

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).

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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.

Caws's explicit aim, she says, is "to understand and evaluate the temperaments of these women artists, together with the representations they made of themselves and the lives they chose to lead" (1-2). This clear statement of purpose is, unfortunately, muddled by Caws's perplexing defensiveness, as though she were writing to an audience of the 1950s, one to whom sexual complexity was thought to be repellent. Caws refers repeatedly to the "unjudgemental evaluation" she wishes to bring to her subjects against the "accusations of society" (2). She attempts to clarify the intensity of her position, describing the "overt and unbridled scorn" visited upon Vanessa Bell and Carrington for choosing to commit themselves to homosexual men (4). Caws does not take up or take on the homophobia implicit in the shocked and dismayed critics she encounters, but rather looks for the positive effects of the "unusual" situations of these women—she is interested in the ways their pain deepens their art and her intention is to concentrate on the art, not the pain (5-7).

The introductory chapter is the weakest, I think, because of its self-conscious insistence that the criticism she offers is personal without giving us any particularly personal material to let us feel or know that intimacy for ourselves. When Caws tells us, for example, that she feels "deeply obliged . . . to make an open statement about [her] own involvement in the issues aroused" (3) by the complex lives of her characters, I expect to learn how her own experience was illuminated by, or clarified her understanding of, the Bloomsbury figures. This level of "personal criticism" (her phrase) never appears. Instead, Caws contrasts the "cool science" of some other kind of criticism with what she is doing. What one of my students calls "biocrit" may be extremely valuable, but it requires an extraordinary degree of self-revelatory courage *and* the capacity to make felt connections explicit. Think of Adrienne Rich's essay on Emily Dickinson, for example, or Barbara Smith on Toni Morrison.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not one agrees with their readings, the critic's intense relationship to the text is intelligible, and the truth-value of personal criticism comes through the emotional texturing of the criticism. This is, surely, what Caws is attempting, but because she limits herself to opinion and assertion, and guards her own privacy, the attempt serves only to arouse a desire (unnecessarily) and then thwart it.

Following this opening chapter, Caws's method is to arrange a narrative of connection placing excerpts from letters, journals, diaries, novels, descriptions of paintings, and so on alongside each other and splicing them into an historical and analytic reading of each and of their interactions. Chapters two ("These Working Women"), four ("Together, With Virginia"), and seven ("How We See, How We Are") connect the three women; Chapters three, five, and six are devoted respectively to Virginia, Vanessa, and Carrington. This structure works, but the prose is sometimes awkward in its claims and its manner. Speaking of the marriages, for example, Caws writes, "In the case of the two artists, it [marriage] was scarcely, to greatly understate the case,

what mostly interested them; none of the three took it more seriously than her work" (12-13). Although the chapters focussing on the individual artists provide insightful readings of the paintings of Vanessa, for example, or draw provocative links between Woolf's fiction and her friends' aesthetic concerns, too many sentences like the following (from "Vanessa") appear:

Whether they are discussing a new green dress for her and the dinner parties at which it is worn, or the paintings of Giotto and Matisse, for which she has a particular passion, whether their work or their relation, and the problems of each, or the interweaving of Vanessa and her sister Virginia Woolf, Vanessa's writings to Roger stand, concerning her mind and personality and heart, in the place of the private journals kept by Virginia and Carrington, and so many other artists and writers, those journals with their strange and sometimes uneasy relation to the letters, those journals often best described assituated midway between invention or elaboration, and fact. (76)

The effort to make the text flow, to represent the fluidity of life as Caws imagines Bloomsbury to have lived it, leads to a kind of breathless muddle that sometimes loses touch with the subject.

Despite the obvious infelicities of style, the real strength of this book comes through in its careful attention to the work of each artist as it relates to her life as friend, lover, sister, mother (or not). Caws portrays the ongoing anxieties of each about money, about what the others would think, about the ongoing value of the work. The intertwining self-representations that emerge will engage the reader—whose own life is likely to appear barrenly, or blissfully, simple in contrast.

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Tony Bennett. *Outside Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. pp. 320. \$45.00; \$15.95.

Tony Bennett's previous books have made signal contributions to Marxist criticism and theory (*Formalism and Marxism*) and cultural studies (*Bond and Beyond*, written with Janet Woollacott). One is thus at a loss to understand the turn to post-Marxism and Foucauldian anti-Marxism (for such it is) in *Outside Literature*. Without knowing anything in particular about the author's personal or political biography, I shall hazard the view that this book reflects—a word rendered effectively *verboden* as a descriptor for cultural phenomena in Bennett's account, but one that, in some instances, surely remains entirely appropriate and fundamentally accurate—a political and theoretical turn typical of many among the 1960s and 1970s generations of the Anglo-American