

Maddox's sense of humor and wit are also attractive. Examples are her comments regarding the use of the name George by Yeats and Lady Gregory and her description of Yeats as "phallically challenged" (298). Her parenthetical explanation of Bricriu's withered right hand in *The Only Jealousy of Emer* is hilarious.

This is clearly an author who has done careful research, and who loves the variety of life, the traditional subject matter of history (i.e. military and political and religious history) and the personal and domestic detail. Unfortunately, sometimes she loves not wisely, but too well, and the exotic and even outrageous are foregrounded. Nevertheless, this book is an enjoyable and informative read that will undoubtedly result in a good deal of rereading, uninventing and reinventing by both the naïve explorer of Irish Culture and the committed academic.

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Michael Simpson. *Closet Performances: Political Exhibition and Prohibition in the Dramas of Byron and Shelley*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998. pp. xvi, 470. \$55.00.

The Acknowledgments at the beginning of Michael Simpson's book commence as follows: "Rather than saluting the many who have selflessly assisted with this work, it would almost be more pleasurable to acknowledge those few who might have helped but did not, especially since they may even have the temerity not to know who they are. The corporate ethic and professional self-preservation unfortunately forbid such an indulgence, and I must settle for ingratitude" (xi). Unfortunately, both the ponderous style and the supercilious, archly contrarian persona are characteristic of the whole book, which is almost five hundred pages long.

The style may be mandated, in part, by the persona; it recalls the linguistic terrorism familiar from the days of deconstruction, a school to which Simpson owes a qualified allegiance. It is certainly marked by what Veblen might call conspicuous complexity — especially in a kind of expletive construction to which Simpson is addicted: e.g., "How Hunt's essay and the *Examiner* as a whole coordinate these contradic-

tory figures, if they do so at all, *is by* implying that each is a precondition of the other" (64-65); "What the political faction being addressed is not supposed to be beyond, however, *is* the irresistible notion that it is identifiable with that same disinterested reader who is beyond all seduction" (65); "Why *it is* drama instead of other artistic forms *that is* credited with such a capacity to condition both political states and civil societies *is because* drama is also said to comprise more of these forms than any other single form can manage to include" (70; emphasis added in each case; see also 78, 80, 82, 84, 97, 101, 103, 105, 107, 112, 121, 128, 137, 142, 154, 156, 157, 158, 162, 177, 184, 188, 189, 205, 206, 220, 231, 234, 235, 268, 270, 279, 280, 291, 292, 293, 295, 296, 315, 316, 319, 320, 322, 323, 334, 335, 341, 349, 355, 357, 358, 359, 363, 365, 366, 370, 374, 383, 386, 387, 388, 389, 393, 397, 404, 405, 407, 411, 412, 414). Simpson refers approvingly to the non-academic cultural work in which scholars might engage — "Journalism, part-time independent scholarship, and teaching outside higher education" (13) — but this is a book that only an academic could write, and only an academic would read.

The persona, in turn, may be mandated by the book's topic and approach (in person, Simpson is unassuming and pleasant). Simpson describes his project as, in part, to give Byron and Shelley's dramas "the kind of close reading that is routinely applied to other texts but that has never, until now, been applied to most of these plays" (21; see also 400). This is a surprising claim to make about *Manfred*, *Cain*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Cenci*, and *Hellas*; even *The Two Foscari*, the most neglected of the works Simpson discusses, has received attention in at least three recent articles and in books by Ehrstine (1976), Manning (1978), Martin (1982), and Lansdown (1992). Simpson describes his approach, and its limitations, frankly: "Since archival research tends to be labor-intensive in itself and to militate against a priori economies of time, like the tenure track, hermeneutic work with primary texts punctuated with divagations into the history of ideas or received social history offers itself as a more attractive formula for professional success and survival" (8). In other words, he is dealing with largely canonical texts, and he hasn't done any archival research, because it would have been too much work. It may take something of a contrarian to enter such a discursive field under such conditions. Simpson certainly adopts the time-honored contrarian strategy of opening a discursive space for himself by criticizing the critics who got there first: e.g., "Erdman does not understand the disclaiming of theatrical production to help project a materialization that is instead political" (173); "Endo . . . does not seriously countenance the text as a drama with a performative drive that is not necessarily related to that of explicit performative utterances contained in the play" (433n27); "Ferriss . . . does not acknowledge the function of the body in language, so crucial for both Kristeva and Lacan" (447n48). Formulations like these imply some-

thing fairly definite that the precursors have failed to understand, countenance, or acknowledge; contrary to the book's explicitly deconstructive agenda, they imply that the truth is one, and that Michael Simpson knows it. (Many of his critical citations, however, are less dogmatic and more dialogical.)

