

# REVIEWS

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**The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline**, by Robert Scholes. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, 203 pp., \$20.00 hardbound.

*Marc Berley*

Should English professors stop teaching literature and start teaching bumper stickers and "television texts"? Absolutely, according to Robert Scholes, who is Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities at Brown University. The rise of English as a literature-based field of academic study at American colleges and universities is, in his view, a suspect success-story "that contains within it the seeds" of an imminent, and potentially fortunate, fall.

A collection of "separate but interrelated essays" (five chapters and five "assignments" designed to link them), *The Rise and Fall of English* describes the rise of English as "closely linked to the fall of classical studies . . . and to the near obliteration of rhetoric as a college subject." "In the beginning there were no English professors," writes Scholes, but later the study of English began to replace classical studies. In 1817, at Yale, the study of English meant a professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory. But by 1839 "its title was changed to Rhetoric and the English Language, and in 1863 to Rhetoric and English Literature." And, "in the evolution of this chair," Scholes argues, "can be read the fortune of English as a field of study." As the rise of English sealed the death of Greek and Latin studies, "literature achieve[d] equal status with rhetoric." Eventually, the study of literature replaced rhetoric as the main purpose of English departments. According to Scholes, the study of literature (which he considers passive "consumption") is not only far less valuable than the study of rhetoric (the

"production" of "texts"), but the root cause of the decline of English.

The context of *The Rise and Fall of English* is the culture war raging in America's English departments: liberal arts traditionalists who understand why majors should read Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the Romantics versus postmodernists, multiculturalists, and theorists who argue, variously, that the traditional curriculum is arbitrary, oppressive, and irrelevant. Scholes takes what he touts as a "militant middle position," offering a proposal not for saving the "field" of English literature as we have known it, but for "reconstructing" English as a "discipline." This means replacing "the canon of texts with a canon of methods," reconstructing English as the rhetorical study of "textual production."

Without change, Scholes warns, English is likely to go the way of classical studies. Abiding cultural shifts, ridding English departments of the "coverage" of literature is Scholes's plan for making the fall of English "a fortunate one." We must, he argues, "let go of the Story of English," ending the requirement that English majors study *Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf.

Scholes's anticanonical bent is clear throughout, but he does embrace tradition in Chapter 2, a moving critique of deconstruction (which denies the possibility of truth) and neopragmatism (according to which *true* means "whatever is good for *us* to believe"). Scholes asserts the importance of the "love of truth": "if we teachers of the humanities cannot claim what [one] Victorian sage called 'the love of truth' as part of our enterprise, that enterprise is in serious trouble." The title of Chapter 2, "No dog would go on living like this," invokes Nietzsche:

how easy it is for [man] . . . grown accustomed to seeking the for and against in all things, for him to lose sight of truth altogether and then be obliged to live without

courage or trust, in denial and doubt, agitated and discontented, half hopeful, expecting to be disappointed: 'No dog would go on living like this!'

Nevertheless, Scholes observes, "[p]owerful voices in our field have taught us" to be "embarrassed by the word *truth*, and thus either to avoid it or condemn it." And this brings trouble. The inability to "make truth claims" led even Jacques Derrida to declare: "We feel bad about ourselves." And, "the proposal that we consider as true whatever is good for *us* to believe turns out to be bad for *us* to believe," in part, Scholes concludes, "because it is useless when we need it most."

So much for sobering thoughts. For the rest of the book, Scholes pursues his own brand of accommodating pragmatism, offering proposals that would further turn students into dogs without hopes. Scholes proposes popular culture as better "textual" food for thought than "the corrupting carcass of Western Civilization," seeking to protect students from bombardment by the same Great Books that gave him his "love of truth" and verbal skill.

Scholes's is surely not a "middle position," and is in many respects more muddled than "militant." The ten essays (some "re-re-framed") are to a degree more "separate" than "interrelated." Still, Scholes's has a main point: "The process of reading should take precedence over the coverage of texts in the English curriculum. By process I mean learning how to read closely . . . how to situate a text in relation to other texts (intertextuality), how to situate a text in relation to culture, society, the world, (extratextuality)." Scholes would replace *Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf with "something more possible and more practical," a curriculum from which students will "emerge" as "no longer rough beasts but textual animals." He con-

cludes (without giving evidence) that "the corrupting carcass of Western Civilization" makes students rough beasts. His reconstruction of English as a discipline based on "textuality" will, he argues, enable students to manage "those textual processes through which our culture and our actual society are constituted and preserved." He calls this ability "textual power."

