a range of social acts, from theatricals to pantomime and political cartoon, that situate Shelley's rhetoric within the hurly-burly world of the early nineteenth century, where revolution or tyranny seemed to turn on the next broadside or libel prosecution. If Weisman's Shelley yearns to embrace and yet transform the "quotidian," becoming trapped in rhetorical contradictions and despair, Jones shows us the social sense of that rhetoric and the conventional import of particular gestures of critique and transformation. He fills out the rather rarefied, almost idealist, sense of the quotidian in Weisman's study. Everyone must decide for him or herself whether these are two sides of the same Shelley, two levels of abstraction, or two very different Shelleys. My own sense is that these are two opposing critical approaches to this poet's sense of the role of art in re-

solving the contradictions—either of figuration or of public voice—that condition its own appearance. They will not appeal to the same readers. But they are good examples of the directions taken by modern Shelley criticism.

Northern Illinois University

Mark Kipperman

Annoying the Victorians by James R. Kincaid. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. Pp. 271. \$49.95, cloth; \$15.95, paper.

James Kincaid is a familiar (if not always comforting) name to Victorianists these days. A prolific critic well before the rise of theory, he began his career with serious, old-fashioned new-critical books on major Victorian poets and novelists, and over the years he has kept pace admirably with the fashions of literary theory (displaying a special penchant for deconstruction and psychoanalytic criticism). Truth to say, Kincaid has actually outdistanced these fashions: he is now a maverick who entertains all of us immensely in his role as self-parodic metacritic. One might view him as the Oscar Wilde of contemporary Victorian studies.

The opening of Kincaid's new book declares the subversive, albeit impish compulsion behind its production: "My mother said, . . . that I should never, no matter how bad the times, let myself be dragged down to playing by the rules. . . . The idea [of this book] is to bring some of the rules governing critical-scholarly-theoretical discourse out into the open, show them a good time" (3). The problem in a nutshell, is that "there is so much rectitude around that the rules have been made nearly mute. . . . The rules governing what we do within literary discourse wear clothes that are so resolutely fashionable they pass as natural and innocent, do not even register on the eye or in the mind." Thus, "the rules need and want denaturalizing . . . only resolute criminal activity can do it, and . . . I am just the man for the job" (4). Indeed he is.

This book, which openly confesses the self-indulgent arbitrariness and narcissism of semiotic, deconstructive, and psychoanalytic critical play reminds us that reading and thinking about literature can be outlandish fun—and that sometimes the fun might even get us somewhere (a conclusion Kincaid would "resolutely" deny). Kincaid's pages are full of zany speculative arguments about his primary texts that just may end up renewing them for us. Even *Pickwick Papers* is reanimated when we learn that "the lustful reader" of it is at heart (heart?) a voyeur and that the novel "offers us the next best thing to a fleshbath, a kind of porno film we can run in our head," presenting a "relentless barrage of flesh images along with compelling invitations to plunge into them" (28). Similarly, Kincaid's aborted argument for the canonicity of the *Pearl* poems—truncated because "those who demand full proof are those who would be unable to recognize proof if it stuck a pipe wrench up their nose" (156)—refreshingly spoofs academic concerns about canonicity.

What else is in this book? Thirteen chapters: on Dickens (*Pickwick Papers*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*), Tennyson (*In*

Memoriam), Ryder Haggard (*The Return of She*), Meredith (*Modern Love*), *The Pearl* poets, Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*), Trollope (*Barchester Towers*), and Hardy (*Jude the Obscure*)—in short, something for almost everyone. This is the case not only in terms of the genres and primary texts discussed but also the critical methodologies employed and parodied. Only historicism, which Kincaid altogether deplors, is missing. (More on this topic later.) Nine of these thirteen chapters are revised from previously published articles, a fact that might disappoint some readers.

Kincaid dwells not only on the subversive fun to be enjoyed by deconstructive rule-breaking but also focuses, with exuberant eccentricity, on what repressed pleasures draw readers (most notably, modern ones) to the texts he treats: irrepressible desire, voyeurism, exhibitionism, and the sado-masochistic delights of child abuse, among other normally proscribed libidinal indulgences. Readerly voyeurism in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, for instance, "constitute[s] a kind of competition for Quilp, who is a peeper himself. Voyeurs do not work in teams, so he sets out to eliminate us by making our gentle, or at least disguised, interest in Nell blatant and grotesque. His open, winking, drooling lust after Nell is a way of pointing the finger at us" (44). Later on we learn that the true impulse behind Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is an exhibitionism that is "ridiculous, available to ridicule, precisely because it lies so deep in most of us" (113). Inhabiting this poem, Kincaid finds a "Lacanian hollowness" that "is Tennyson's initial dread that his poem may have no object: Hallam is dead past all power to be resurrected, and grief, as an object has been appropriated by powerful precursors, notably Milton. Nonetheless, as the poetic subject (the poet), Tennyson feels a compulsion to poeticize. . . . But what is to be the object of this piping and singing? In his anxiety that there is none, Tennyson makes his impulse to pipe and sing itself the object, occupying and investing the lost object-position in a strategy of poetic exhibitionism" (133).

