# BOOK REVIEWS

Donald, James. (1992). *Sentimental education: Schooling, popular culture and the regulation of liberty.* New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 204 pp., $17.95 (softcover).

James Donald takes his title from Flaubert's novel of the same name, but unlike Flaubert's Moreau, who "remains under the tutelage of conventionally banal fantasies" (p. 175), Donald spends his sentimental journey peeling back the layers of what it means — or what it should mean — to be an educated citizen in a democratic society. He tells us that his work is "largely autobiographical" and is based on his attempts to "come to terms with two experiences": teaching in a London comprehensive school during the 1970s and working in the area of cultural theory during the 1980s, "the era of high Thatcherism." The first caused him to ask Tolstoy's question, "Who has the right to teach?", which he examines here, rejecting the usual approach that education is "part of a dialectic of repression and liberation." The second experience led to the earlier formulations of those chapters that "reflect a desire to understand the cultural roots, the radical ambition and social consequence of this curious episode in British political life," revised here to focus on "broader explanatory themes" (p. x). What emerges is a cultural-historical examination of what has shaped and what continues to shape modern education — largely modern British education — from a point of view formed by "Althusserian Marxism, Lancanian psychoanalysis, semiotics, and Brechtian aesthetics" (p. x).

Donald's method is to shift the focus between education and popular culture with the aim of offering "new and perhaps unexpected perspectives on the terrain and limits of both domains" (p. 3). Donald sees *Sentimental Education* as a contribution to the perennial questions: "What sort of an institution is education?" "How is it related to the art of government?" and

"Why are education and government both so difficult not only to do but to define?" Unfortunately, this search and the juxtaposition of material are not particularly productive. The principal conclusions appear to be:

- It is especially important to heed different, marginal, abnormal, and transgressive voices that question the "we" of political dialogue and the "I" of agency (p. 178).

- A new style of political judgment is needed, calling for the sustained critique of regimes of truth, the patient and practical reform of existing institutions, and yet also a political imagination, which, so far, looks more than anything like a witty and subversive science fiction (p. 179).

In short, readers who expect substantive conclusions or directions for change will be disappointed: The promise of chapter titles (e.g., chapter 2, "How English is It? Popular Literature and National Culture") is not realized in the chapter conclusions, and the anticipated enlightenment sparked by the proposed interplay of education and culture does not materialize.

The problem is partly to do with Donald's paucity of references. While he quotes copiously from theorists such as Michael Foucault, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Jean-François Lyotard, he neglects much of the current research and debate, as well as reports on education; also, his definition of popular culture (and its content) seems restricted and insular. In education, for example, he seems unaware of the work by North Americans (Apple, Giroux, Goodlad). His deliberations circle for the most part around Hirsch and Dewey. Discussion at the level of high theory is well and good, but to maintain pertinence some grounding is necessary. For example, the great agonizing about education and its purpose that has provoked report after report, particularly in the United States, goes unmentioned. Similarly, in the realm of popular culture his extensive material on Fu Manchu and vampire films, while interesting enough in itself, is not perhaps the most relevant or conducive to imaginative leaps on issues not only of the future but also of the present. The limits on popular culture imposed here lead to a retrospective perception of

education. The place of broadcasting in popular culture, for example, is not only confined mostly to the BBC but also to a dated explanation of what is going on in radio and TV internationally.

A persistent annoyance is that the language gets in the way in dealing with Donald's ideas and reference field, limited though the latter may be. Such inflated sentences as the following appear to be more a form of rhetorical credentialing than of communication.

> If you reject the fictional "parent" of populist conservatism, the progressive orthodoxies of emancipation and self-realization, and also the cynicism of aimless reformism, what is left is the agonistic dialogue as itself constituting authority in a democratic community. (p. 170)

The above suggests our stance as readers and our expectations and we concede that the text may allow other, friendlier readings. It may, for example, be viewed in Barthes's terms as "a tissue of discontinuous texts" by those readers who see this book as an implicit challenge to coauthorship. Simon Frith, for example, contends that Donald "sounds a refreshingly caustic note among the usual dull certainties of current education debate," and lauds Donald's enthusiasm for "education as a site of argument — about history, about language, about the very idea of the democratic subject" (book jacket). The congeries in Donald's presentation, indeed, may lead — in seminar fashion — to creative and productive thought, perhaps for those in cultural theory or media studies, but the base text itself offers little that is provocative to those knowledgeable about educational practice.

Further, readers who have read Donald's other writings may have a feeling of déjà vu. In the author's words, five of the seven chapters "draw on material" first published elsewhere, two chapters of books that Donald has coedited and three journal articles. The opening chapter, for example, is a revision of a chapter found in Beechey and Donald, *Subjectivity and Social Relations* (Open University Press, 1985), containing almost identical illustrations, a word-for-word introduction, and many lightly revised paragraphs. There is no reason why juxtaposing of previously published

material could not work, but here it just does not work because the interplay lacks focus and pertinence and cumulative impact.

For the record, *Sentimental Education* is carefully indexed, largely by proper nouns, but also by concept (such as *kitsch*, *management of the soul*, and *vocationalism*). Documentation includes 14 pages of "Notes" (pp. 180-193, divided by chapter), but not a bibliography. Those accustomed to reading works documented using the APA style may find the lack of dates of text citations disconcerting and the consequent need to flip to Notes irritating. Of the 15 illustrations in the text, five are line drawings which help explain concepts; ten are photographs, generally cosmetic, seldom referred to in Donald's discussions.

To conclude, the pastiche method of presentation — the compilation of earlier writing into a book with a new label — is not necessarily unrewarding. When it works, the collected pieces generate an electricity that energizes the whole, presenting new insights, a focus, or a synthesis much greater than the sum of the individual parts. This does not occur with Donald's collection of material.

Joe Belanger and Roy Bentley
University of British Columbia

## Howard, V.A. (Ed.). (1990). *Varieties of thinking.* New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 176 pp., $35.95 (hardcover).

The editor of *Varieties of Thinking* chose eight articles from scholars connected with the Philosophy of Education Research Centre (PERC) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education for inclusion in this collection on thinking in education. With the exception of Kenneth Hawes's