

NOTES ON CURRENT BOOKS

LITERARY STUDIES

Words Alone: The Poet T.S. Eliot, by Denis Donoghue.

Eliot has been ill handled in recent years, perhaps inevitably so, given his dominance at mid-century. And perhaps it was inevitable that this backlash would induce its own backlash, with scholars springing vigorously to Eliot's defense. While much of this reaction is marred by defensiveness as much as the accusations are drawn with a prosecutor's pen, these defenses have also produced some remarkable works of genuine and communicable intelligence—partial keys into Eliot's cryptogrammatical poems. Donoghue's book takes its place beside Christopher Ricks' *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* as exemplary among these. Focusing, as the title implies, on the language, the "words alone" of Eliot's writing, Donoghue argues that Eliot's writing models a certain form of estrangement from language—or makes us recognize an estrangement always there—that is communicated through the radiant hieroglyphics of his language. In-between discussions of many poems (including a happily thorough analysis of the "Four Quartets," and even a just treatment of "La Figlia Che Piange.") we get to see a meticulous mind at work among the briar-patches that are Eliot's poems. Donoghue has also managed to set Eliot in a conversation with Wallace Stevens which, admittedly, seems a bit unfair—Stevens was a very pretty writer, but his rumored "philosophical" sensibilities were all, like his favored idealism, superficial. Indeed here as elsewhere one senses that a bit of score-settling has infiltrated Donoghue's agenda, perhaps without his full awareness. In any event this is a wonderful book, with much to recommend it. When the recovery of Eliot gets underway—as it inevitably will—in the near future, the first explorers back to the scene will find in this book a cache full of supplies on which they will gratefully draw.

Yale \$26.95

Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature 1830–1930, edited and introduced by Monika M. Elbert.

Monika Elbert, associate professor of English at Montclair State University, has brought together a collection of essays by feminist critics pairing female and male authors in order to reveal the artificiality of the barrier between domesticity and the male public sphere. Although these essays are not exactly groundbreaking—questioning the legitimacy of the "cult of true womanhood" is well-trod ground by now—each one aims to re-envision historical and pedagogical misperceptions of women's exclusion from the public sphere. The essays themselves are clearly written and well-argued—of particular interest are Lucinda Damon-Bach's study of Susan Warner's novelistic critique of Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and Dawn Keetley's socio-historical investigation of Mary Grove Nichol's spirited response to the medical profession's construction of female invalidism—thus making this a useful text for general studies of the period.

Alabama \$39.95

Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder, by Isaiah Berlin.

Henry Hardy, one of Isaiah Berlin's literary trustees, has brought together in one volume several of Berlin's essays on three of the most idiosyncratic but also eminently insightful thinkers of the 18th century. Berlin's power to portray intellectual figures both in the context of their social milieu and according to their own personal development is strikingly evident here. Hovering in tone somewhere between intellectual biography, didactic survey, and critical investigation, Berlin sets out to discuss three thinkers who have been largely slighted by standard histories of philosophy, but who have gained prominence in recent years thanks to their critical stance toward Enlightenment rationalism which accords well with similar critiques coming from many fields in contemporary theory. Vico's extraordinary sociological genealogy is really the hero here (nearly half the book is accorded to him and it), although Berlin displays a singular respect and even reverence for the uniquely

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opaque and even bizarre style of Herder's anti-Kantian teacher Hamann. Herder himself merits only a relatively brief chapter sandwiched in between the two more flamboyantly engaging figures. Berlin's prose is as clear in these discussions as anywhere, and this volume should present an excellent introduction to anyone for whom the 18th century means philosophically only the luminary figures of Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Kant.

Princeton \$45 cloth, \$16.95 paper

Lost Words: Narratives of Language and the Brain, 1825–1926, by J. S. Jacyna.

This book concerns a seemingly narrow subject: a century of medical writings on "aphasia," a condition involving the loss of the ability to form spoken words. But the author, a historian of medicine with a penchant for literary criticism, has a large goal in mind. J. S. Jacyna's real subject is how the history of conceptions of language and the history of the study of the brain became rhetorically intertwined beginning in the early 19th century and how the resulting discourse has affected modern understandings of the self. His detailed readings of the narrative strategies employed in often obscure medical texts will probably only be of real concern to specialists in 19th-century medicine and, especially, the history of neurology. But as the conclusion to this book makes abundantly clear, anyone interested in comprehending the establishment of the material conditions of language and, ultimately, the elevated status of "the brain" in modern culture will benefit from knowing more about the creation of aphasiology within a small circle of 19th-century doctors.

Princeton \$45

Postslavery Literatures in the Americas: Family Portraits in Black and White, by George B. Handley.

Handley is interested in literary representations of the complex social and political relations which followed the abolition of slavery in the Americas. More specifically, he wants to contest the idea that histories of slavery can only be comprehended as part of a national history.

While acknowledging that slavery existed in very different forms throughout the Americas, he argues compellingly that postslavery writing from different locations and moments in time demands a rigorous comparativist approach. What emerges from this analysis are "uncannily similar postslavery cultural quandaries" in seemingly disparate writers. Handley covers roughly 1880 to the present, and compares fairly well-studied American novelists, like Toni Morrison and William Faulkner, to lesser-known writers from Cuba and the Caribbean, like Cirilo Villaverde and Rosario Ferré (many of whom he translates himself). His readings are situated in a carefully researched historical and political context and make a strong case for a more international approach to the study of slavery.

Virginia \$57.50 cloth, \$18.50 paper

What Makes Us Think?: A Neuroscientist and a Philosopher Argue About Ethics, Human Nature, and the Brain, by Jean-Pierre Changeux and Paul Ricoeur, translated by M.B. DeBevoise.

In the grand French tradition of public, intellectual debate comes this latest dialogue between two of the country's foremost thinkers: hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur and neuroscientist Jean-Pierre Changeux. At stake, human cognition, consciousness itself, our very identity. The book, as skillfully translated by DeBevoise, is intoxicatingly dense and provocative. Reading Changeux and Ricoeur skirmish over this contested ground is like listening to Rachmaninoff's brilliantly difficult Third Piano Concerto. This is not, however, a book for those new to the subject. Ricoeur and Changeux are formidable thinkers, and those not familiar with the philosophical history from which these two so often draw may find themselves left behind.

Princeton \$29.95

Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and the Other Arts, by Daniel Albright.

The general themes of this book are the coordination of artistic media and collaboration across the arts in modernism. Daniel Albright surveys a large field, taking up the Brecht-Weill