One problem with the fun Kincaid is having here is that the poems and novels at issue tend to lose their uniqueness as texts and become deconstructive paradigms. Just as *The Old Curiosity Shop* is represented as a novel about the reader's desire endlessly to perpetuate desire and *Frankenstein* is seen as a self-consciously inarticulate text that focuses the reader's attention finally on the play of language, Haggard's *Ayesha: The Return of "She"* suggests that "each act of knowing, all interpretation, seeks not to uncover but to hide the truth; or, as I'd prefer to put it, construct the truth as something which is always out of reach (tantalizing). Truth would be worthless if we could have it" (170). This critical approach leads to Kincaid's recurring argument, that "deconstruction doesn't really land one anywhere; it's a cruise, not a device for reaching destinations. [It] provides joy in the doing, a way to glimpse rather than grasp further possibilities of being and making, of exciting and being excited." The goal is to sway "always within desire. The only mistake, and it is a fatal one, is to stop" (111).

Annoying the Victorians redoubles the pleasure of the primary text by adding to it the pleasure of sophisticated serio-comic criticism. What this book does not do, however, is add to our understanding of the Victorians or their culture or the ways in which the primary texts Kincaid treats operated in their Victorian contexts. This, of course, would be the job of historical criti-

cism, which Kincaid not only eschews, but apparently despises: "Historical criticism has been restored to respectability," he acknowledges in one chapter. "It has slithered back onto our playing field and taken on new shapes, even before the reactionary and short-lived (mark my words!) new historicism tried to turn back the clock" (62). For Kincaid, nonetheless, the enemy (thanks in part to the work of Susan Horton) is hardly a threat any longer: "history is a very uncertain text," and thus just like the novels and poems that allow for the kind of rule-breaking fun Kincaid indulges in here.

Historicism is without question a deeply problematic critical methodology. It rests on two assumptions, neither defensible through rigorous proof: first, that something we call history "exists" outside of our narratives of it; and second, that history is, in a limited but usable way, recoverable. As Kincaid observes, narratives of history are open to the same deconstructive analyses that expose the instability of all other texts. Stephen Greenblatt's catchy insistence on the "historicity of texts and the textuality of history" affirms this fact. Or as Browning's Pope argued over a hundred years before Greenblatt, the truth lies everywhere and nowhere in narratives that are selective and partial attempts to represent reality.

So, what beyond the marshalling and the sophisticated rhetorical deployment of synchronic materials (not only textual) from past cultures, what beyond the discussion of their social institutions, and what beyond speculations about the "social energies" that circulated within those cultures, do practitioners and audiences of the new historicism—to whom Kincaid is viscerally hostile—find so compelling about it? Simply stated, it regenerates a world. That is, it opens our eyes to the operations of literary texts within plausibly reconstructed historical fields of social and political particulars whose relations were previously unknown or opaque to us.

What Stephen Greenblatt has written in relation to the processes of "mobility" and "exchange" that take place in *art* also applies to the most effective deployments of new historical *criticism*. To paraphrase Greenblatt: something happens to objects, beliefs, and practices (especially artistic practices) when they are represented, reimagined, and reconstituted in successful historicist critical texts—something often unpredictable and disturbing. That "something" signals both the power of those critical texts and their cultural embeddedness. After we view Wordsworth through the historicist eyes of Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, Alan Liu, or James Chandler, for instance, we may never again read him "innocently," that is, without an awareness of the rhetoric of transcendentalist mystification which constitutes the central strategy of his poetic attempts to reconstruct the effects upon him of the French Revolution and its aftermath. Wordsworth, the nature poet and spokesman for the "primary affections of the human heart," we realize, mediated a particular set of ideological pressures (of political miscalculation, of class, of gender, profession, nation, etc.) by shaping a myth of the self that elided or transvalued many of the actual experiences that were pivotal in the formation of his own subjectivity.

If we see Brontë's work through the eyes of Mary Poovey or Tennyson's and Browning's through the lens of Isobel Armstrong, we are jolted into a wholly new understanding of what that work meant to contemporary readers and what specific political events or cultural contexts determined that

meaning for them. Not only does such historicist criticism re-view canonical texts and authors, it also opens a space for the retrieval of suppressed or invisibilized writers whose recovery may well provide us with a "disturbing"—or exciting—new view of the social operations of literary texts at particular historical moments. Pace Kincaid, it is difficult for me to envision the conclusion to such work or to imagine its supersession either by some as yet unformulated critical methodology or by the rejuvenation of some anterior critical compulsion. This would, needless to say, include Kincaid's serio-comical version of deconstruction, delightful as the hours spent on his playground might be.

