

Lynette Hunter. *Outsider Notes: Feminist Approaches to Nation State Ideology, Writers/Readers and Publishing*. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1996. Pp. 312. \$19.95 pb.

Lynette Hunter is, the cover tells us, a Canadian educated in Canada. Nonetheless, this book appears to have originated in a British PhD program (if I read the acknowledgment to Shirley Chew correctly), and to have been worked out in the classroom where Hunter teaches at the University of Leeds. Hunter certainly comes at Canadian literature from a materialist and reader-focused perspective unusual here, although it can be connected with the debate over canons conducted for the past few years by Frank Davey (*Canadian Literary Power*, Edmonton: NeWest, 1994) and Robert Lecker (*Making It Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature*, Concord, ON: Anansi, 1995) and debates over the access to publication of minority writers usually lumped under the rubric "appropriation of voice." The title seems appropriate, however, since only an "outsider" would begin a book on contemporary Canadian literature with the claim that "Canada is a country similar to most in western Europe . . ." (13). This statement runs counter to the perspective of most Canadianists and of most post-colonialists, who would argue that Canada's relation to Britain and the US complicates its literary and publishing history in ways that simply do not hold for the non-English speaking countries of Europe. Once Quebec is added to the mix, of course, Canada is even less typical, even if occasionally Switzerland and Belgium are useful for comparisons of language politics. However, the persistent Canadian anxiety about distinguishing this country's culture from that of others is perhaps usefully countered by such a claim, which in the end does not really control the book's direction. The word "notes" in the title more accurately describes the approach which appears to be to examine various important debates and the associated literatures in a way that often generates useful insights on particular texts and issues, but that is finally hard to summarize or even remember because there is no clear argument holding the book together.

The book is divided into three parts. The first deals with institutions, canons, and publishing. The second discusses the general issue of women and race through the works of Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, and M. Nourbese Philip; with the works of so-called "language writers," usually influenced by French feminism through Québécoise writers, for example the Tessera collective; and with what one can only call minority themes, such as incest, rape, and child abuse depicted in Beatrice Culleton (now Mosionier), Maria Campbell, Jaqueline Dumas, Rose Doiron, and Elly Danica. The third part focuses on memory as an issue for both individual and nation in works by more canonical writers Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, and bpNichol.

For me, one useful insight came in the analysis of genre. Hunter makes it clear that genre is not just a set of conventions used by writers, but a frame that often controls how ordinary people can describe what they experience in daily life. For readers trained by what she calls genre-fiction (and here I am not clear whether this includes more than what we call Harlequin romance or not) and its wish-fulfillment fantasies, "often concerning murder, rape, war and sex," these same issues shifted into autobiographical accounts make it "difficult for the reader to read them without the habitual titillations and satisfactions of the consumerist expectations in pornographic sex and violence" (149). I have many questions about what appears to be a conflation of pornography and romance here, but nonetheless she deals interestingly with the ways in which an autobiographical account of sexual abuse detaches itself with difficulty from the discourses usually associated with sexuality, discourses that usually originate with the abusers, rather than the abused. However, for a materialist, she oddly seems to subsume class difference into ethnic/racial difference (several of the texts she deals with in this discussion are by Native writers) and her reader is implicitly a female middle-class British reader used to romance conventions, although she never really considers the differences that might exist between the "embarrassed" response of such a reader and the responses of other groups. Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* has been, in Canadian terms, a best-seller, appealing strongly to young people who normally are reluctant to read, for example. Further, the embarrassment that she argues derives from this use of language inappropriate to the genre of autobiography would surely be greater for senior students (who have been trained to apply an aesthetic based on formal finish and generic consistency) than for junior ones (who usually find Culleton completely gripping) and also greater for teachers who stress the issue of quality over the issue of what work a text might be considered to be doing in a particular sociopolitical context. Here then perhaps Hunter's materialist approach falters a little. But she deserves credit for convincing her students to work with their uncomfortable emotions rather than simply dismiss the books that elicit them. She argues that

other communities use genre in different ways, . . . there are different constructions of reality in other lives, . . . [and] the implications of social violence are different for different communities. Embarrassment can be a help to this recognition because it locates points of difference. (146)

She later comments that

if the embarrassment leads to repression or appropriations, the shock of the account is distanced and displaced, but the embarrassment also acts to locate experience for which we have no adequate vocabulary, and to alert the reader to the need for engaged reading. (166)

Certainly, this book requires engaged reading from its readers to ferret out insights such as the above. Sometimes I was embarrassed,

and sometimes I was annoyed (Hunter often uses a word that I think she must have invented—*outwith*—and I spent a time puzzling over whether it differs from *without* or not). I hope I succeeded in working constructively with these emotions to write this review. But I suspect that a reader who did not have to produce a review at the end would be tempted either to abandon this book or to rely on the index to skip to material of interest. The lesson may be that we are too dependent on narrative or argument to control our reading, and perhaps we should learn to read otherwise. There is a more coherent book inside this one, if not precisely screaming to be let out, at least worth attempting to find and appreciate for its ideas about commodification, genre, and reader response.

MARGERY FEE



Bryan Cheyette, ed. *Between "Race" and Culture: Representations of "the Jew" in English and American Literature*. Stanford UP, 1996. Pp. 222. \$45.00, \$16.95 pb.

Like Linda Nochlin's *The Jew in the Text, Between "Race" and Culture* gathers together an impressive array of criticism from both sides of the Atlantic. From Bryan Cheyette's "Introduction: Unanswered Questions" to Eric Hoberger's concluding essay on "Jewish Ambivalence," most of the essays find common ground in "ambivalencing" ambivalence. It is precisely that extra postmodern twist to ambivalence that distinguishes this intriguing volume.

Frequently, the contributors take some marginal remark by an established author of the nineteenth or twentieth century, and tease out its implications for antisemitic portraits of the Jew as culturally unstable. Cheyette opens with a startling passage from Virginia Woolf's "Street Haunting" (1927): "They do not grudge us, we are musing, our prosperity; when suddenly, turning the corner, we come upon a bearded Jew, wild, hunger-bitten, glaring out of his misery. . . . At such sights . . . a question is asked which is never answered." *Flâneuse* and Wandering Jew haunt this two-way street, for his uncanny glare meets the "sudden flare" in her eyes.

William Galperin examines the complex relationship between romanticism and antisemitism. After noting an affinity between romanticism and modern Jewish critics such as Harold Bloom, M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Hartman, and Lionel Trilling, Galperin underscores romanticism's ambivalence *toward ambivalence* with regard to antisemitism. He selects Wordsworth's peripheral poem, "A Jewish Family," and centres it for his argument by pointing out that the poem's final line, "proud Jerusalem," is an attempt at Christian conversion and figuration to the New Jerusalem of a New Testament. Similarly, Heine's essay, *Concerning the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (1832), his