

nary morphology of western rationality is characterized by the principle of identity, ... the principle of non-contradiction, ... and binarism.... An equation is made between the (symbolic) phallus, stable form, identity, and individuation" (59). According to Irigaray, the female "functions as a *hole*" (66). Women are "residue" or a "sort of magma ... from which men, humanity, draw nourishment, shelter, the resources to live or survive for free" (67). Whitford stresses that Irigaray is "not *prescribing* what the female should be, but *describing* how it functions within western imaginary and symbolic operations" (67) in order to change it. The imaginary is "not confined to philosophers and psychoanalysts, but is a social imaginary which is taken to be reality, with damaging consequences for women, who unlike men, find themselves 'homeless' in the symbolic order" (69). What Irigaray envisions is an alternate imaginary, where the female is not equated with waste, debris, and death, but where both desirable and undesirable qualities are divided up within each sex.

Related to the structure of the imaginary is the problem of the absence of women in the symbolic. Whitford discusses Irigaray's expression of women as the "dark continent" in lucid terms: "An unsymbolized mother-daughter relationship makes it difficult if not impossible for women to have an identity in the symbolic order that is distinct from the maternal function" (77). Irigaray links "clichés of psychological or psychoanalytic descriptions (hatred of the mother, rivalry between women, women as women's own worst enemies), and the symbolic order" to suggest that a "different symbolization could have effects on women's relationships with each other" (78). As things stand, women "suffer from drives without any possible representatives or representations" (79). Metaphysically, they are not individuated: "there is only *the place of the mother*, or the *maternal function*" (80). Whitford explains: "Unless one accepts the need for women to be able to represent their relation to the mother, and so to origin, in a specific way, i.e. not according to a masculine model, then women will always find themselves devalued. Neutral/universal/single-sex models always turn out to be implicitly male ones" (85-6). The relation between the girl-child and the

mother needs to be symbolized in such a way as to allow one to be a mother *and* a woman, so that "women [are] not forever competing for the unique place occupied by the mother" (88-9). At times, the manner in which Whitford summarizes Irigaray sounds like she is something of a prophet: "Irigaray says that women need a religion, a language, and an economy of their own" (89).

Finally, Whitford also manages to clear up Irigaray's infamous metaphor of "two lips." Again Whitford suggests that the metaphor "is *not* a definition of women's identity in biological terms" but should be regarded as a "discursive strategy" (171). She agrees with critics like Carolyn Burke, Jane Gallop, and Elizabeth Grosz who read the metaphor as one that "implies plurality, multiplicity, and a mode of being 'in touch' that differs from the phallic mode of discourse" (172). The notion of multiplicity is crucial for feminist politics. As Whitford eloquently puts it:

it allows for differences between women as aspects of their multiple identity. It allows for exploration, failures, and mistakes, since Woman is becoming, perfectibility and not static perfection. It allows for ethics and for responsibilities, a symbolic home for women in the genre which does not limit their capacities arbitrarily. It provides a framework for thinking further the problems of identity and negativity (violence). And it also allows for the possibility of dialogue with Irigaray herself. (144)

In this well-written and thoughtful study, Whitford's own dialogue or exchange with Irigaray has certainly proved to be a fruitful one.

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Left Politics and the Literary Profession. Leonard J. Davis and M. Bella Mirabella (eds.). *New York: Columbia UP, 1990, Pp. 316.*

This deftly edited anthology aims "to assess the politics of literature as it has evolved over the past twenty years as the function of a particular time

and place" (2). The trajectory is the radical activism of the 1960s in the United States. The editors take their "impetus" from a previous anthology, *The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English* (1971). This was:

...the first American book to try to consolidate the political insights of the New Left into the practice of literary criticism. Now such an attempt to combine politics and literature seems normal if not expected. (2)

Indeed, *Left Politics and the Literary Profession* provides clear evidence that the scope and constituency of the New Left has multiplied to uncover and promote political difference. The seventeen essays, which "mainly focus on issues of feminism, canonicity, and theory" (15), exemplify in the process the praxis of Black, Hispanic, Palestinian, lesbian, and cultural studies. As Davis and Mirabella note, contemporary literary criticism includes many other new subjects. The proof is in the pudding: progressive criticism is at work; and, judging by the inventive and thorough scholarship of the essays, it works. However, radical critics pursue their undertakings within the context of great public and collegial antipathy or, at best, apathy. The anthology variously addresses the meaning of the larger literary profession's deep resistance to profound and inclusive change. The hostility/flabbiness would seem to be a function not merely of individual intransigence or institutional bad faith; the primary problem arises from the historical interplay between departmental structure and cultural hegemony.