North Carolina State University

Antony H. Harrison

Impressions of Theophrastus Such by George Eliot, edited by Nancy Henry. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994. Pp. xli + 187. \$24.95.

It is a healthy circumstance for literary criticism and for the appreciation of literature generally when an obscure work by a major writer is made available in a modern edition. George Eliot's last published work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, is a minor achievement, but making the work available is helpful, especially to scholars who would like an accessible annotated copy. As it turns out, an Everyman edition of *Impressions*, edited by D. J. Enright, has recently appeared as well. By coincidence, then, this neglected text has had unusual recent exposure. Nancy Henry's edition, however, is a scholarly edition, with sound notes to support readings of the text and an ambitious introduction that attempts to situate *Impressions* as a pre-Modernist text, self-reflexive and experimental.

Not much need be said about the textual features of this edition. The book is clearly printed, the text is free from errors, and, as mentioned above, the notes to the text are instructive. In all regards this is a model of scholarly editing, though, admittedly, this text involved few complications, such as multiple editions, multiple manuscript versions, and so forth. What one has to deal with, then, is the value of the work itself and the editor's scholarly interpretation of it. I shall take these in reverse order.

Professor Henry's introduction is a model of shapeliness and ordered argument. The original part of her argument is that "Impressions comes at the end of [Eliot's] development as a late Victorian writer of organic form, and at the beginning of what looks like early Modernist experimentation through fragmentation in form" (ix). Henry later elaborates: "In *Impressions* George Eliot is testing a new form not only to express, but to stage her anxieties about the perpetuation of a culture which seems to her to be devaluing the written word, and therefore the author" (xxxii). In short, Henry wants to haul Eliot into the camp of the Modern, to make her a precursor of those who experimented with fragmentary form, while facing the cultural dilemma of the devaluation of printed text. Much of the introduction is devoted to analyses that support this position. Hence the essays about writing and authorship are depicted as reflexive, almost post-modern, perceptions

about a world that has become all text. Accordingly, the title *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, refers not only to intellectual responses to events, but the actual pressure of typeface to paper, creating an "impression" which stands for the author's views. Moreover, the narrator of these essays can be seen as offering an "impression" or imitation of the original Greek Theophrastus, who invented the genre of the "character." Henry carries this notion to an extreme when she declares that the Such in Theophrastus' name comes from the stylized introduction to the original Theophrastus' characters *toiontos tis, hoios*, which, she says, translates as "such a type who." Thus Theophrastus is "Such a type" himself. This is all exciting play in the postmodern pen, where we have learned that all the world is a text and where even biological scientists now offer us DNA as just another text or code in a universe of information processing.

But this exciting play must be tempered by sober reflection. Let us begin with names. Whatever Eliot's Such may mean, the tradition of translating *toiontos tis, hoios*, does not emphasize "such," but runs more to "the sort of," as in the Loeb Classical Library translation. Henry offers no evidence that the translations Eliot knew and used translated as "such." Also, since the characters that Theophrastus refers to are almost all Greek or Roman types (such as Lentulus and Mordax) or symbolic (such as Touchwood and Grampus), there is no reason to suppose that Theophrastus himself is not a generic type as well, especially in view of his statement that all the faults he finds in others he possesses himself.

Then let us consider the pre-Modern nature of the essays. Henry does not mention that *Impressions* strongly resembles a work from the very beginning of Eliot's career "Poetry and Prose, From the Notebook of an Eccentric" (1846-47). The same oddity, the same concern with the craft of writing appear in the early work as in the later. So the suggestion that Eliot was moving into a new form and a new attitude could be countered with an assertion that she was falling back upon the assumptions she had begun with. *Impressions* could thus be seen not as a breakthrough document, but as a weary retrogression. Moreover, the form that Eliot chose was by no means unfamiliar. Bulwer-Lytton had recently published his collection of essays entitled *Caxtoniana* (1863), containing a number of widely ranging essays, but which included essays such as "On the Moral Effect of Writers" and "On Essay-writing in General, and these Essays in Particular." Also, Thackeray, not so many years ago, had had enormous successes with collections of essays, presumably the products of very self-conscious "authors," in *The Book of Snobs*, and, perhaps more significantly, *The Roundabout Papers*. In these works a constructed male identity comments on the frailties of those around him, while admitting his own affiliation with those weaknesses. *The Book of Snobs* even owes a debt to the Theophrastian character.

