

Book Reviews

Elizabeth D. Harvey. *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts*. London: Routledge, 1992. pp. i, 173. \$49.95.

Cross-dressing, long deemed the determining feature of English Renaissance stage practice, recently has become the structuring trope, as well as a site of cultural analysis, in a number of studies. Elizabeth Harvey's *Ventriloquized Voices* intervenes in this critical exchange through a theoretically keen, precisely scholarly consideration of gender-inflected authorial voices in primarily early modern but also postmodern texts. *Ventriloquized Voices* targets "male appropriations of the feminine voice in English texts in the early modern period" (1) as its focus for a textual, ethical, and political investigation into evolving and devolving conceptions of authorial property, discursive appropriation, and sexual propriety. Seemingly audacious couplings, such as Elaine Showalter's defences of gynocriticism with *Haec-Vir's* defence of the Jacobean "man-woman," Sarah Kofman's critique of Freudian psychoanalysis's family romances with Spenser's gender-troubled romance of the *Faerie Queene*, the arch-humanist Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* with the hysterics analyzed throughout Freud's *oeuvre* and celebrated in Cixous and Clément's *La jeune née*, John Donne's *Anniversaries* on the death of his patron's daughter with Julia Kristeva's inscription of her personal birthing experience, and Sappho in Ovid and Donne with Luce Irigaray's "When Our Lips Speak Together," are justified, argues Harvey, because though the phenomenon of male writers speaking a woman's voice has "temporally local causes and manifestations. . . [t]here are, nevertheless linkages across history" (11). The detail and depth of Harvey's subsequent analyses gives great weight to this methodological claim.

Harvey evokes the mixed metaphor of "transvestite ventriloquism" as the governing trope for her examination of gender, voices, bodies, and power in the early modern and postmodern periods. This hybrid image of "the cross-dressed tongue" appears both absurd and apt in the context of Harvey's dialogic study, a study that attempts to negotiate the current critical divide between feminists who insist on ground-

ing the feminine voice in a historically bounded female body and feminists who wish to discard the correspondence between language and gendered bodies entirely: crudely partitioned, the debate between essentialism and anti-essentialism in the feminist camp.

Playing on the notion of "travesty," a term which etymologically unravels into literal cross-dressing, Harvey proposes that "although much post-structuralist theory has striven to divorce the author's body (and voice) from his (or her) writing, the constructed voices" within the texts she considers "vigorously reassert their (feminine) bodily origins" (3-4). The materialist basis of Harvey's argument seems to rest on the female—or is it feminine?—bodily origins of the feminine (female?) voices configured within texts whose connections to an embodied authorial voice poststructuralist theory has repudiated. The slippage between the signifiers *female* and *feminine*, and the relative stability of the signifier *male* persist in Harvey's text, though perhaps less as a theoretical inconsistency than as a symptom of the difficulties negotiating the impasse between essentialist and anti-essentialist stances currently poses for the feminist scholar. Questioning "the efficacy of a gynocritical model for Renaissance studies" (17)—a model whose teleology collapses feminine into female—Harvey harkens to Alice Jardine's specification of *gynesis* as the process whereby a metaphorised Woman is put into discourse as diagnostic horizon. Harvey suggests that a feminist "gynetic gesture" (69), which attends to Woman as an effect of masculinist discourse, rather than gynocritics, with its investment in binary oppositions beginning with masculine versus feminine, potentially can urge us beyond the essentialist/anti-essentialist dichotomy.

Inflecting her argument with the poststructuralist proposition that discourse functions determinatively, the body Harvey specifies as the effaced material basis of masculinist texts remains an inscribed body. The womb at the bottom of the "hysterical texts" (4) Harvey considers operates as a thoroughly ideological, very Renaissance textual construction, transposed into early modern canons of law, medicine, theology, and art from the ancient formulations of Plato, Hippocrates, Aretaeus, and Galen. Importantly, though, as Harvey never ceases to point out, this textualized body materially shaped the lives of those social subjects marked as woman within an onto-theological regime subtended on women's exclusion from the body politic. Perhaps one of the most incisive aspects of Harvey's approach is her reiterated insistence that "ventriloquizations of women in the Renaissance achieved the power they did partly *because so few women actually wrote and spoke*" (5; emphasis added). Ranging into an analysis of the modernist painter Odilon Redon's *Le Silence*, Harvey states her conclusion uncompromisingly: "the cultural silence of women . . . subtends and enables male ventriloquizations of their voices" (13).