LPLP is a significant and engaging "consolidation," acting as summary statement, marker, and paradigm, for those working for change in universities. Although it explicates the intricacies of American polity, demographics, and university policy, those of us living on top of the USA can read beyond the level of abstract or specialized information-gathering. The book is reminiscent of, say, Terry Eagleton's elegant marxist critiques of the uses and social effects of literary theory and his insistence that moral stances be articulated by those professing literature in British universities. *LPLP* offers, in other words, witty, impassioned, and lucid

explanations of the practices of teaching, researching, and administration. A signal of the book's integrity is that the contributors, even to the final section ("Personal Reflections"), find no solace in good old-fashioned American liberal nostalgia for the '60s. The essayists sustain angry, vigorous, inspiring lines of inquiry.

The anthology is organized so as to assess and enact the specific intellectual labour and the more general transformative aspirations of progressive politics. It features acknowledged intellectual activists, introduces some new ones, and even includes a pseudonymous author (whose wonderfully outlandish piece narrates the surveillance and ostracizing of the outlaw/non-tenured professor who dresses funny, reads Simone de Beauvoir, and teaches non-canonical syllabi). The first essay, Gerald Graff's "Why Theory?" presents what I take to be the overarching thesis of the editorial programme. Namely, overt theorizing is the means to democracy.

Graff argues that universities have "admirably" defended "the principle of ideological inclusiveness" in encouraging new areas of research. On the other hand, they have "acted ineptly in failing to take advantage of the unprecedented state of increased dissonance that has resulted from the increased diversity." He proposes that we abandon the "'field-coverage' model," that century-old division of labour which separates academics according to rigidly defined areas of specialization. As it is, department members do not, cannot, truly communicate their differences. Standpoints are only partially understood. We fail to debate; instead we fracture and become fractious. Departments, says Graff, ought to be structured so that disagreements are brought out of the closet and aired. If, moreover, we were to "teach the debate" existing between faculty to students, universities might become activist as opposed to elitist institutions.

Richard Ohmann ("The Function of English at the Present Time"), in turn, deplores the way cultural forces have imposed divisions between radical intellectual workers and the rest of the world:

Acceptance in the academy came to us just as the movements that had fueled our thinking were breaking up, losing steam, or changing direction. So our respectability — precarious and vital, of course — coincides with our greater distance from the vital popular movements; cynics might say the latter explains the former.

It is perhaps over-obvious to say that Graff's and Ohmann's overviews have particular resonance for those of us in women's studies. Boringly and predictably, the immediacy of the "Us-and-Them" struggle within the male supremacist academy, and the isolation of academic professionals from other social groups, continues to keep women apart.

To juxtapose a sampling of the volume's subsequent essays which elucidate the shape of feminist literary criticism is to expose, willy-nilly, some of feminism's internal conflicts and intentions. While Catharine R. Stimpson ("What Am I Doing When I Do Women's Studies in 1990?") exuberantly canvasses the hard-won accomplishments of American women's studies, Nelly Y. McKay ("Literature and Politics: Black Feminist Scholars Reshaping Literary Education in the White University") hones in on exclusionary practices amongst feminist literary critics. Kate Ellis ("What Is the Matter With Mary Jane? Feminist Criticism in a Time of Diminished Expectations") takes time to rehearse the reception of French feminist theory by suspicious American feminists, whereas Lillian S. Robinson ("Some Historical Refractions") pauses to reflect sardonically on her twenty-year career as an independent/dispossessed/unemployed yet active feminist scholar. The contradictions between these reviews, arguments, and narratives are instructive and evocative. It all suggests the necessity for more exchange, more academic roles, more theory-making, to attain productive differences.

By the end of *LPLP*, we get the picture: politics has not been "left" behind in American English departments (any more than it has in Canadian ones). Progressive theory and practice has flourished enough to develop the possibility of theoretical and critical pluralism which exceeds reified positions. There is hope that divisions between

social groups, mirrored in factionalized university politics, can be overcome. Despite pernicious state interference — especially with regard to revised systems of funding — and notwithstanding dreary reactionary bodies within universities, newly introduced theoretical positions over the last twenty years have gained, at the cost of some ruined careers and a great deal of institutional backpedalling, significant public space in the academy. However, *LPLP* incites us to more than any "bloody but unbowed" posturing. Its clear yet complex analyses of our quintessentially middle-class profession galvanizes us to go on considering strategies, both reactive and visionary, for furthering emancipatory politics.

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The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World. Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector (eds.). *Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1991, Pp. 311.*

The first question arising from the ambitious subtitle of these essays on medieval literature will regard the character of the collection: Is this a true thematic study, responsibly embracing the whole of its subject; or is it another bundle of related material, a non-book, such as one comes to expect of anthologies? Although the individual contributions are first-rate — all of them — the finest feature of the work is its editors' commitment to relative comprehensiveness. The cover labels the project honestly.

The introduction by Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector is indispensable. The question their writers study is "whether companionate and reciprocal love, love as requisite to marriage, emerged in any significant way before the later seventeenth century." In the end, a hypothesis of revisionist cultural history is convincingly borne out, "that sanctioned erotic attachments [James Thomson's 'esteem enlivened by desire'] not only preceded any modern ideal of marriage but also made it historically intelligible." Yet, what the essayists discover