Henry has tried to rehabilitate *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* with some fancy modern critical maneuvers. But these maneuvers, when confronted with the historical context of Eliot's actual production, seem thin and unconvincing. Similarly, the neglected *Impressions*, now available for careful perusal in a modern edition, itself appears thin, justifying the lukewarm assessments of critics from the time they were first published until the present. The essays themselves have very little that is original. Much of what

Eliot had to say was commonplace in her day. The more original elements have been extracted from *Impressions* and reprinted—specifically autobiographical reflections and speculations on Jewishness. After all, despite Henry's admirable efforts to resurrect an obscure text by a major writer, the obscurity of the text reasserts itself. And perhaps this is one of the healthier byproducts of re-representing such texts to a modern public. Modern readers have an opportunity to reassess them in the light of modern thinking. Mainly, I suspect, the critical estimate will remain the same. And for those who understand the literary and historical context out of which *Impressions* emerged, the little novelty that a modern, ahistorical reading provides, disappears as well and we have left what we began with—the minor reflections of a major talent.

Wayne State University

John R. Reed

The Contingency of Theory: Pragmatism, Expressivism, and Deconstruction by Gary Wihl. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994. Pp. xiii + 215. \$27.50.

Although superb in many respects, recent efforts to determine the relationship between philosophy and literature such as those of Anthony Cascardi, Richard Eldridge, Alexander Nehamas, and Martha Nussbaum have been characterized, according to Gary Wihl, by an apparent indifference to the profound shifts which have taken place in literary studies over the past twenty years under the general heading of "textuality." Failure to engage with the insights of those working most intimately with literary language has had the unfortunate effect, Wihl says, of impoverishing the philosophical consideration of the importance of literature while stranding debate over deconstruction and other literary theories associated with textuality at what he calls "a nonproductive level of inaccurate, occasionally superficial expression" (xi). In his ambitious articulation and refinement of a number of contemporary theories of language, Wihl seeks to raise the level of that debate by demonstrating the power of highly textual theories, and particularly deconstruction, to sharpen the way we think about the place and function of literature in plural, democratic societies.

In his book's most broad gesture, Wihl triangulates three contemporary philosophical positions on language: those of pragmatism, deconstruction, and the expressivism of Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. No simple synthesis, however, Wihl's work places these theories in relationships of dynamic and reciprocal modification, constructing a "circuit of inquiry" (60) in which positions supplement one another while moving the argument towards an increasingly refined determination of the forms of relatedness (as opposed to identity) which are constitutive of the coherency and values of the human agent. In a sense, the entire circuit, from Richard Rorty through writings by Taylor, Stanley Cavell, William Empson, Stanley Fish, Fredric Jameson, Paul de Man, and a host of other figures, forms a complex detour by which Wihl elaborates the relationship between pragmatism and decon-

struction while avoiding the trap of a vague and uncritical identification of the two into which pragmatists, eager to embrace deconstruction for its non-foundationalist element, have frequently stumbled. Wihl obstructs the possibility of such generalizations by interposing Taylor's notion of expressivism directly between pragmatism and deconstruction as a sort of bridge which, while connecting the two, also underscores their important differences. Thus, while expressivism's interest in the interpretive moment marks an area of concern it shares with pragmatism, its emphasis on personal identity as the expression of specific contrasts of meaning and value constitutes a rough equivalent to the careful scrutiny of the contrasting forms of language within a text which is a crucial characteristic of deconstruction. Mediated by the expressivist consideration of those moments of decision in which the human agent is situated between different types of language, the deconstructive analysis of incommensurable linguistic forces supplements and modifies the reduction of language to monolithic utterances of belief, such as what Wihl finds in the writings of a pragmatist such as Stanley Fish.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Wihl's book, however, is the relentless rigor with which it maintains its focus on texts as sites of relatedness rather than as neutral reflections of preestablished "social and cultural foundations" (ix). All texts are bridges between other texts in Wihl's circuit of inquiry, loci of similarity and difference which supplement and modify other texts as they themselves are modified. Just as Wihl resists any easy synthesis of positions, no text forms a final link in his chain of readings: each enriches the notion of textuality and its relation to the plurality of options among which the agent is situated and among which he or she must choose. Wihl, for example, enhances the picture of the expressivist dimension of deconstruction by way of a sequence of linked readings of theorists who define textuality in increasingly specific terms. Thus, with its emphasis on the relationship between critical decision making and linguistic heterogeneity, the work of Stanley Cavell offers a bridge between Taylor's expressivism and such highly textual theories as those of Jameson and de Man. But just as Cavell's position supplements Taylor's somewhat idealistic representation of language, Wihl finds that Cavell's "surprisingly uncritical" (83) analysis of linguistic discontinuity must be qualified by readings of various literary theorists who, with greater and greater precision, examine the construction of "a linguistic moment that may be defined as textual" (96), a task which Wihl argues culminates (although does not conclude) in the deconstructive approach of Paul de Man.

