

rather than monsters. There is much more to be said about the wildness and even ferocity of his style, which confounds our sense of character and moral standing, and complicates our judgment as readers who must respond to the contradictory voices of Richler's writing.

I have stressed the faults of Brenner's book, perhaps unfairly in view of her thorough knowledge of Richler's work and her familiarity with modern Jewish issues. She has provided an informed introduction to a valuable subject. Nevertheless, I conclude by *kvetching* about the many typographical errors and the photocopied typescript that guarantees a headache after prolonged reading.

JON KERTZER

Peter de Bolla. *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. pp. vii, 324. £30.00.

This is an important, difficult, ambitious, and wide-ranging study, which most eighteenth-century scholars — including historians of all kinds, literary theorists and critics, and philosophers — will find useful and suggestive. The title has a double reference, effectively representing de Bolla's book itself as well as drawing attention to the primary discourse it analyzes; the subtitle suggests the book's interdisciplinary scope, as it attempts "to generate a historical account of the subject in and of the sublime" (291). Focussing on the period of the Seven Years' War but ranging throughout the eighteenth century, de Bolla begins by distinguishing a "discourse of" from a "discourse on" something, showing how a theoretical discourse that sets out to legislate a practice produces an excess that it cannot control, and arguing that the subject (in the sense of a subject position) emerges "adjacent to the discursive excess" (19). In Part I, de Bolla chiefly considers Burke on the sublime and beautiful, Alexander Gerard's *Essay on Taste*, and, in a particularly interesting section, Frances Reynolds's *Enquiry concerning the principles of taste*. The last chapter of Part I, on the national debt, shows de Bolla's skill at Pocockian scholarship and analysis.

In Part II, he examines three less dominant discourses, concerned with speaking (elocution), viewing (perspective), and reading (as an activity involving both voice and text), and he traces dominant figures, particularly that of the body, across different discursive fields that form parts of a network. The production of speaking, viewing and reading subjects is the emphasis in this part of the book: the chapter "Of the Transport of the Reader" examines the formation of what de Bolla calls the "feminized subject." The figuration in eighteenth-century reading theory of novel-reading as a disease makes

space for women constructing their own subjectivity through textuality. However, de Bolla argues, it also prescribes a self-image for men—public, aural, and oral—this is transgressed by the fact that many of them read novels. De Bolla's exploration of the connections between reading, writing, and sexuality could and should be taken further, judging from his sometimes brilliant footnotes and from the long eighteenth-century passages he quotes without full comment. Part III, "Of the Sublime," returns in a sense to the beginning, focussing on Wordsworth and/or Coleridge's marginalia to Knight's *Analytical Inquiry*.

Throughout the book, the archival material is fascinating. Familiar passages from Burke, for example, are transformed by juxtaposition with other, unfamiliar texts. The scholarly research seems as encyclopaedic as the range of theoretical reading that informs de Bolla's arguments. The section on the national debt was particularly interesting to me, focussing on the figuration of the body (blood, circulation, discharge) in this particular discourse. Readers from different disciplines might wish at times for more specific reference to their areas of interest, but this book's subtle, concentrated "readings" focus mainly on theoretical texts. Perhaps inevitably, given the book's audacious sweep, it sometimes seems disorganized or arbitrary in spite of a controlling, almost paradigmatic table of contents. More precisely, it appears to be organized in accordance with a plot that may sometimes tax the reader's patience. Like a particularly complex detective story, it begins with a mystery (presented as a somewhat portentous, collage-like, pseudo-historical fantasy) and expects the reader, led by a controlling authorial guide, to trace the windings of evidence to the solution. The book itself generates its own excess, replicating its own reading of the discourse of the sublime; its argument is sometimes lost in exuberant confidence, and de Bolla analyzes—sometimes explicitly—the character of his own text, referring to its horizon, trajectory, and excess.

This self-reflexive, self-conscious quality of *The Discourse of the Sublime* is compelling but sometimes also annoying. The "I" dominates: the reader is drawn through the text by an insistent voice that claims almost the attention it attributes to the voice of Pitt in the eighteenth century. We are not allowed to lose sight of the author, who represents the representations of other authors in a manner that assimilates his own discourse at various times to all those he sets out to analyse. He concludes Chapter Five, "The Voice of Liberty," a rhetorical *tour de force* on—and of—Pitt that leads into his chapter "Of the Gesture of the Orator," as follows: "The voice sublime, the voice that speaks all voices, that speaks with one voice for all voices, the voice of liberty" (145). This prophetic trumpeting, following a quotation from Godwin, is fortunately not characteristic of the

writing, which is more often sharply analytical. But there is little doubt that de Bolla is attempting to appropriate various levels of eighteenth-century discourse to the work of writing twentieth-century criticism and theory. The attempt is interesting and the author's control is obvious. If one prefers more restraint, however, or less intrusion of authorial presence, one will be irritated by this book, no matter how instructive one may also find it.

Strangely enough, in a book so conscious of its own status as book, *The Discourse of the Sublime* is not consistently well produced. Physically it is very attractive, with nicely designed pages, clear type, and a provocative jacket illustration (Sir Joshua Reynolds's "Self-portrait Shading the Eyes" [1747]). But the proofreading is careless, the punctuation is eccentric, and once or twice footnotes — thoughtfully (and unusually) situated at the bottom of pages — do not appear in the right places. The book seems the product of both immense energy and undue haste; its strengths and weaknesses are compatible with this judgment. But having said that, I find far more here to admire than to criticize. This is an extraordinarily rich book, full of ideas, ingenuity, and vitality. Informed by recent theory and scholarship in several disciplines, it also reveals familiarity with a wide range of eighteenth-century texts and an audacious, often original intelligence. The result is very demanding and occasionally brash, with more than a hint of the egotistical sublime; but a serious student of the eighteenth century might find it all the more stimulating and provocative for that.

ANNE MCWHIR

Carl Woodring. *Nature into Art: Cultural Transformations in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989. pp. xvi, 326. \$30.00.

The argument of Carl Woodring's *Nature into Art* is a straightforward and familiar one: that at the start of the nineteenth century nature was exalted as "womb, bosom, lap, mother, and goddess whose temple is the organic world" (11), but by the end of the century art had separated itself from the demands of nature and could confidently assert its autonomy. Wordsworth is Woodring's chief exemplar of the return to nature, Whistler and Wilde the exultant proclaimers of the apotheosis of art. In charting this transformation, Woodring takes us on a dizzying survey of numerous poems, novels, philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic treatises, and paintings, with occasional forays into music, especially opera. The result is often exhilarating, but the book will frustrate those who cannot instantly recall the context of quotations or the precise significance of a lesser-known writer, artist, or work. A sentence like the following is typical: "Turner's *Hannibal*