Simpson does make some striking and original claims. While acknowledging a few isolated predecessors like *Samson Agonistes* and *The Mysterious Mother*, he contends that the achievement of Byron and Shelley was largely responsible for the critical construction of the genre of closet drama. He argues that the dramas of Byron and Shelley revive, in coded form, the radical discourse of the 1790s (extinguished by the ideological climate of the intervening war years), and that they do so, in large part, through their ambiguous generic status. Considered as dramatic poems, they lay on their reader the burden of completing the political projects left incomplete by their tragic protagonists (in the most obvious case, of overthrowing the oligarchy that Marino Faliero fails to overthrow). Considered as (currently unstageable) plays, they look forward to a utopian moment in which they might be staged. (Simpson himself instigated the brilliant world-première performance of *Prometheus Unbound* in Austin in 1998.) Because they lay a political burden on the reader, "these plays are not, or are not only, aestheticizations of social problems, reproducing the mental politics of a Romantic ideology by supplying an imaginary solution in the form of the idealized literary figure of the reader"; but because they construct this reader more or less exclusively as an upper-class male, their "political function" is "inhibited" (412).

Simpson's argument is logically rather than chronologically organized. Introductory surveys of Romantic theatrical theory and radical discourse are followed by three long chapters on "The Matter of Political Drama" (the strongest part of the book), censorship and self-censorship, and the construction of the closeted reader. This organization largely prevents Simpson from showing how the plays of Byron and Shelley engage in dialogue with each other (as Charles E. Robinson has done) and with the developing political discourses of the period. Other anachronisms seem more serious. As an example of the "obsessive self-detection and consequent self-foreclosure" of "the texts of [the] wartime period," Simpson cites the way that "the marginal gloss shuts down any political implications in the verse" of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (116). Whether the gloss performs this function is a matter of interpretation; as a matter of fact, the verse was originally published, in 1798, during wartime, without the gloss; the gloss was added in 1817, two years after Waterloo. And the author of a 96-page chapter on "The Economic Comedy of (Self-)Censorship" should know that Byron did not destroy his "journals" in a gesture "redolent of Sardanapalus and Count Cenci" (415): he gave his memoirs to his friend Thomas Moore, to be published after his death;

Moore sold them to Byron's publisher John Murray, who allowed them to be burned at the request of Byron's friend John Cam Hobhouse, neither of whom had read them, over the objections of Moore, who had. When I was in London in 1987, doing archival research, Virginia Murray showed me the grate.

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Eleanor Ty. *Empowering the Feminine: The Narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West, and Amelia Opie, 1796-1812*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: U of Toronto P, 1998. Pp. x, 224, 5 ill. \$45.00.

In this well-written and cogently argued book, Eleanor Ty continues the ground-breaking examination of uncanonical female novelists she initiated in her first book, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries* (U of Toronto P, 1993). Here she turns her attention to the less well known novels and prose narratives of Mary Robinson, Jane West and Amelia Opie. She focuses on the ways in which these authors contest their society's construction of gender and female subjectivity, on the role played by female sexual desire in these novels, and on the evaluation of maternity and the exploration of the mother-daughter bond engaged in by these three writers. Ty's emphasis on the representations of the mother in these texts is particularly engaging and provides many valuable new insights into these three authors' fictions.

In sum, Eleanor Ty argues that Mary Robinson challenges any cultural notion of a female "essence," thus anticipating contemporary feminist resistances to an essentialist definition of woman; that Jane West finally empowers the woman only within the realm of domesticity; and that Amelia Opie rewrites her society's dominant construction of the ideal woman as "delicate and ornamental, hence weak and useless except as alluring mistresses" (179), putting the concept of the fallen woman "under erasure" (142). Each of these women writers, Ty insists, offer accounts that finally empower the feminine.

Ty begins with four chapters on Mary Robinson. Her reading of the *Memoirs* recapitulates the fine essay on Robinson's concept of the