

ture which Klein has created have the paradoxical effect of throwing into relief a gap at the centre which no act of the imagination can entirely bridge" (231). Klein's story stops some time after publication of *The Second Scroll*, and Pollock offers some compelling thoughts in his analysis of this novel as to why that may have been so.

Overall this is an excellent study, although, built upon perceptive—sometimes ingenious—close readings of representative texts, it does not really break any new ground in its critical approach and technique. And occasionally the analyses disappoint. For example, despite his own awareness of Klein's significant notes on "Sestina on the Dialectic" and his discussion of Klein's comments about the dialectic itself, Pollock says surprisingly little about this poem's formal qualities (156-58). Yet here in this imploded sestina Klein makes perhaps one of the most significant and prophetic comments on the limitations of the dialectic as form, anticipating the dialectical perplexities of *The Second Scroll* that Pollock examines so effectively. Also, while his treatment of various dialectical oppositions such as the Diaspora and the State of Israel provides a solid grounding for the analysis of many pieces, his treatment of the differences between those two problematic demarcators of twentieth century criticism—modernism and postmodernism—is less satisfying. The critical insufficiencies of some of his generalizations regarding these terms tend to prevent Pollock from extending his insightful analyses even further. These minor reservations aside, however, *A. M. Klein: The Story of the Poet* is an essential book for anyone interested in Klein, particularly in his significance for modern, Jewish, and Canadian literatures. While it is not the final story of the poet, as the definite article in its Joycean title might suggest, it certainly sets a high standard for any more stories of Klein yet to be told.

NEIL QUERENGESSER



Hans Bertens. *The Idea of The Postmodern: A History*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Pp. ix, 284. \$55.00, \$16.95 pb.

Many of us whose graduate study took place in the 1980s felt called upon to ally ourselves with a blend of translated "theory," and the postmodern art which formed the avant-garde of the time. This is not to say that we escaped bewilderment, in face of the variety of ideas and experiences being called "postmodern." We were immersed in the thing, we could not easily stand outside of it and map it. We "did theory" and we lived the postmodern. When we tired of reading Lyotard or Baudrillard ("by the yard," as we said), we witnessed "*la condition postmoderne*" manifesting itself in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*. (There, we learned that the postmodern was paranoid, carnal, and had a compelling soundtrack.) Newly mannered, exuberantly coloured post-

modern towers and “decorated sheds” rose around us. At McMaster University, I watched Catherine Belsey and Linda Hutcheon agree to disagree on “problems of agency and resistance” in postmodern works that ironically admitted their own complicity in the very structures they problematized. Everything *was* problematized, at that time: representation, the subject, the canon, the curriculum, the arrogance of theory, theory’s necessity, high culture, popular culture, the distinction between the two, the centre, the margin, the self, the other, othering, identity. And through it all, a voice kept whispering the three words “gender, race, and class.” How did it all hang together? Did it indeed hang together at all?

Hans Bertens offers the kind of map that would have been helpful then. It will still be helpful now, to students attempting to piece together the antecedents of current arguments, and to academics who find it useful to have a synthesizing reference work on the debates about postmodernism. If all Bertens had accomplished had been to demonstrate how much confusion has resulted from the way “postmodern” became a label used in positive or negative polemics, his book would be worthwhile. But he does more than that, and will no doubt incite further polemics as a result of some of his interpretations, assertions, and inevitable omissions. (The index entry under “race” shows only three mentions. And where are Salman Rushdie, Graham Swift, Jeanette Winterson, to note only these?)

One of Bertens’s interesting decisions is to place the beginning of postmodern art and theory in the US of the 1950s, with Charles Olson and John Cage. The ideas eventually named postmodern were, he contends, initially cultivated in the work of American critics such as Ihab Hassan, William Spanos, and Susan Sontag, who at first did not use the term “postmodern” at all. Nevertheless, their work can retrospectively be seen as opening the debate about a new kind of art. It was “American criticism’s specific, and narrow, idea of modernism” (17) that led to the style of anti-modernism which, after many developments, we now call postmodern. Many contradictions and confusions attached to definitions of the postmodern stem from this early use of a limited definition of modernism as it was understood in the US. By 1959, Irving Howe had not only begun using the term “postmodern,” but had inaugurated “a leftist analysis of postmodernism that places it within the social context of postwar consumer society” (22). The cultural logic of late capitalism had been glimpsed.