Exactly what is a *text*? Pretty much anything. It can still be Shakespeare (though perhaps only *Othello* will be assigned, "issues of cultural conflict" being "in the foreground"), but Scholes's curriculum focuses on "voices" and "cultures," popular and modern. It includes "television texts" and bumper stickers, the latter likely especially inane, judging from the two examples here, one of which reads: "If you don't like my driving, call 1-800-EAT-SHIT." Scholes's page-long exegesis (a disgruntled professional driver speaks his mind on the vehicle he owns) seems easy enough for college students to manage on their own. If they cannot, moreover, it's even less clear why Scholes would transform traditional College Composition courses into something "that might be called Language and Human Subjectivity," with the linguist Emil Benveniste, Hegel, Freud, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Lacan as required reading (difficult Western writers, incidentally, though apparently not responsible for the unidentified rot Scholes so broadly condemns).

Are students who need help in "textualizing" bumper stickers really ready to race off the road with high-octane theory? Scholes doesn't say, but he does assert that bumper stickers get students interested in "textuality." In contrast, "Great Books and Western Civ have no disciplinary focus and hence no academic core." One cannot put a classic author directly into a student's hands, Scholes

argues. Rather, teachers must use recent “cultural situation[s]” and “texts” to whet “the appetite of students for earlier literature.”

In the end, Scholes recommends “a larger set of requirements for the [English] major, though not more courses taught by the English department.” His proposal—bumper stickers, “television texts,” a few culturally strategic great books (“coverage” being forbidden), and a lax notion of interdisciplinary rigor thrown in—eviscerates the English department, thus effecting a fortunate fall.

In the middle of the book, after referring in refrain to “the rotting carcass of Western Civilization,” Scholes impertunes: “This may at first seem like just another assault on Western Civ and the Great Books, but I ask for your patience.” Patient as one may be, it is another attack, but with a twist—Scholes wants to convince us that he is the savior of the Western tradition.

Scholes doesn’t see that just as the rise of English killed classical studies, so the movement to “television texts” and bumper stickers will kill off rather than revive English. It will be hard to bequeath “textual power” to students who do not have Scholes’s old-fashioned learning.

*Textuality* may be his shibboleth, but Scholes is himself at his best when analyzing with passion the great books of English and the Western tradition. Valuable, too, are his sturdier pedagogical suggestions. One is to reduce the number of Ph.D. students by half, making each study twice as long, combining attention to research and teaching. Another is to pay far more attention to student writing, ending the practice of relegating its teaching to graduate students and overworked adjuncts. Scholes

knows a lot about what has made English departments the messes they so frequently are, but for all he sees, Scholes is blind to ten times more. His account often fudges reality: “What this society *wants* of those who graduate from its schools and colleges with degrees in the humanities . . . are, at worst, docility and grammatical competence, at best, reliability and a high level of textual skills.” At worst? For a large number of college students, even at elite schools, “grammatical competence” has become a pipe dream.

An author steeped in and provoked by Great Books who can no longer see that “coverage” has a pedagogical value, Scholes betrays throughout an odd ingratitude that is linked to his blindness. He refers derisively to the “gift of literature” his “teachers tried to give” him, likening it to the furniture in his parents’ bourgeois home. “Everything in this book, I want to say unequivocally, is motivated by my love of the English language and my concern for the students who must learn to use it as well as they can,” Scholes writes. He “wants” to say “unequivocally,” but he equivocates. (Before going to print, Scholes should have read this book for what he calls “gaps”—those places where rhetoric betrays.) As Scholes writes, “[w]hen academic discourse turns away from truthfulness and embraces fashion, it requires a forgetting or ignorance of its own past, in order to achieve a spurious originality.” Most important, “radical critiques, made from safe and tenured positions, may lead students to take chances that can damage their lives,” and “those of us who make them are practicing hypocriticism.” All of this applies glaringly to Scholes.

Today’s students do not read and write enough. Period. This very large problem will not be solved with bumper stickers and “television texts” that turn students to

their least challenged selves. Better to give them the works of great, alien minds.