As "the most highly determined theory of textuality thus far developed in the literary disciplines," (159), de Manian deconstruction, and particularly the consideration of the material dimension of language which we find in such late essays as "Hegel on the Sublime" which Wihl reads here, offers a bridge between textual conceptions of language and the possibility of human agency which antiformalist critics say such theories limit or exclude. Far from being the Gorgon whose gaze petrifies agency as critics of deconstruction frequently contend, deconstructive undecidability figures in Wihl's book as the most precise determination available of the incommensurability of the options among which the human agent is situated and which constitute the grounds of his or her personal coherency. Wihl suggests that, in mapping the

textual moment in which multiple elements of language come into conflict, deconstruction actively determines and constructs—rather than merely locates “on the assumption that it must already exist in the work of literature” (96)—a decision, much in the same way that choice is constructed in Taylor’s expressivism. Agency in such a theory emerges not in the decisions of an already embodied speaker (as Wihl finds in Fish) but rather in the actual event of differentiation which is the condition of possibility of textuality and thus of the construction of a choice. In this liminal moment, agency is thoroughly imbricated with the material element in language which de Man explores in his last essays. Constitutive of relativeness, this nonphenomenal dimension of what comes to bear less and less resemblance to what we perhaps too familiarly call language, is the condition of possibility of a decision.

As Wihl notes, de Man failed to state the philosophical implications of his idiosyncratic version of deconstruction. One result of this omission has been the hostility and neglect his work has suffered from those who associate deconstruction and other theories of textuality with nihilism and skepticism. With *The Contingency of Theory*, however, Wihl seeks to supplement this lack in de Man’s work by demonstrating that “the crucial decisions enacted with the complex language of texts” have “a direct bearing on human identity and personhood” (xii). As the literary theory which, according to Wihl, offers the most rigorous consideration of textuality, de Manian deconstruction presents the possibility of refining our picture of such decisions and their relation to the construction of human selves in plural societies. In building bridges between some of de Man’s most provocative ideas and the positions of other contemporary philosophies of language which either ignore deconstruction, dismiss it, or consider it only insofar as it may be assimilated to their purposes, Wihl shows the way for new and productive considerations of textuality, human agency, and the crucial space between them. That he is able to construct these bridges through an approach which is largely deconstructive is itself evidence of the power of textual theories to refine and modify thought in these areas.

McMaster University

Robert Alexander

Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe by Saul Friedlander. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993. Pp. 160. \$24.95.

In the Introduction to this collection of essays, written between 1985 and 1992 for a variety of journals and other volumes, Saul Friedlander frames all that follows with Eric Hobsbawm’s words: “For all of us there is a twilight zone between history and memory; between the past as a generalized record which is open to relatively dispassionate inspection and the past as part of, or background to, one’s own life . . .” (vii). Perhaps nobody has navigated this “no-man’s land of time” better than Saul Friedlander, who over the last thirty years has combined the scrupulous rigor of historical inquiry into the

Holocaust with the keenly self-conscious eye of one whose life was forged in its history.

But in a characteristically gentle departure from historical thinkers like Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, and others, Friedlander has concluded that the opposition between memory and history is far from clear-cut. On the one hand, Friedlander concedes we must continue distinguishing between public memory and historiography, and that "the process involved in the molding of memory is, theoretically at least, antithetical to that involved in the writing of history. Nonetheless," he continues,

the representation of a recent and relevant past has to be imagined as a continuum: the constructs of public-collective memory find their place at one pole, and the "dispassionate" historical inquiries at the opposite pole. The closer one moves to the middle ground, that is, to an attempt at general interpretations of the group's past, the more the two areas—distinct in their extreme forms—become intertwined and interrelated.
(vii)

Given his own background as so exquisitely wrought in *When Memory Comes*, this kind of historiographical positioning cannot come as a surprise. That Friedlander can sustain this self-reflective stance as well as build on it is testament to his own powers as both historian and interpreter of Holocaust history.

At the same time, one feels that Friedlander has arrived at this position somewhat unwillingly, his hand forced by the impossible claims of post-war German historians in their quest for a "rational historiography" of the Nazi era. In *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, Friedlander does not attempt to offer an easy answer to what he terms the "insoluble choice between the *inadequacy* of traditional historiographical representation [of the Holocaust] and the need to establish as reliable a narrator as possible." Rather, these essays represent an ongoing attempt to work through this dilemma, to paint in the subtle shades of meaning and consequences surrounding both the German historians' debate, in particular, and the larger ethical and phenomenological issues attending all historical interpretations of the Holocaust.

