

Implicated in colonial exercises itself during the twentieth century, and sharing the values of individualism, capitalism, and industrialism on which Britain and the rest of Europe have rested their major narratives for many generations, Italy gives no substantial place of difference from the clamour of life in England—not unless Chambers is attempting to understand it once again as a sunny place to use and appropriate for the representation of one's own, British self.

MARY LAWLOR

Richard A. Grusin. *Transcendental Hermeneutics: Institutional Authority and the Higher Criticism of the Bible*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1991. pp. xii, 196. \$32.50.

Richard Grusin has written a scholarly book of great importance for the understanding of the American literary movement of Transcendentalism that flourished between the 1830s and the end of the Civil War. As a volume of the "Post-Contemporary Interventions Series," edited by Stanley Fish and Fredric Jameson, *Transcendental Hermeneutics* re-examines the canon as a problem of reading texts.

Grusin examines Emerson's resignation from the Unitarian pulpit in September 1832, to begin his literary career. True, his resignation—as noted in his resignation sermon, "The Lord's Supper"—is clearly the result of his being unable to administer the Lord's Supper as an institution permanently authorized by Jesus. As a result, literary historians (for example, Richard Poirier and Ursula Brumm) have viewed the resignation as an act of rebellion to make the individual autonomous of a religious institutionalism, leading to a literary career as a path for such individualism. Emerson the literary artist is canonized as such because his rebellion led him to a language founded upon aesthetics, distinct from ordinary discourse; through this language, he set up significant oppositions between individual intuition ("genius") and institutions, the literary and the political, the self and society, the head and the heart.

However, literary historians do not examine what Grusin terms the "complication" of the sermon. The proper "complication" involves a study of hermeneutical practices deriving from specific issues of 1830 post-Puritan America. The central focus of the sermon is on how to interpret Christ's words about bread and wine becoming His body and blood at the Last Supper, and how that hermeneutical interpretation served Emerson as a theoretical model for interpreting other texts.

Emerson resigned not for reasons of secular individualism but to find a "true doctrine respecting forms" in which the rhetoric of a text could make individuals conscious of their "moral sense." The "moral self" was, in Emerson's view, a disposition for action which made individuals conscious of their virtues in the eyes of God, and this consciousness was Emerson's formulation of what individuals experienced in the moment of grace. Grace was an immediate experience that could give individ-

uals "power" over phenomenal circumstance, when it allowed them to adopt words of the Bible to manifest a moment of its power.

The "true doctrine" was not that "forms" constrained respondents but that individuals had to see that "forms" could symbolize what they had in mind or at heart. Individuals "accommodated [themselves] to the authority of 'institutions already made' by accommodating existing institutions to the authority of [themselves]" (6-7).

Grusin's study challenges the supposed anti-institutionalism of the Transcendentalists. The Transcendental appeal to the "self" is to a view that the "self" is already so institutionalized as to appear as innate as common sense. The key behind this thesis is that the lives, careers, and writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Theodore Parker provide instances of the movement's indebtedness to changing notions of hermeneutical exegesis of the Bible and their application to all reading and experience.

In chapter two, Grusin explains that Emerson was attacked in 1838 by the Harvard Divinity School, especially by Andrews Norton, for his Address to the students, not because he was announcing strange doctrines, but because he was using the School's interests in "higher criticism" to undermine its doctrine of an historicized Christ in favor of a Christ that spoke of the immediate "moral sense." Schools of theology (at Harvard and Andover) had begun to "professionalize" the pulpit, making correct principles of interpretation possible for uniformly trained preachers, and the "higher criticism" had become a valuable means to harmonize the Christ of the indefinite "moral sense."

The professors believed hermeneutics to be a science that could determine the meaning of words, but Emerson saw hermeneutics as a means for making readers conscious of their faith through the attempt to interpret, knowing all along that reading the Bible properly—even in the most individualistic manner—gives the reader a "moral sense" towards "being in the world." Emerson's "moral sense" is not a "right" or "wrong" view, but a sense that every moment of existence compels the individual to consider a choice for or against the excellence of the divine; thus, "to see" the world is to participate in the divine.

Thoreau's hermeneutical principles depended upon the same belief about institutionalized forces in the light of the novel views of David Friedrich Strauss's 1835 bombshell, *Das Leben Jesu*. This book had concluded that the Bible is a human creation and to make sense of it as a whole an interpreter has to reconstitute what is only a myth; Strauss's mythologizing implies that a reader has a means to see through the eyes of a person of an earlier time, and this implies, again, an "historicism" of a prior event that precludes the immediacy of individuality in the reader.

Like Emerson, however, Thoreau turned the tables on this liberal, advanced view of "higher criticism" when he applied it directly to an individual's existence. If humans read through the "mist of prejudice," the "mist" meant—to Thoreau—that no interpretation could be fixed cognitively, because what confronted one was also non-defined; there-

fore, individuals could reshape and resymbolize phenomenal existence according to the inherent power of *their* own virtue. Thus, in responding to an hermeneutics which sought specific doctrines or specific historical analyses, Thoreau actually worked to liberate the capacity of individuals to mirror in language one's consciousness of being in the world.