To see the rise of English as containing the seed of its destruction, Scholes must distort both its development and current condition. Scholes's straw man (erected in Chapter 1) is the claim that the "Story of English" seeks *only* to instill a religious reverence for secular texts, "to tell believers how things are—and how to live." This went out a long time ago. Even the most traditional English professors today do not "use" literature to "inculcate." They read writers such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton in ways that invite the mind to be critical and the heart to be vulnerable.

If one were forced to reduce Scholes's book to a bumper sticker—one cannot, of course, and that is the point—it would read thus: "Literature killed English. Text rules. Honk if you agree." Unfortunately, many professors will be honking, as well as graduate-student-drivers who should instead be clinging to a surer road.

Exactly how did English fall? Scholes does not articulate an adequate answer. But he does, inadvertently, provoke a question that directs us to an answer: How did the same guy who wrote Chapter 2 write the rest of the book? That's the real question. How did professors raised on Great Books come in the same life to reject them for the "text" of bumper stickers? English didn't begin to fall back in 1863. It fell on the watch of professors like Scholes. Deep down, he knows it. The problem is, he needs to call the fall he helped cause "fortunate." No, he doesn't have the rhetorical power of Milton's Satan. But he'll do his damage nonetheless.

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**Shattering the Myths: Women in Academe**, by Judith Glazer-Raymo. Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, 237 pp., \$38.00 hardbound.

*Patricia Hausman*

In the opening pages of *Shattering the Myths*, Judith Glazer-Raymo describes her transformation from suburban housewife and mother to professor of education at Long Island University. It is an inspiring story, told in a straightforward yet engaging style.

The progression of events that sent Glazer-Raymo steadily up the ladder of higher education began with a volunteer position in her local PTA. From there, she was elected to the school board, and eventually became its first female president. During her service, she developed a proposal for a new community high school and won much acclaim for convincing reluctant officials to adopt it. With her growing reputation came an invitation from a university president to join his staff. It was but the first of a long and impressive list of professional positions she would hold in the field of education.

After earning a doctoral degree in higher education administration at New York University, Glazer-Raymo was sought out again—this time by the dean of education at Long Island University. She was hired into a tenure-track position at its C.W. Post campus, where today she holds the rank of full professor.

Her account is also intriguing for what it does not contain. Glazer-Raymo mentions not a single incident of discrimination against her during a career spanning more than thirty years. Nor does she describe unkind words or disapproving glances from male colleagues resentful of her presence or influence. Given her

many successes, one might expect her to praise, if only faintly, the system that has allowed her star to rise.

Instead, she damns it with none at all. After noting the many milestones in her professional life, she informs us that these experiences "have evoked a more scholarly interest in the gendered construction of the academy [and] the ways in which the policy environment impedes women's ability to eradicate barriers to their advancement."

It is disheartening to see a woman who has not lacked for recognition or opportunity embrace the language of oppression chic, but in doing so, she prepares the reader for what is to come. Her purpose, she says, is to examine "the issues that continue to deny women full economic, political, and social equality." Primarily, she seeks to do justice to her title—that is, to "shatter the myth" that females in the United States have achieved anything close to academic equity with males.

Unfortunately, the statistics she presents do more to undermine her case than to support it. She marshals a great deal of data, most of it showing that during recent decades, females have made extraordinary gains in dozens of academic and professional fields. Though the figures show females outnumbering males at every academic level but the doctorate, Glazer-Raymo maintains that serious inequities remain. Her argument rests largely on the underrepresentation of women in some of the more lucrative disciplines as well as in the upper echelons of academia.

Of the many statistics she cites, a few raise questions worthy of further inquiry. In the aggregate, however, her data fail to convince. Although Glazer-Raymo is not alone in viewing sex disparities in earnings and rank as proof of discrimination,

these are insufficient indicators. Fair evaluation of these data requires control for an array of factors. Among them are time in the workforce, publications and their influence, and grants and honors received.

Similarly, the underrepresentation of females among deans and top administrators cannot, in and of itself, prove discrimination. These figures must be viewed in the context of how many females actually seek these positions, and, of course, their qualifications relative to other applicants.