Toward this end, Friedlander opens this collection with a piece he wrote on "German Struggles with Memory" for Geoffrey Hartman's edited volume, *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (1986). In some ways, the German memorial and historiographical predicament as Friedlander so succinctly describes it is as intractable as it is emblematic of any culture's attempts to assimilate the Holocaust: "the Nazi past is too massive to be forgotten, and too repellent to be integrated into the 'normal' narrative of memory." As a result, the German debate proves to be especially instructive for all historians of the Holocaust, Jewish or otherwise. In this context, Friedlander explores the historical understanding underlying the great range of public responses to the Nazi past in Germany, from Golo Mann's defensive argument against remembering the May 8 capitulation in "Commemorations that Reopen Wounds" to Richard von Weizsäcker's courageous demand that Germans stand face to face with their past; from Rudolf Augstein's cynical

relativization of Nazi crimes to Cardinal Joseph Hoffner's self-exculpating assertions that "All guilt is abolished in the mercy of Jesus Christ." The implication here is that given the Germans' excruciatingly ambivalent relationship to their past, a fiasco like President Ronald Reagan's visit to the cemetery at Bitburg was inevitable.

This 1985 essay is then followed in Chapter 2 by the first of three succeeding chapters on the "*Historikerstreit*," in which Friedlander first outlines the terms of the German historians' debate and then analyses its consequences for public memory. Rather than paraphrasing and thereby reducing the arguments of the main players in this debate, Friedlander wisely allows the actual words of Ernst Nolte, Andreas Hillgruber, and Joachim Fest to indict their authors. In each case, Friedlander shows that even though "responsibility of the Nazis in exterminating their victims is not denied . . . , it is [] balanced against the responsibility of the Red Army for the crimes committed on German soil" (p. 33). Indeed, in the case of Nolte's notoriously incendiary contribution to the fray, only his words can begin to suggest the dimensions of his argument:

He who does not want to see Hitler's annihilation of the Jews in this context [communist annihilationism] is possibly led by very noble motives, but he falsifies history. In his legitimate search for the direct causes, he overlooks the main precondition without which all these causes would have remained without effect. Auschwitz is not primarily the result of traditional anti-Semitism. It was in its core not only a "genocide," but was above all a reaction born out of the anxiety of the annihilating occurrences of the Russian revolution . . . (34)

In effect, the Nazis' extermination of the Jews was merely the acting out of their own anguish "at the idea of being themselves potential victims of the Red Terror."

Although these kinds of arguments were noisily and effectively refuted by a number of leading German historians and philosophers (including Eberhard Jäckel, Christian Meier, Hans Mommsen, Martin Broszat, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, and Jürgen Habermas), a fundamentally insoluble conundrum underlying the entire debate still haunts Friedlander. This is the very process of historicization, as crippling for a stable historical narrative of events as it is inevitable. It is precisely the truth of Joachim Fest's afterword that most disturbs Friedlander, even as it eludes easy rejoinder. In pleading for a consensus view of the Holocaust, Fest writes, critics of the revisionists "not only plead for a static image of the Nazi regime, but also fight against the passage of time, which makes them into defenders of a lost cause" (37). Friedlander grants what he calls the "common wisdom of the historian" in these lines, but he also points to where such wisdom leads: back to the insidious relativism of Nolte and Hillgruber.

At this juncture, in fact, Friedlander must address the central dilemma underpinning what he eventually calls the "unease of historical interpretation": do we continue to search for the single, most persuasive and permanent interpretation of these events? Or do we allow these events to be reread and renarrated over the passage of time, a process that simultaneously ani-

mates historical memory, even as it necessarily generates a constant evolution and revision of historical memory? By extension, can we allow the historicization of the Holocaust and at the same time assert its exceptionalism? For most of the remainder of this volume, Friedlander meticulously explores the complicated balance of these questions, even as he gradually suggests that historicization of the Holocaust and its exceptionalism necessarily exclude each other.

In the next chapter, "The Shoah in Present Historical Consciousness," the terms Friedlander uses as guiding criteria for finding meaning in the Shoah remain deliberately, if uncharacteristically, soft. "Since the end of the war," he writes, "notwithstanding our considerable increase in historical knowledge, the catastrophe of European Jewry has not been incorporated into any compelling framework of meaning in public consciousness, either within the Jewish world or on the Western cultural scene in general" (43, emphasis added). As Friedlander makes clear, for example, he is persuaded by neither the interpretations of the Shoah implicit in a traditional religious framework of "catastrophe and redemption," nor by those meanings suggested in its Zionist corollary, "catastrophe and heroism." Neither do American idealizations of the Holocaust move him very far, though here he chooses not to dwell on the multiplicity of interpretations inherent in the Americanization of the Holocaust, including its embodiment of all that seems to counter-point America's own reasons for being—such as liberty, refuge, egalitarianism, and tolerance.