After analyzing the diverse definitions of modernism and postmodernism at work in this founding period of criticism, Bertens tries to sort out some seemingly contradictory themes within the debate on postmodernism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He sees three competing approaches at this time: a return to narrative and representation, an attack on these same things, and (largely in theatre) a turn toward some form of Heidegger-inspired or Artaud-like emphasis on

fullness and presence (67). The simultaneous "return to" and "attack upon" representation might more coherently be described as the kind of "repetition with a *difference*" that Eco describes in his postscript to *The Name of the Rose*. Eco's kind of "return" incorporates a critique or "attack." Bertens's third option, the emphasis on presence and the refusal of representation (sometimes by way of performing unrepeatable artistic moments) perhaps coheres just as well with this acknowledgement of representation's power. This acknowledgement is after all at the heart of the postmodern. The proliferating, confusing, and sometimes confused responses to this insight are what unite so many strands of recent art practice and criticism.

Bertens's emphasis on postmodernism as, on one level, a *view* of the world, rather than a phenomenon, is also useful. It is in some places a well-established view, while elsewhere it still cuts no ice at all. Bertens clearly paraphrases some of the tenets that by the 1980s had become self-evident for some, and infuriating for others:

That language constitutes, rather than represents, reality; that the autonomous and stable subject of modernity has been replaced by a postmodern agent whose identity is largely other-determined and always in process; that meaning has become social and provisional; or that knowledge only counts within a given discursive formation, that is, a given power structure. (10)

Bertens sees this by now well-defined viewpoint about language, representation, the subject and discursive formations as one conceptual level of more recent discussion of postmodernity. This is the level of criticism and theorizing, often driven by analyses of artistic practices. At another conceptual level is the "cultural logic" debate about whether the saturation of life by mass culture and universal commodification means that the (Western) world "is" now postmodern. What links these conceptual levels is a "deeply felt loss of faith in our ability to represent the real, in the widest sense" (11). Again the crux is a rethinking of representation in terms of power rather than truth, in this case at the social, political, and economic levels.

Bertens traces these themes through the work of Habermas and Lyotard, Rorty, and Baudrillard. His synopsis on feminism and postmodernism stresses the work of Laclau and Mouffe, leaving aside the more psychoanalytically focused feminism of Irigaray. A concluding section on the question of postmodernism as a new social formation considers Zygmunt Bauman's positive view of the postmodern. In it, the social world is composed of "habitats" within which we create meaning and constitute ourselves. These habitats "have no overwhelming reasons for being what they are" and Bertens describes existence within them as a process of "self-assembly that may be continuous but is not cumulative" (235). (In other words, I am tempted to say, "whatever." It is interesting how far corporate mantras about "lifelong learning" and "continuous change" echo Bauman's formulations.)

In the end Bertens declares himself more persuaded by Anthony Giddens's description of the postmodern in its social form as merely

"radicalized modernity" (236). The crisis of representation, argues Bertens, is really a crisis only, or mainly, for those in the university humanities disciplines. Though "rationality cannot found itself" there are still examples of grounds and universals, if only in the natural sciences. Bertens could clarify and update this part of his argument by looking at writing on science since Thomas Kuhn. There is by now a broader (and for humanists, exciting) recognition that an understanding of representation is crucial for the natural sciences, because of the heuristic but also limiting role of representation in the discovery stages of scientific work. Scientists such as Stephen Jay Gould assent in part to a social-constructionist view of science. Evolutionist Richard Dawkins's work on memes begins to bring together genetics and the study of what we might choose to call "representations," seen by him as effective "life forms." In the face of such developments, Bertens's conclusion seems too cautious. Clearly postmodernism (whatever you think it is) is not yet played out, and is only beginning to extend its habits of thought to the most prestigious areas of our culture.

HARRY VANDERVLIST



Margaret R. Higonnet, ed. *Borderwork: Feminist Engagements with Comparative Literature*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994. Pp. x, 335. \$44.95, \$16.95 pb.

In *A Room of One's Own* (1928), Virginia Woolf identifies an absence in British literary history—the absence of women's writings from the archive—and points to ways rectifying it. She reinterprets a historical record deformed by patriarchal ideological hegemony, revalues works once deemed subliterate or otherwise unworthy of attention, and argues that the future of women's creativity depends on the collective efforts of women: that is, on feminist politics. *Borderwork: Feminist Engagements with Comparative Literature*, a collection of essays edited by Margaret R. Higonnet, takes up the project set out in *A Room of One's Own* and elaborated in the work of Woolf's successors, critics of British (women's) writing nurtured by second-wave feminism. But the contributors to this volume extend feminist criticism and theory beyond the confines of the British (and European) national languages and literary formations that constitute Woolf's frame of reference. In preparation at the same time as the 1993 Bernheimer Report to the American Comparative Literature Association on the state of the discipline of comparative literature, *Borderwork* anticipates many of Bernheimer's concerns.¹ The essays in *Borderwork* implicate gender, along with other determinants of positionality (identity) and cultural production, in a transnational or global political order. In interrogating the key terms of the subtitle, "feminist" and "comparative," moreover, *Borderwork* works to remap the terrains of comparative literature and feminist studies alike.