

work for change and ones that resist it. Jarman's *Edward II*, his contestatory position notwithstanding, is "breathtakingly misogynistic" (110); the dissidence in Barry Keeffe's *A Mad World My Masters* or Howard Barker's *Women Beware Women* "at the same time seems largely to be an expression of heterosexual males whose panic in the face of sexual, racial, and gender difference activates the grammar of Jacobean performance" (110) and theatre practitioners, proclaiming radical intent, repeatedly pay simultaneous obeisance to the "beauty" of the Shakespeare text. The "shifting" Shakespeare in her subtitle therefore denotes not only the continual return to and deviation from powerfully regulatory texts. She finds this in the voices of theatre practitioners, within particular productions and within the reception economies identifiable in reviewers, academic critics, and audiences within which each performance is situated. Her book is also intelligently sensitive and thoughtful about the multiple and sometimes contradictory impulses or positions evident in projects, particularly in performance, to provide "new maps with which to chart the possibilities of 'post'" (150).

MARTIN ORKIN

WORK CITED

Parker, Andrew, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1995.



Anne Compton. *A. J. M. Smith: Canadian Metaphysical*. Toronto: ECW, 1994. Pp. 262. \$25.00 pb.

While A. J. M. Smith's status as a pioneering anthologist and critic has long been relatively secure in Canadian letters, his reputation as a poet has been less so, for reasons that arguably have more to do with the vagaries of poetic fashion than with the quality of his poetry itself. Despite some excellent critical articles on his work over the last two decades, Smith's poetry has yet to receive the fuller attention it merits. Anne Compton's book, growing out of her PhD thesis, is the first published full-length study of Smith's poetry,¹ and it goes some way to redressing past neglect. Yet, while the work is extensively researched, well-documented (although sometimes excessively), and comprehensive, it falls somewhat short of what its title and the preface promise. I had expected a greater emphasis on the metaphysical qualities of Smith's work and the resultant knotty theoretical implications of his most challenging poems, but Compton's quite insightful discussion of this subject is essentially limited to two or three chapters of the entire nine-chapter study.

Compton adopts a traditional critical approach, asserting that her "work does not participate in the theoretical conflicts ongoing among contemporary critics and theorists" (7). This is true; and while such

non-belligerence may in some contexts be an admirable virtue, much is also lost through this ostensible neutrality. Her methodology consists primarily of close textual readings of the poems organized both chronologically and thematically, reflecting Smith's organizational methods in his *Poems: New and Collected* (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1967). Such an approach has both its benefits and its drawbacks. On the one hand, it does allow the reader to appreciate much more fully the development of Smith's poetry within its literary, cultural, and historical contexts. Compton provides a comprehensive overview of Smith's extensive work as anthologist and influential critic—indeed as one of the fundamental architects of modern Canadian poetic criticism. She revisits such legendary battlegrounds—skirmish sites?—as the *New Provinces* preface debate, the fall-out from the “native-cosmopolitan” preface of *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, and various other feuds between Smith and his fellow poets/critics. She also provides an interesting reassessment of Smith's invaluable contributions to the development of Canadian modernist poetry during his McGill years; although she often covers fairly familiar territory, her research helps to place a number of these events in the broader context of Smith's overall career. Her detailed analyses of representative poems from six decades similarly provide a comprehensive overview of Smith's poetic development. From the entire book emerges a composite and fairly complete picture of A. J. M. Smith as anthologist, critic, and poet.

On the other hand, despite these strengths, Compton's approach relegates to the thematic sidelines what should be the centre of her thesis, an intriguing analysis of Smith's metaphysical poetry. As she points out, Smith's most significant work, dealing with his “core subject, death and faith,” (17) emerges from the years 1927-43 (17) when his best poetry—indeed the bulk of it—was written. A thorough exploration of the metaphysical poetry might have been at odds with Compton's thematic/historical approach, but it could have proved quite fruitful, given the basic framework she has already provided. Compton explores the ties between Smith and the poets in whom he was most interested, drawing some important connections between the materials of Smith's PhD thesis on the seventeenth-century Anglican metaphysicals and his notebooks (she makes extensive use of original documents in the Smith collections at Trent University and the University of Toronto), and his own metaphysical verse. Compton is particularly interested in the challenges presented to twentieth-century metaphysical poetry, challenges that loom large in Smith's own work. The basic questions that beset the earlier metaphysicals—“the relation of the flesh and the spirit, the knowableness of death, the means to faith, and the possibility of a discernible pattern in creation” (97)—beset Smith too, but within obviously different historical contexts. Compton argues that “[Smith] approaches these questions by moving between extreme positions: privation and material sufficiency, denial and indulgence” (97).

Indeed, it would seem as if these positions were never fully resolved, for reasons that undoubtedly had much to do with Smith's ambivalent religious views: "Although not a religious poet as John Donne, George Herbert, and Henry Vaughan were, Smith had a sense of their sense of the world, and this coexisted with his awareness of the modern foreclosure on the religious life. Smith lived between these two positions. He did not believe what they believed, but intellectually he explored it" (103). As Compton points out, this ambivalence marks not only the religious aspects of Smith's poetry but its erotic aspects as well. Smith's compelling fascination with, yet his simultaneous ironic distancing from, Eros and Thanatos alike is central to the metaphysical verse. Unlike the confessional voice characteristic of much seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry, Smith's "I" is often difficult if not impossible to discern, having been obscured through increasingly refined imagery and syntax, a practice that has resulted in some seeing his work as too calculating and dispassionate. Yet, while Compton explores in some detail the possible reasons for Smith's "extreme positions," she could have significantly extended her analysis. A psychoanalytical approach, for example, might have proved quite useful at unlocking some of the doors of personal reticence in Smith's treatment of sex and death, might have given more insight into his often ironic mockeries of these perennial topics of fascination. Similarly, a fuller comparison of the methods of Smith with other modern metaphysicals (most notably Eliot, whom Compton does deal with, but not enough) would have gone a long way to further elucidating the peculiar position of twentieth-century metaphysical poetry. It is somewhat disappointing to be taken from the edge of Smith's most searching and intriguing eschatological explorations in the middle of the book to the admittedly insightful but less inspiring chapters on "Nature" and "Social Poetry" that follow.

These reservations aside, Compton's book is a valuable study of this influential Canadian man of letters, a man the greater part of whose legacy is a complex and intellectually challenging metaphysic that is not as easily dismissed as some would have it to be.

NEIL QUERENGESSER

NOTE

- ¹ See John Ferns's *A. J. M. Smith* (Boston: Twayne, 1979) for an earlier but primarily biographical book on Smith.



Michael Coyle. *Ezra Pound, Popular Genres, and the Discourse of Culture*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1995. Pp. 264. \$37.50.

Why does the very form of Ezra Pound's *Cantos* remain so perplexing to so many readers? Michael Coyle's intriguing and well-researched ar-