Grusin's examination of Parker's career is the most intriguing of all, and deserves commendation for its new insights. In two autobiographical fragments, Parker showed a major divergence between the formation of his life and his "intuitive" basis of interpreting his experience as a text. In one, Parker noted how at the age of four, after walking out on his farm with his father, he is sent home alone; coming to a pond, he is tempted to strike a "harmless" tortoise with a stick as other boys might, but stops when a "voice within" says, "It is wrong!" Returning home, Parker tells his mother what happened, and asks "what it was that told" such a desire to hurt was wrong. Brushing back some tears, his mother says that "Some men call it conscience, but I prefer to call it the voice of God in the soul of man" (131-32).

Grusin's point is that the mother socialized the incident for Parker; it was not seen as true because his mother was right and free from the beliefs of her age (which she was not), but because she was the first to voice an interpretation and she (not the father) was the closest individual to the four-year old child. The views of his mother are "accidental," but the process of maternal socialization must be recognized as an institution existing prior to specific beliefs.

Playing against this fragment, Grusin examines Parker's second fragment, written in Italy shortly before his death. In this, Parker noted that his Christian intuitionism (learned from his mother) has shaped his experience as an individual person, and yet he experienced more than what he articulated in his published writings. This more encompassing "voice of God" is non-verbal and not fully moral as was his youthful life; this means, for Grusin, that it is a non-social factor; as such, it bespeaks an unknown Theodore Parker who has eluded the attempts of the authorial Parker to verbalize his alter life. This dialogic consciousness of intuition led Parker to speak of there being two Theodore Parkers. One was known in America as a Unitarian theologian and the other was an expatriate in Italy; this latter person, in effect, fled from what he would be in America and thus, deprived of his maternal institutional perspective, became silent.

What Grusin's book does is to restore the matter of "historical credibility" to our study of Transcendentalism in the manner of the "New Historicism." If the traditional literary historians are blind to the force of institutions, so too are the modern revisionists. It no longer seems plausible that Emerson's "break" with institutions could be simply a matter of individual insight and choice if he were determined beforehand by institutions, as revisionists assume. Such absolutists attempt to "hold on to the traditional reading of Transcendentalist anti-institutionalism, even while exposing the ways in which this reading

serves a particular set of ideological, institutional practices" (2). Instead, Grusin suggests that "Transcendentalism was from the beginning more complicated and less committed to these oppositions than either traditionalists or revisionists might have us believe" (3).

JOHN STEPHEN MARTIN

Mary Ann Caws. *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. pp. 218. \$25.00.

The entanglement of lives, imaginations, and eroticisms that was Bloomsbury continues to exert its fascination over readers. To the long history of Bloomsbury books, feminist scholarship is adding attention to the specific presence of and relationship between those remarkable Stephens sisters, Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. Most recently, their productive intimacy has been the focus of Diane Gillespie's *The Sisters' Arts: The Writing and Painting of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell*, 1988, and of Jane Dunn's *A Very Close Conspiracy: Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf*, 1990. Mary Ann Caws disrupts the Virginia/Vanessa duo by making Dora Carrington an effective third in her study *Women of Bloomsbury: Virginia, Vanessa and Carrington*.

Caws rehearses the well-known configurations of love, desire, confusion, and frustration that amaze us (where did they get the time? the energy?) as the pan-sexuality of the individuals reshapes itself in various constellations. For those readers not already initiated into this tangled web, one knot should give them the picture: Dora Carrington, married to Ralph Partridge, is obsessively in love with her companion, writer Lytton Strachey, who is in love with artist Duncan Grant, who is lover(?) - companion of Vanessa Bell, who is sister of Virginia Woolf and lover of Roger Fry and wife of Clive Bell. Unlike some untanglers of these threads, Mary Ann Caws does not dwell upon the gossipy details. Her book wishes, rather, to trace the pattern of the women's work, Woolf's as writer, Vanessa Bell's and Dora Carrington's as painters, and to allow the work, the relationships and the feelings to intercept each other as these women intersected each other's lives. Carrington is an odd figure here, and Caws seems to wish to recuperate her. Against the genius of Woolf and the great gifts of Vanessa Bell, Caws sets Dora's more modest abilities and her "little girl delight in everything about nature, the turned-in toes . . . the self-effacement" (25). The serious attention that Caws gives to Carrington's work both as painter and decorative artist (she worked mostly on tiles, signs, and the like) and the parallels she draws between each of these women's anxious insecurities do give Carrington an authority or presence that Bloomsbury studies rarely accord her. Nevertheless, the power of Virginia Woolf's words and Vanessa Bell's pictures, and the passion these two have for each other make Caws's labours over Dora Carrington seem strenuous, even exhausting.