In fact, for Friedlander, the issue goes beyond convincing frameworks for meaning: how to resolve what he calls "the major discrepancy between memory and the absence of its general cultural impact" (52)? That is, not only have a priori systems of meaning failed to provide a single compelling significance in events, but the events seem to have had almost no impact on the culture at large: on the arts, literature, or surrounding intellectual discourse. Having already discussed some of these issues in *Reflections on Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, Friedlander does not pursue this as far as he might have here. On the one hand, it's true that unlike World War I, the Holocaust has resulted in no new literary forms, no startling artistic breakthroughs; for all intents and purposes, it has been assimilated to many of the modernist innovations already generated by the perceived rupture in culture occasioned by the Great War. On the other hand, what has certainly changed is the redemptory promise that traditionally underlay innovation and "newness" in modern art and culture: where anti-realist and fragmentation motifs were seen as redemptory of art's purpose after the Great War precisely because they refused to affirm the conditions and values that made such terror possible, art and literature after the Holocaust are, as Friedlander makes clear, aggressively anti-redemptory of either themselves or the catastrophe they represent.

In Friedlander's view, this means that even the ironic and experimental responses to the Shoah are also necessarily inadequate, insofar as their transgressiveness seems to undercut any and all meaning, verging on the nihilistic. But in fact, in arguing against a post-modern aesthetics a sentence earlier, Friedlander may also make a case for it: a post-modern aesthetics applied to the Shoah, he says, "would be to accentuate the dilemmas." Even

by Friedlander's terms, this is not a bad thing: an aesthetics that remarks its own limitations, its inability to provide eternal answers and stable meaning. Partly ironic, partly straightforward, works in this vein acknowledge both the moral need to bear positive witness and the impossibility of doing so in art and literature. In short, post-modern responses devote themselves primarily to the dilemmas of representation, their difficulty and their irresolvability.

In the next three chapters on the "historicization of the Holocaust," Friedlander seems to resist both the traditional forms of historical inquiry and their alternatives. On the one hand, he finds an unacceptable relativization of Nazi and others' war crimes in the historians' attempt to contextualize the Holocaust in its time and place; moreover, once understood in context, the Holocaust seems to be inevitable, an apparently natural effect of many causes. But the dangers in dehistoricizing the Holocaust are also clear: when torn apart from its surrounding events, the Holocaust is also rent from memory itself; it becomes a metahistorical event, mystified and obscured.

The dilemma comes into especially sharp focus when Friedlander looks specifically at what happens when the Holocaust is submerged in the sea of other longitudinal processes preceding and following the war. How do we talk about the social welfare reforms such as social security and women's emancipation developed during the 1920's and 1930's, which continued throughout the war and after? In the historicization of the Nazi-period, these too are relevant topics, subject to the same historical methods as those applied to the Nazis' killing machinery. Friedlander worries that by including the everyday history as such, however, those events (like the mass murder of Jews) that set the Nazi-regime apart from all others are lost beneath a welter of competing details. Once again, Friedlander articulates best the puzzle: "During the Nazi era, few domains—with the exception of direct criminal activities—can be considered as entirely abhorrent; on the other hand, very few domains can be considered as entirely untouched by some of the objectionable or even criminal aspects of the core" (73). The answer for Friedlander is the degree of relativization achieved in such historicization, which is both necessary and dangerous—all of which demands a very finely calibrated historical hand.

Further questions in this vein include: Is the Nazi epoch to be regarded as one among others? Or is it to be understood as a time outside the human ken, which makes it always already incomprehensible? What weight do we give everyday life in Germany during the war? Given the meticulous work of historians like Christopher Browning, it could even be said that without factoring in everyday life of the killers, calculating a precise moral algebra of the Holocaust remains impossible. Moreover, by including many voices, even those identifying to some extent with the killers, an ever-larger composite history of the Holocaust emerges, which in and of itself is not a problem for Friedlander. His difficulties with such historicization arise precisely at the point at which the "differential relevance" of such events is lost in their contextualization. To counter this, Friedlander argues for an absolute self-reflexivity on the part of the historian, "whereby the historian remains aware that—whatever his feeling of objectivity may be—he or she is still the one who selects the approach, determines the method, and organizes the ma-

terial according to some kind of agenda" (80). Only then can the specificity of the Holocaust within the overall context of war be established, its essential criminality sustained and not eliminated from human memory (83).

