

shows up their "reproduction of the [sic] homosocial relations, of the nation as normal" (65) as problematic and contradictory.

The book is a tour de force in its stylistic fusing of the theoretical and the personal, of the interrogation of cultural texts and personal anecdotes. Nevertheless, in the more recent afocited version, Probyn confesses that her moving away from Quebec (these days to the University of Sydney, Australia, where she is the director of Women's Studies) has since led to her misplacing the desire to prove her sense of "belonging in Quebec," a powerful reminder of just how contingent a sense of identity is.

Much like Probyn, Allor and Gagnon, at the end of their discourse analyses of the governmentalized cultural politics of Québec, conclude that "l'identitaire québécoise . . . doesn't exist per se but rather [is] a process of identification with what we already are, and with what we aren't anymore" (46). Still, so thorough is their mapping of the 30-year coherence with which the cultural field "articulate[s] the being and becoming of the state and citizenry . . . accomplish[ing] the linked production of the people as 'subjects' whose social being the state serves and as the 'objects' of government power-relations" (46) that one might wrongly conclude that Allor and Gagnon consider the cultural field's resolution of social tensions and contradictions to be hegemonic rather than simply diachronic and systemic. In keeping with Probyn's often lyrical first-person accounts and her strategic use of more disparate genres and fields, her conclusion resists more openly such a sense of overdetermination by dominant culture. One might even call her conclusion utopian, a strong tendency within queer theory and activism, which in Probyn's case is quite studied and tentative:

These queer means of belonging cannot be performed through general descriptions; rather . . . cruising in dives, we may glimpse them, catch our bodies "as they rise up for a moment, and it is that moment that is important, that is the opportunity that one must grab." (Deleuze 70)

Whichever approach you might find more appealing, these two books make important contributions to the elaboration of ways to interrogate and understand better how cultural production and social identities in Quebec and Canada are produced, consumed, appropriated and, yes, even resisted, translated.

DAVID LEAHY



Rawdon Wilson. *Shakespearean Narrative*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1995. Pp. 320. \$46.50.

As Rawdon Wilson suggests in his new book, Shakespeare's use and transformation of narrative and narrative techniques both in his "properly termed" narrative poetry and in his plays has received scant

attention from literary critics. In this interesting and long-overdue study, the narrative structures of *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Venus and Adonis*, and the *Sonnets* as well as the various narratives embedded in the plays themselves receive attention in terms of recent narrative theory and narratology, resulting in an argument which seeks to test the value of these theories as well as investigate their relevance to an interpretation of Shakespeare's works. Beginning with a brief analysis of the place of narrative in humanist education, Wilson divides up his study to look at how Shakespeare manipulates narrative conventions, creates various narrative voices and in turn conjures up the worlds and characters both invoked by a particular narrator and presented through particular narrative acts. In doing so, Wilson focuses our attention upon the hitherto neglected fact that "Shakespeare's plays contain many narratives: in the most urgent moments, characters interrupt dramatic action to tell stories that evoke a different action, a different place and time, even an absent fictional world, and they do this with an extensive and varied range of the storyteller's skills" (18). Wilson himself demonstrates an impressive grasp of and fluency in the complex fields of narrative theory and narratology, making them accessible to the general reader and fascinating to the specialist.

However, while Wilson is certainly correct to see Shakespeare's narratives as an unjustifiably neglected aspect of his plays, he tends to see this neglect in terms of an unquestioning and rather oppressive ideological conformity among critics who wish to construct Shakespeare entirely as a practical man of the theatre. To begin with, Wilson's reduction of the materialist and new historicist project to a fascination with "nails and planks, codpieces and plackets" (9) and to a blind commitment to Shakespeare as "a playwright with very practical objectives and concerns, perhaps a businessman with a hard eye cast towards his profits" (19) is altogether unfair and tends to ignore the richly varied questions and materials which such critics bring to bear upon Shakespeare's oeuvre. It also has the effect of vitiating his own argument: the reader is less likely to accept the division he sees promulgated by such critics between drama and narrative, since his own definition of drama seems strangely narrow. As a result, Wilson places limits on his own project which do not allow him to investigate some of the more fascinating questions which Shakespeare's use of narrative introduces into his various plays. While Wilson believes that "a discussion of Shakespeare that focuses on his narrative achievement may add little to the way one sees his stagecraft and his grasp of dramatic conventions, but it should add quite a bit to the understanding of a neglected dimension of his work" (18), this conviction comes under immense pressure from the limited and reductive definition of drama implied throughout. On the basis of this definition, for example, Wilson states that the dramatic uses of the play's embedded narratives amount to little more than the "obvious" (56): "summary" either of

