

that some new theorists lack what French Symbolist poet Paul Valéry calls an "appetite" for poetry (26–27). Appetite is about feelings, the capacity to respond with pleasure and emotion to poetry.

The chapters consider a range of issues, works, and writers. "Freud and Interpretation" and "Divination" deal with meaning—how to interpret textual signs. Individual poets John Milton, Wallace Stevens, and T. S. Eliot are subjects of chapters. "The Bible: Story and Plot," the fascinating final chapter, discusses mythological and narrative levels of Biblical plot. It emphasizes that realization of the wholeness of the Bible depends on an understanding of how the New Testament draws from the Old. James Joyce's *Ulysses* connects similarly with Homer's *Odyssey*. Kermode points out in both cases that, in a paradoxical and almost mystical way, the older text is whole, "a book like a world" (221), yet at the same time is completed by the newer book. Ultimately, that is how Kermode sees literature, "as Matthew saw his Bible, and Joyce his Homer. To say that it is complete, and yet in constant need of interpretive excess, is after all to say that its senses are inexhaustible" (223).

**Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English.** Robert Scholes. Yale UP, 1985, 176pp., \$8.95. ISBN 0-300-03726-0

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How many of us, when teaching literature, act as "priests and priestesses in the service of a secular scripture"? We use canonical works that require interpretation by trained readers. We "expound the wisdom and truth" of these texts, transmitting their eternal verities to passive receptacles—our students.

What's wrong with this picture? A great deal, according to Robert Scholes, who argues in *Textual Power* for a way of teaching literature that wrests control from the teacher's firm grasp and offers it to students. Through textual power, students can learn "to make sense of their worlds, to determine their own interests . . . to see through the manipulations of all sorts of texts in all sorts of media, and to express their own views in an appropriate manner." Can we wish any less for our students?

Scholes suggests we quit "teaching literature" and begin "studying texts" in our classrooms. This involves helping students to develop textual competence in three areas: "reading," a largely unconscious activity in which we produce *text within text*; "interpretation," the production of *text upon text* that happens when we begin to think consciously about meaning or theme; and "criticism," *text against text*, wherein we critique a work's themes or underlying cultural codes. Using examples from writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Ursula LeGuin, Scholes demonstrates how techniques developed from structuralist literary theory can open these areas to our students.

Sometimes this book is slow going—as when Scholes contrasts his position with those of other literary theorists (Derrida, de Man, and Fish, among others). But many of Scholes' ideas have direct relevance to what we do as teachers, and his central concept is a powerful one:

rather than encouraging students to show "reverence before texts," we should give them "critical strength," the ability to question texts they encounter in an extremely manipulative world.

**Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory.**

Toril Moi. Rutledge, 1985, 200pp., \$13.95. ISBN 0-415-02974-0

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In the everchanging world of literary studies, Moi's book is the perfect introduction to feminist literary theory. It is a concise critical approach to both Anglo American and French feminist criticism.

One may argue that theorists such as Jacques Lacan or Jacques Derrida are oversimplified here. However, such inclusions as the clear explanation of Helene Cixous's critique of "patriarchal binary thought" (104) or the "Images of Women' Criticism" chapter make the book indispensable.

*Sexual/Textual Politics* served as a guide to help me identify some of the critical approaches used when I was researching literature which I was preparing to teach. I was also encouraged to read further many of the theorists included in the book. Most important, Moi's book increased my awareness of the diversity of feminist theory.

**The Mother Tongue: English and How It Got That Way.** Bill Bryson. Morrow, 1990, 288pp., \$18.95.

ISBN 0-688-07895-8

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*The Mother Tongue: English and How It Got That Way* is more than a book about the etymology of our language. It offers appealing morsels of thought which can launch any or all of a wide panorama of selections from American and English literature.