Admittedly, Glazer-Raymo has on her side numerous reports that contain conclusions similar to her own, and she highlights some of their findings. However, this discussion does little to strengthen her case, for it is evident that she has paid scant attention to those with alternate interpretations. Accordingly, by the middle of the book, one cannot help but conclude that this is a work more in the tradition of advocacy than scholarship.

Particularly striking is Glazer-Raymo's lack of attention to factors that logically contribute to sex segregation in fields such as engineering and the physical sciences. Individuals who choose these fields generally have an intense theoretical orientation, a preference for working with things rather than people, and strong spatial ability. A large literature in psychology reveals striking differences favoring males on all of these. This is not to deny that some females have these characteristics, but simply to acknowledge that the pattern occurs far more frequently among males.

In Glazer-Raymo's view, persistent sex differences such as these are "culturally constructed." Extensive research contradicts this notion. Spatial ability is a case in point. Cultural factors make an unlikely explanation for the fluctuations in spatial ability seen over the course of the female

menstrual cycle or the decline observed when male-to-female transsexuals receive large doses of estrogens. These are but a few of the findings consistent with hormonal explanations for sex differences in spatial ability. Moreover, male superiority in navigational skill (an analog of human spatial ability) is the norm in a number of species. Feminists who deny any biological basis for sex differences would do well to identify the hegemonic patriarchy responsible for this phenomenon.

The exclusion of contrary information continues to be a troubling feature throughout the book. Convinced that females suffer while males thrive, Glazer-Raymo appears almost incapable of acknowledging any example of the former prevailing over the latter. She recounts instances of women allegedly denied tenure because their research challenged prevailing orthodoxy—as if men have not met similar fates. Indeed, before concluding that the academy consistently caters to males, Glazer-Raymo would do well to consider the experiences of men who have been terminated at the behest of feminist faculty.

In the same vein, Glazer-Raymo overlooks the power that academic feminists have wielded by promoting and exploiting campus speech codes. There can be little doubt that males have been heavily overrepresented among those charged under these codes. Prosecutions against feminists have been all but nonexistent. Yet, a central feature of their discourse is its obligatory invective against men—precisely the kind of commentary that would bring swift prosecution if uttered by males in reference to females.

Though Glazer-Raymo's effort to "shatter the myths" falls short, she nonetheless bases her primary argument in facts and presents it in clear and readable prose. The rhetoric of radical feminism surfaces

from time to time in her first five chapters, but does not overwhelm a style that is generally free of obscurantism. The final chapter and conclusions stand in contrast. After reviewing the work of various commissions on the status of women in the academy, Glazer-Raymo delves into the strange world of the postmodern professoriat.

Here the language of extremist feminism takes over as Glazer-Raymo traces the evolution of its mission to transform the university. The decision to reassess teaching practices, she explains, is rooted in a recognition that "academic institutions are gendered organizations, that gendered subtexts are embedded in academic departments and disciplines, that the epistemological development of students is not a gender-neutral process, and that . . . variations in gender motivation are due less to gender differences than to disparate social norms and expectations."

She also makes clear her sympathies with those who have found the solution to these vexing problems in feminist pedagogy. It is a strange endorsement from an author whose argument thus far has depended heavily on statistical evidence. Glazer-Raymo describes feminists as opposed to "positivistic methodologies," yet such approaches are the stock-in-trade of those who collect the data essential to her cause. In this regard, she also fails to explain why feminists reject positivist methodologies but readily accept their fruits—including the computers, software, and related technologies employed to disseminate their harsh criticisms of Western science. Nor does she reconcile feminism's complaints about the underrepresentation of women in certain sciences with its professed disdain for these disciplines. Presumably those who reject the scientific method would find this low participation of women to their liking.

In this final chapter, Glazer-Raymo also shares her own foray into the therapeutic classroom. She describes her four-year case study in feminist pedagogy, undertaken to examine "reflective journal writing as an approach to self-knowledge" among students pursuing teaching careers. All of the buzzwords are here: "consciousness-raising" and "critical voice," the "construct[ion] of meaning" and "attitudes of powerlessness, anger, ambivalence, and confusion." Absent is objective evidence that the teaching skills of the participants were enhanced in any meaningful way. Surely those who advocate radical changes in educational practices should demonstrate their value using methodologies that others can replicate.