As insidious as the arguments of Nolte and Hillgruber may be for Friedlander, however, they are not a subtle enough foil for the rest of Friedlander's argument. For this, he turns to the much more complex thesis of the late Martin Broszat, whose motives for historicization are less troublesome than its consequences. At first blush, Friedlander would seem to agree with Broszat's "search for nuances, for complexity, for differentiation, the fight against any kind of mythification or monumentalization of the past" (96). At the same time, however, Broszat's "plea for historicization" also includes a plea against using the Holocaust "as a golden thread to explain *a posteriori* the motives, methods, and stages of National Socialism" (91). Since it is impossible for the victims of the Holocaust to understand the Nazi-regime outside the ways it has affected them, Broszat finds that the victims' memory obstructs a German rational historiography of the regime. Moreover, he buttresses this argument by counterposing what he regards as the rational historicization of the Nazi-era against the mythification inherent in the Jewish memory of Auschwitz.

Friedlander's response to Broszat's "plea" is double-edged: not only would such an historiography provide only a "very small place, in a corner of the picture, so to speak, for the full scope of the crimes of National Socialism" (91), but the very dichotomy (or "division of labors") Broszat tries to establish between "German rational historiography" and the "mythic memory of the victims" is also untenable. For as Friedlander makes clear at the outset of this volume, history and memory are always intertwined, each as capable of flattening, coarsening, and mythifying this era as the other.

As becomes clear by the end of this volume, Friedlander's aim here is never to answer these questions entirely but only to ensure that they are framed in ways that will invite continued reflection and self-critical historiography. Toward this end, the last two chapters on "The Unease in Historical Interpretation" and "Trauma and Transference" embody beautifully both the difficulties and promise in sustaining a Holocaust historiography with "negative capability." After Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Friedlander wonders whether all historical interpretation, whether the very act itself, is somehow fraught with redemptory potential. That is, does the very act of making meaning in events like these redeem them with significance? And if so, wouldn't it be better to reserve the essential opaqueness lying at the core of our historical understanding of the Shoah? Thus will Friedlander issue his own plea for an "uncanny" history of the Holocaust, a kind that sustains uncertainty, allows us to live without understanding, to understand that we may not understand the Holocaust, after all.

"Paradoxically," Friedlander writes, "the 'Final Solution,' as a result of its apparent historical exceptionality, could well be inaccessible to all attempts at a significant representation and interpretation" (113). The problem is, he arrives at this point at least partly because he does not want the Holocaust to be redeemable by its meanings, and thus justified according to any system of inquiry. "Thus," he continues, "notwithstanding all efforts at the creation of meaning, it could remain fundamentally irrelevant for the history of human-

ity and the understanding of the 'human condition'" (113). But this in turn, raises another, as yet unaddressed question: is it epistemologically possible to preserve either the history or memory of the Holocaust without meaning? As soon as it is spoken of, it is made meaningful at some level, no matter how subtle. Which leads to another question: is it possible to preserve the exceptionality of the Holocaust and to preserve its memory at the same time? For if it remains fundamentally irrelevant to the history of humanity and the understanding of the human condition, as Friedlander believes, then won't it also necessarily fall outside memory, which is always contingent on the human condition?

Fittingly, Friedlander's answers to these questions do not come in flat, declarative responses. As he patiently elaborates in his last chapter, hope lies instead in the growing trend in both Jewish and non-Jewish literature toward anti-redemptory narratives of the Holocaust: the kind exemplified in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, or Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*, or Ida Fink's reflections—where irresolution, lack of closure, and uncertainty rule.

For the historian, this means an historiography whose narrative skein is disrupted by the sound of the historian's own, self-conscious voice. "Whether this commentary is built into the narrative structure of a history or developed as a separate, superimposed text is a matter of choice, but the voice of the commentator must be clearly heard," Friedlander writes. In the process, "The commentary should disrupt the facile linear progression of the narration, introduce alternative interpretations, question any partial conclusion, withstand the need for closure" (132). Moreover, by reintroducing the individual's memory into an otherwise "rational historiography," the historian can also puncture the perceived "normality" of *Alltagsgeschichte*. Such interruptions would remind readers that this history is being told and remembered by someone in a particular time and place, that it is the product of human hands and minds. In this kind of multi-vocal history, no single, overarching meaning emerges unchallenged; instead, narrative and counter-narrative generate a frisson of meaning *in* their exchange, in the working through process they now mutually reinforce.

Friedlander concludes this volume with the words of Maurice Blanchot: "Working through may ultimately signify . . . 'to keep watch over absent meaning.'" But as Friedlander has also made quite clear by now, "working through" is not just refusing to believe in the meanings generated in any given narrative. It is also to understand both the necessity for meaning and meaning's own necessary contingency. One can only look forward to the next installment of Saul Friedlander's working through—with a special curiosity about the form (or counter-form) it will take.