"events that have occurred" or of "those that are presently taking place," providing "effective links between disparate parts, tying circumscribed action on the stage to the absent and invisible" (57); exposition to explain "why things have happened, or are happening, in certain ways"; exposition which "expand[s] the immediate action through historical, philosophical, mythological or literary allusion" (58); and characterization of "the teller of the tale" (59). While appreciating the value of Wilson's general aim—to identify and analyze each embedded story's "distinctively narrative features" (60)—his belief that "the neglected and underread . . . narrative elements" of Shakespeare's plays can and should be "separated from their dramatic contexts and discussed independently" seems unconvincing based on the poverty of his account here. Even if, as Wilson demonstrates, "all the embedded narratives in the plays are constituted by specific conventions" which "are not dramatic even if the narrative appears in, and functions superbly within, a drama" (61), it would seem that these narratives then need to be put back into their dramatic contexts and the plays themselves re-examined. Thus, Wilson's dismissing of the dramatic function of Prospero's narrative in 1.2 of *The Tempest* as simply expository seems itself an underreading of this scene's complex dynamic, its instantiation of story-telling and history-making (of oneself, of others, of nations) as tools of personal and political power.

Yet, at the same time, strewn throughout this analysis are a variety of incisive comments on and acute extended readings of the way such embedded narratives function dramatically within particular plays. As Wilson points out, "narratives are gripping; they smash down the barriers of obstinacy; they compel attention; they elicit assent" (27); in terms of both Shakespeare's narrative poetry and the plays' embedded narratives, then, stories function as "playful, heuristic exploration[s] of human potential and limitations" (31). He also implies, particularly in his reading of *Othello*, that embedded narratives also function as an index of the storyteller's power and control not just over the narrative itself but over its effects on the listener or listeners. Although Wilson states that "[he is] not interested in textual interpretation" but rather in the way "Shakespeare tells stories, in scores of invented voices, and how recent narrative theory provides an explanatory account of his practice" (44), there are some fascinating interpretations of particular narratives and at least some suggestion of the ways in which they affect the dramas in which they appear. In *Othello*, for example, Shakespeare's narrative skill and his interest in narrative in general is evinced by the way the play turns upon various acts of storytelling, particularly on Iago's creation of false narrative worlds through Shakespeare's brilliant deployment of "broken discourse" and the "displace[ment] of narrative functions onto nonlinguistic means": "To tell a story without actually telling it—that is, to beguile a narratee into inferring a story from discursive fragments—seems like a mark of great

narrative skill" (99). Likewise, Wilson's discussion of storytelling in the romances draws our attention to the way *The Winter's Tale* "turn[s] upon the narrativization of a radically absent story, [and thus] stands out as a play reflexively preoccupied with the problem of narrative" (100). Yet, Wilson's discussion of such "narrative reflexivity" (102) in the romances and in other plays, such as *Hamlet* and *Othello*, tends to emphasize the weaknesses of his approach at the same time that they offer interesting new ways of thinking about narrative moments. Because the romances, particularly *The Winter's Tale*, also contain important moments of what we might call dramatic reflexivity, moments which Wilson briefly and parenthetically acknowledges, the exploration of the connections between the dramatic and the narrative seem even more crucial. One also wonders what Wilson would make of Gower's constant reiteration of the limitations of narrative when compared to the enacting of dramatic action in *Pericles*, a romance which receives surprisingly short shrift in this study.

While Wilson's book makes the reader yearn for more of that interpretation which is admittedly not the author's aim, this book also contains many other pleasures, from the lucid discussion of theories of character construction (151-82) to the analysis of embedded narrative worlds as "set[ting] up contrasts, [and] explor[ing] imaginative alternatives" to the examination of the multiple ways in which Shakespeare's narrative "embedded discontinuously within the dramatic action . . . explodes outwardly into the play's world" (187). It will prove a valuable and thought-provoking resource for those interested in further exploring the narrative dimensions of early modern drama.

MARIE LOUGHLIN



Maria Lauret. *Liberating Literature: Feminist Fiction in America*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Pp. 241. \$62.95, \$22.99 pb.

The cover of *Liberating Literature: Feminist Fiction in America* offers a black and white photograph (1970ish) of a slender young woman standing in an open doorway. She is the image of the male-world revolutionary woman: she is young, sexy (but not cheap), solitary, possibly African American, tough, pretty, stylish, and armed with a big gun. Whose fantasy is she? Whose feminism does she represent?

Not that of the book Maria Lauret has written, with its earnest scholarly treatment of neglected feminist novelists. Lauret starts with writers of the 1930s, gives serious attention to the relationship of the Harlem Renaissance women to the leftist black men and the white women writers of the time, and reasserts some modes of principled feminist thought and writing of the last 60 or 70 years. Lauret is sensitive to the seductions of nostalgia and the charms of individualism. She watches for them in the novels she discusses, and identifies the