In her conclusions, Glazer-Raymo looks to the future of women in academe. Her forecast is bleak. She sees the growing resistance to affirmative action and the "corporatization" of the university as dangers that threaten to erode female progress. Here, the language of victimhood reaches a crescendo, with Glazer-Raymo declaring women to be "largely powerless within the university organization" and dependent on "male leadership to bring about substantive changes in their situation." Women spend more time on teaching than research, she asserts, because "the prophecy [that they will do so] determines the outcome, reinforcing women's lower status." Her words confirm an uneasy feeling that one has had all along. It is that she sees women as so ineffectual and easily manipulated that they cannot resist unwarranted stereotypes, use their time as they see fit, or remove obstacles from their paths.

This raises some intriguing questions. If a male-dominated society is intent on impeding the progress of women, why has it dealt them a better hand on many characteristics important to academic success?

Among other things, the average female has better verbal fluency, reading comprehension, and study skills than the average male. Similarly, if the system seeks to thwart females, why do they outnumber males in the top decile of writing ability by a factor of 2.6? If unflattering attitudes toward women are drummed into the collective subconscious night and day, why do males and females alike report more negative attitudes about the former than the latter? And if males determine who will have the ingredients that facilitate success, why have they burdened themselves with disproportionate rates of learning disabilities, stuttering, dyslexia, mental retardation, and attention deficit disorders?

The answer is obvious. Males simply do not have the vast powers that feminists attribute to them. Those who maintain otherwise have themselves fallen for a myth. It is one that, upon objective analysis, shatters far more readily than any of those allegedly debunked in this passionate but disappointing work.

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**The Twilight of the Intellectuals: Culture and Politics in the Era of the Cold War**, by Hilton Kramer. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999, 363 pages, \$27.50 hardbound.

*Sol Schindler*

*Merriam-Webster* defines an intellectual as one engaged in activities regarding the

creative use of the intellect. The *O.E.D.* says he is given to pursuits that exercise the intellect. Both these definitions are clear, defining a person by what he does. *Larousse* goes along with the British and American definitions but adds a third: *Personne qui a un gout predominant pour les choses de l'esprit*. No one can argue with these definitions. They are succinctly written and easily comprehensible. But in the United States during the middle decades of the century the word, somewhat foreign to ordinary American speech, had certain partisan connotations. Thus, *so-called intellectual* became one word, used by the successors to the nineteenth-century know-nothings to show that we are all equally intelligent and equally ignorant. *Left-wing intellectual* was also one word for much the same reason: it meant he was not one of us, the majority.

In France, strangely, the third *Larousse* definition did not necessarily apply. If one had managed to gain a baccalaureate enabling one to teach, one was by definition an intellectual regardless of where one's taste lay. In the United States the reverse was true. School teachers were not intellectuals. Although they knew many good things, they were only school teachers. Professors of humanities in colleges were, however, clearly intellectuals.

Among the educated elite, contrary to popular usage, *intellectual* became a treasured word. It meant one was educated, cultured, and of profound moral worth. One felt deeply about the important things of life. In consequence, an intellectual lived more intensely and had a richer life than his less well-endowed neighbor. The word *culture* carried with it that Central European aura of mental and spiritual achievement which brings such pleasure to life. To be cultured was an essential part of being an

intellectual. One could not be one without being the other.

Intellectuals were also liberal in their politics. They believed in progress (progress meant simply that life would continue to get better and more just), and since all new ideas seemed to come from the left, they looked to the left for direction. The phrase *right-wing intellectual* did not exist.

The intellectual, as could be expected, was revolted by the crudities of the American scene, the inanity of the movies, and the philistinism and general unsophistication of American life. In today's world some of the language then used sounds rather quaint. There was much criticism on Broadway of people "selling out" to Hollywood, of people lowering their aesthetic standards just to make more money than normal, more money than they really needed.

The American intellectuals of the mid century were a bit pompous perhaps, a bit too much taken with themselves, rather politically naïve even if politically active, and since New York was the magnet that drew them all, a bit too insular, even parochial. But they were certainly energetic and creative, with an intense commitment to progressive causes whether cultural or political.

It is of this group of intellectuals that Hilton Kramer, editor of the *New Criterion* and thus a certified intellectual, looks back and writes, in a collection of essays, on their general condition.