This historical sense of women's physical exclusion from the *polis*, together with the understanding that "[h]istorical reconstructions are

always a kind of ventriloquization" (6), enables Harvey to read suppressions of feminine voices in male-authored texts not simply as the operations of a feminine "repressed of the text" but as complex markers of historical women's oppression under a socio-symbolic system based on women's silencing. By emphasizing differential "double-voicing" (32), Harvey resists the rhetorical closure of Foucault's infamous citation, "What difference does it make who is speaking?" ("What Is an Author?" 120). Harvey insists that "it is different for a man to ventriloquize a woman's voice than for a woman to speak in a masculine voice, since gender itself is asymmetrically constructed in relation to power" (32).

This asymmetrical disposition of transvestite ventriloquism in relation to the sexes, to paraphrase Harvey, yields a double charge: on the one hand, transvestite ventriloquism empowers the male author ensconced in his masculine privilege to reinforce phallogocentrism by means of appropriated female voices. But transvestite ventriloquism when deployed by women deliberately occupying the materially evacuated place of metaphorised Woman also may establish a site of resistance to masculinist hegemony. The feminist ventriloquisms of Sarah Kofman, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray, for instance, proceed through borrowings that take up man's metaphorization of woman and subversively turn this feminine figure against a masculinist socio-symbolic order. This is a method of mimetic infiltration whose "undermining doubling" (75) retains its counter-hegemonic force through a persistent self-reflexivity. It functions as a "feminist intertextuality" (67) that perpetually challenges an economy of property, proper names, and propriety that depends on the exchange of dispossessed women between men.

While Harvey does not deal explicitly with writing by women in the early modern period, her theorization of transvestite ventriloquism should prove rejuvenating for critical treatments of this recently recovered body of texts, a corpus increasingly rendered moribund by reigning gynocritical strictures. Harvey's model of double-voicing enables us to ask a number of critical questions about early modern women's writing: In what ways do early modern women's texts appear overdetermined due to complex genealogies of transmission that cross gender lines as well as generations? Are the authorial voices of early modern women inevitably undermined by the phallogocentric function of author? If so, what political effects accrue from reading these historically specific voices as textually indeterminate? Harvey is well aware that the theoretical cutting edge offered by the model of transvestite ventriloquism slices two ways: transvestite ventriloquism may "affirm phallogocentric rule" or it may "expose the contingency of gender, opening cultural discourse to the 'voices' it otherwise marginalizes and silences" (53). And, like the hysteric who simultaneously tears her dress away and hugs it tightly to her body, transvestite ventriloquism may do both. Ris-

king the radical indeterminacy posed by the unlikely cross between ventriloquism and transvestism, Harvey offers a theoretical paradigm and a critical methodology that requires refinement, but that should prove foundational for future feminist and Renaissance studies.

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WORKS CITED

- Foucault, Michel. *Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984.
 Jardine, Alice. *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.

Albert Gerard. *Contexts of African Literature*. Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990. pp. 169. \$35.00.

Divided into four parts (thirteen chapters), this book is an argument for both a comparative approach to the study of African literature and for the use of Africa as a case study of the various phenomena that accompany the passage of a people or continent from orality to written literature. The methods are therefore those of the literary historian. Using Latin within European literary history as a point of departure and in comparison with the advent and roles of European languages within the African context (Parts I and II), the book extracts the general law that creative writing is at first élitist then progresses to concern itself with the problems and conditions of the majority in its own languages. Thus, despite the apparent official ascendancy of European languages in Africa, there still existed fifty African languages in the 1980s.

This awareness makes it imperative to adjust the boundaries and methods of comparative literary studies as well as to re-examine traditional notions such as Commonwealth and national literatures. Henceforth the criterion of linguistic unity can no longer be tenable in defining these notions. What is national may at once be polyethnic and multilingual. The book further posits that an adequate African literary history must include vernacular literatures, some of which, such as Ethiopic languages and the Arabic scripts, preceded Roman script in Africa.

Part III is a practical application of the theories advanced earlier, providing case studies of three "national literatures"—Ghana, East Africa, and South Africa. The literary history of Ghana, for example, includes not only works written in English but the "various ethnic groups' oral art . . . all creative writings in the Ghanaian vernaculars, as well as the country's anglophone output" (82). The last section discusses the ways tradition has affected modern writing in sub-Saharan Africa, concluding that the former has shown great resilience in the face of the onslaught of Western forms.

The merits of Gerard's book lie first in the interesting parallels he finds between the roles and fortunes of Latin in the Western world and