To introduce Geoffrey Chaucer through his use of *climbed* or *clomb*, or William Shakespeare with *forgat* and *digged*, or John Keats through "*whose name was writ on water*" becomes a delightful point of departure to the literature to follow. There is an atmosphere of serendipity in welcoming Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Sir Thomas More, Isaac Newton, John Milton, Charles Dickens, and Samuel Coleridge through the new words they created through their writings. George Bernard Shaw's *superman* has flown away from its creator and becomes an example of one word which serves as a beacon to literary gems and memorable characters. Bill Bryson adds to this some words created by famous authors which were never accepted into usage, as for example, Dickens' word *vocular*. Shakespeare added the word *gloomy* through his writing but failed with *barky* and *brisky*.

Shaw's *Pygmalion* is just one of several introductions to dialect literature which presents its own unique challenge to the teacher of literature. Joel Chandler Harris, through *Uncle Remus* and *Daddy Jack*, provides a potpourri of examples which not only pique student inter-

est but also lead to new student awareness of dialect in the assigned readings.

If there is one special delight to both reader and teacher, Bryson documents his claim that it is through the characters who are made ridiculous to the reader "by the manner in which they misapply or distort big words" (233). Team teaching with Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop, Henry Fielding's Mrs. Slipslop, Dickens' Sam Weller, or Shakespeare's Mrs. Quickly should prove to be successful—and pleasurable—for teachers and students.

**Amusing Ourselves to Death.** Neil Postman. Penguin, 1985, 184pp., \$6.95. ISBN 0-14-009438-5

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Neil Postman contends in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that today's public communication is designed almost solely to entertain. In his opinion, the public language of television does not stimulate thought, critical comment, or intellectual development. Postman believes that "show business glitz" has come to dominate not only commercial television but public television as well. He laments the decline of print intelligence, the ability to read reflectively and judge the quality of arguments.

Students in a college-bound critical reading course or other advanced English course can readily identify with the examples Postman uses to illustrate his point. They can understand why William Howard Taft would not be considered a good presidential candidate today. His three-hundred-pound frame would not project a compelling TV image. After years of watching, high-school students sense that even specially designed educational television programs such as the *Voyage of Mimi*, a science and math program sponsored by the US Department of Education and other prestigious institutions, have little complexity and that the viewer is not required to remember information from one segment to the next. Students are sensitive to news broadcasting that flashes quickly from a world political hotspot to a national crisis to a natural disaster. So when Postman argues that this speeded presentation gives the human viewer little perspective or time to see order and meaning, students sense that he has verbalized a feeling they can identify.

Many of the chapters in the text can stand on their own as nonfiction readings in courses or units designed to help students develop a questioning attitude toward the role of mass media in our society. Chapter 1, "The Medium Is the Metaphor," explores the effect of media in forming a culture. In chapter 2, "Media as Epistemology," Postman shows how Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* prediction that people can be controlled by inflicting pleasure may be correct. Chapter 7, "Now . . . This," explores broadcast news and the world images these programs create. The entire book is written with great energy, and I found that my students read from it and discussed with deep interest the issues presented.

**Fostering the Reader's Response: Rethinking the Literature Curriculum.** Peter Smagorinsky and Steven Gevinson. Seymour, 1989, 228pp., \$14.95. ISBN 0-86651-473-2



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Ralph Waldo Emerson's belief that books "are for nothing but to inspire" definitely holds true for this book. As I read the book two weeks before school started, I was not only inspired to apply its ideas but also frustrated that I had to wait to do so.

*Fostering the Reader's Response* offers teachable suggestions about organization, approaches, and sequence of the literature curriculum. Objectives in Smagorinsky and Gevinson's curriculum are kept to a workable twenty in two sections: literary understanding and adolescent development. The objectives are met through eight "thematic strands"—character, environment, relationships, value systems, problems of change, rhetoric/style, form/genre, and the hero—which vary in emphasis from grade to grade. Thus, the character strand in the ninth grade focuses on "Influences on Personality," while the twelfth grade strand uses "The Psychology of Literary Characters." Long lists of suggested works for each grade level continue the text's emphasis on flexibility and variety.

I appreciate the balance between the theoretical and the practical with the theoretical basis occupying about one-fourth of the book. The practical draws upon the theoretical, both logically and thoroughly, as the authors follow objectives and strands throughout the curriculum. I also admire the extensive use of writing activities, demonstrating how the writing and literature