In his introduction the author quotes Raymond Aron's comments on the two avant-gardes, Marxism and modernism, the dream of a socialist utopia and the promise of unending innovation in the arts. Both these movements were tremendously influential though hardly compatible, and in writing of them, and their inevitable decline, he gives us a kind of



intellectual history of the period encompassed by the cold war.

He begins with two essays on the Alger Hiss-Whittaker Chambers controversy. He cites with approval Sidney Hook's comment that Chambers's book, *Witness*, was "one of the most significant auto-biographies of the twentieth century" for the insights it offered on "progressive" thinking, and for the paradoxes it revealed. Chambers himself had perhaps the best perspective on the affair. The author quotes his comment to Bennett Cerf: "We're cast wrong. I look like a slob, so I should be the villain. Hiss, the handsome man who knows all the society people, is the born hero. If it was the other way around, nobody would pay any attention to the story; but because of the way we look, all of you people think he must be telling the truth."

Chambers did in fact look like a slob and Hiss was, indeed, handsome and well groomed. He had a charming, attractive wife and said all the right things convincingly. He was helped by the character of his accusers. Chief among them was the House Un-American Activities Committee, described by some as the one agency in Washington most suspect for its political motives. Diana Trilling wrote that anyone who "thinks Hiss guilty but would still think of himself as liberal (must) separate himself from his undesirable allies." This, of course, was necessary, but it was exceedingly difficult for most liberals to appear to be in agreement with people they despised. Thus, they continued to champion Hiss's case despite the overwhelming evidence against him. Reason, the exalted *sine qua non* of every liberal, faltered when brought into conflict with cultural antipathies.

Since these essays were written before the impeachment trial of President Clinton, the author could not point out

the eerie similarity of the two affairs. Virtually everyone in Congress along with a decisive majority of the general public agreed that President Clinton had lied, and had also behaved in a manner that merited censure. Yet the charges brought against him were dismissed for much the same reasons liberals could not consider Hiss guilty. One could not appear to agree with his enemies.

Most of the essays under review focus on only one person. Some of them were communists (Stalinists), others liberal, but all by definition were intellectuals. In an early chapter Mr. Kramer reviews the life of Josephine Herbst, a Stalinist writer of the 1940s, whose reputation the new left in the 1970s made some attempt to revive. The author came to know her well in her old age, and his account is always sympathetic and considerate. Nevertheless, he writes that the necessity for her to lie about the Soviet Union and to cover up its deceptions and hypocrisy led to unhappiness. She was bitter not because she was a communist, but because she was a communist and knew too well the failure of the ideology she subscribed to.

His account of Lillian Hellman, another Stalinist, is neither sympathetic nor considerate. He takes pains to show that her memoirs were really fiction, and implicitly makes the point that lying and Stalinism go hand in hand. If the end justifies the means, what could be wrong in lying to secure the desired end? He does not quote Mary McCarthy who said, everything Lillian Hellman writes is a lie, including "the" and "and," but it is one thing he and she agree on.

As for Mary McCarthy herself, she gets an essay of her own later in the book. She made her literary debut as a drama critic in the ferociously highbrow *Partisan Review*. The quarterly was very much of the left, but Trotskyite and consequently anti-

Stalinist. The Broadway theater, the author feels, was still "firmly tethered to the standards of Stalinist philistinism," and thus the *Partisan Review* was delighted to have its drama critic play the role of the scourge of Broadway. During the cold war Stalinists were fair game for both the Left and the Right. But fashions change. When radicalism became chic Mary McCarthy marched along. She visited both North and South Vietnam for the *New York Review of Books*, and subsequently wrote of the "virtuous tyranny" in Hanoi. These articles were not very successful, perhaps because war reporting requires more than acerbic wit or a gift for satire. The author considers her to have had a rather narrow talent which she fully exploited by adherence to the fashionable. He writes, "In the end, Mary McCarthy's politics were like her sex life—promiscuous and unprincipled, more a question of opportunity than of commitment or belief."

In comparing Josephine Herbst to Mary McCarthy one sees a woman impoverished, never having reached the success her early work promised, and hampered by a devotion to a cause that was at best confrontational and for the most part brutalizing, juxtaposed against a woman who died famous, materially well off, but who also never reached the success her early work promised, unhampered by a devotion to anything other than her career.

The only person other than Chambers to merit two essays in this collection is Clement Greenberg who, Mr. Kramer writes, is the author of "the most important body of art criticism produced by an American writer in this century." Mr. Greenberg belonged to the two avant-gardes cited by Raymond Aron: he was a Marxist (Trotskyite) and a modernist. But he evolved. In the 1940s he described himself as an "ex or disabused

Marxist," and by the 1950s he had joined the ranks of the anticommunist liberals. This shift in no way affected his philosophy of art; it was rather the reverse. His philosophy of art helped dictate the shift. He believed in change, and realized that the standards of taste he professed, though valid for his time, were not necessarily immutable. Nor did he believe that the purpose of art was to serve as an instrument of class struggle. He believed in political and aesthetic diversity, but because this is not the kind of diversity preached by current fashion makers, he has fallen into disfavor. He is accused of being too political, paradoxically, because in our age when everything is political, he abstained from a political approach to art. In this, of course, he was politically incorrect.

Of the twenty-six essays in this collection, all show signs of Hilton Kramer's vigorous intellect, his broad taste and erudition. He is not afraid to assert himself and he is as tenacious in his opposition to the hard left as he is in defense of what used to be called high culture.

In many ways he resembles the man he wrote so admiringly of, Clement Greenberg. He began his career as the art critic for the *Partisan Review*, appeared in the *New Republic* and the *Nation*, and in time became the editor of the *New Criterion*. But the corrupting influence of less-than-truth-seeking ideologies had so affected the cultural world that to defend the high culture he strenuously supported he was drawn into ideological battles. This is clearly shown in all his essays. The people he examines are all artists or writers. Each has been tainted or scarred by political controversy. He wends his way through the debris seeking a critical evaluation. As he tells us, criticism is the setting up of standards; modern biography is the set-

ting up of idols. His essays are critiques, and their collection a critical history of the intellectual currents of the latter part of this century.

We are fortunate that a man of Hilton Kramer's caliber is still writing, and still stoking the flame of intellectual freedom.

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**Reconstructing History: The Emergence of a New Historical Society**, ed. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn. New York: Routledge, 1999, 399 pp., \$21.99 paperback.

*Thomas C. Reeves*

In May 1998, a group of distinguished historians announced the creation of a new organization: The Historical Society. Led by Eugene D. Genovese, the Society offered an alternative to those weary of the leftist ideology that had dominated the historical profession for some three decades. Race, class, and gender, by this time, had virtually excluded all other topics of discussion in journals and at historical meetings, while diplomatic, intellectual, political, and economic studies were barely tolerated. Meetings featured and journals published the likes of "Constructing Menstruation" and "A Dual-Gendered Perspective on Eighteenth Century Advice and Behavior." To speak of the existence of "historical truth" was con-

sidered naïve. Ideological conformity was often a prerequisite for promotion, tenure, job advancement, and holding office in professional organizations. The intellectual atmosphere, Genovese wrote, resembled that of the Joe McCarthy years. In short, the imperative for founding The Historical Society matched the earlier need, on a broader scale, for the National Association of Scholars.

Critics, of course, charged immediately that the Society was conservative. (Is there anything more repellent to most academics, at least in the liberal arts and social sciences, than the "C" word?) Genovese countered by noting that people of all political and religious persuasions were welcome, that leadership in the organization "includes blacks and whites, men and women, gays and straights," and by declaring, "all we ask of our members is that they lay down plausible premises; reason logically; appeal to evidence; and respect the integrity of all those who do the same." The restoration of civilized, scholarly debate was at the heart of The Historical Society. As Alan Charles Kors put it in the book under review, "If history as a discipline can offer anything to the world, it can offer that sense of the value of open-mindedness, competing interpretations, and intense debate in the pursuit of knowledge about the human past."

*Reconstructing History* is the Society's first book. In it we see proof of the founders' contention that there is much diversity within the Society and that scholarship is more important to members than ideology. While a few of the authors are conservatives, most cannot be so conveniently labeled. Indeed, several of the essays might well rile many on the right. Authors include Genovese, Marc Trachtenberg, Alan Charles Kors, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Leo P. Ribuffo, Donald Kagan, Diane Ravitch, John

Patrick Diggins, Walter A. McDougall, Martin J. Sklar, John Womack, and both of the volume's editors.

There are twenty-five essays, divided into five categories: "The Imperative: The Historical Society as a Critique and a New Ideal," "History and the Contemporary Intellectual Milieu," "Meditations on the Practice of History," "An Educational Mission: Standards for the Teaching of History," and "Historians at Work." A few of the essays have been published and presented elsewhere. Common to all but two or three of them is an extraordinarily high level of clarity, scholarship, and sound reasoning.

Gertrude Himmelfarb's essay on Postmodernist History, from her 1994 book *On Looking into the Abyss*, is especially rewarding. It covers literature, philosophy, and law, as well as history, and points to authors who are attempting to strip all objective knowledge from these disciplines. She quotes Hayden White, for example, who contends, "We require a history that will educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot." Himmelfarb also notes the major role of feminists in postmodernism, scholars who claim that "logic, reason, and coherence . . . are themselves expressive of a patriarchal ideology" and therefore must be discarded. Himmelfarb concludes, "Postmodernism entices us with the siren call of liberation and creativity, but it may be an invitation to intellectual and moral suicide."

Another of the best of these essays is by Deborah A. Symonds of Drake University. She contributes a stimulating piece on working in primary sources at the Scottish Record Office, noting the necessity of finding and developing all of the possible evidence as a prelude to ideology. History, she writes, begins with the mate-

rials of the past. "It is in confronting these materials that questions of belief, intention, falsification, and truth have to be confronted and resolved. Theory comes later, after one has decided what one is, in fact, at the most empirical and scientific level, theorizing about, and how one's own biases dance at the end of every apparently objective pool of light." I would like to see this essay read by many graduate students.

Victor Davis Hanson of California State University, Fresno, contributes a memorable essay on the problems facing contemporary military historians. Wise and weighty, the piece reveals the author's vast knowledge of history, including references from the ancient Greeks to Steven Spielberg's film *Saving Private Ryan*. His observations on Western power and imperialism are unorthodox and solid. "To claim that the West was and is not militarily superior, or that its preponderance of arms has characteristically been used to accomplish evil, is not so much an easy lie as a betrayal of historical integrity." Hanson's defense of George S. Patton is welcome and long overdue.

Arguably the most brilliant essay in this collection is by Paul A. Rahe of the University of Tulsa. In his "Aristotle and the Study of History: A Manifesto," Rahe ponders the difficulty of understanding the ancient world as it actually was and argues persuasively that modern ideology has corrupted our understanding of the past. Here is a typical sentence from this stunning piece: "That hypocrisy and self-delusion are needed to mask the partisan character of the political order is a sign of man's innate generosity and capacity for impartiality, for they are the dark shadows cast by the tension within human nature between the desire for private advantage and a genuine public-spiritedness."

A previously published essay by the distinguished intellectual historian John Patrick Diggins must also be noted. It carefully and completely dissects the deeply flawed National History Standards released in 1994 and, after an uproar, re-released in 1996. Diggins is especially critical of historian Gary Nash, of UCLA, who directed the Standards project, noting that the final product, even when revised, bears strong marks of his romantic and leftist assumptions. "In the NHS, 1968 lives!" Diggins deplores political correctness, not because he is reactionary but because he knows that ideology distorts history. He opposes, for example, the artificial inclusion of women in historical accounts, and he is highly critical of feminist history. And yet he is eager to include women in historical accounts—not just because they were victims but because they have made genuine contributions. In a sentence almost

half a page long, Diggins mounts a magnificent defense of the importance of women in American intellectual history (267).

In short, this is a book every historian who aspires to any degree of objectivity should read. The Historical Society has shown that it can match its rhetoric with scholarship. When the organization was founded, John H. Roper of Emory University said, "We simply must restore the dignity of our profession." This book has taken an important step in that direction.

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**This announcement of an opening at Brunei University, Darussalam, appeared on the jobs page of the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* web site for 17 December 1999:**

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES d). Lecturer/Senior Lecturer (Critical and Creative Thinking) Applicants should have post-graduate qualifications and teaching and research experience in informal logic. Critical and Creative Thinking and Argument Analysis. Knowledge of non-Western alternatives to rational discourse is preferred. In addition, competence in non-linear discursive approaches, e.g. lateral thinking and creative thinking, would be sought.