

clarify how a position of woman may change in the post-socialist Eastern Europe, which is politically freer but remains patriarchal.

One should applaud Salecl's attempt to combine Lacanian psychoanalysis with political theory, and to apply this intellectual construct to political reality. But political reality, like any other reality (sexual, for example) inevitably brings into question issues of the social responsibility of an individual, as well as of the constructed performance of a social or a private role. Thus the problem with *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism After the Fall of Socialism* is not in its pronounced constructivist orientation but in its inability to argue persuasively for the constructivist, psychoanalytical basis of the political reality, which it claims to do.

However challenging Salecl's project may be, her endeavour seems too ambitious for a book of 167 pages. The usefulness of the book lies in an attempt to read the political in the paradigm of the psychoanalytical. But Salecl's cursory and undeveloped argument does not offer readers either complete results of her analysis or a clear conclusion.

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#### WORK CITED

Lacan, Jacques. "The Function and the Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." *Ecrits*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York and London: Norton, 1977.



Jonathan Hart. *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 1994. pp. 333. \$55.00, \$18.95 pb.

There are now in print recent biographical, bibliographical, or critical books on Northrop Frye from Joseph Adamson, Ian Balfour, David Cook, Robert Denham, A. C. Hamilton, and Marc Manganaro. Certainly there is much to be done to contextualize, supplement, critique, and otherwise cultivate Frye's extensive oeuvre. Still, given the breadth of Frye's work and the appearance of these other recent books on it, it would be preferable for any new overview to offer a distinct sense of its own purpose and viewpoint. I want to know whether Jonathan Hart's *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination* will offer a new explication of Frye, or perhaps an introduction directed toward a very specific new audience (Frye for New Historicists, or Frye for Cultural Studies)? Will it place a well-defined aspect of his work in a new context? Will it attempt a strongly argued global interpretation of Frye's major works, or his place in current and future thinking about just *one* of the many topics he wrote about?

Hart still lacks this well-defined focus, though it is not for lack of awareness of the problem. While he feels obligated to offer a certain amount of synopsis and commentary on the main points of Frye's the-

oretical thought, Hart is careful—perhaps too careful—not to overreach himself. He cautions that the question of “Frye’s place in our contemporary social, intellectual and historical context” is “too big a question to raise here” (149), and it is true that it may be too soon to make worthwhile statements of this type. Yet the issue cannot be avoided either, and so it pops up all the time in his book. It merely does so in an incidental rather than a systematic way. The book reflects an authorial ambivalence in the way it presents three chapters of synopsis and interpretation on the ideas of Frye’s four “key books”: *Fearful Symmetry*, *Anatomy of Criticism*, *The Critical Path* and *The Great Code*. Hart admits he is:

caught between the desire to set out the basics of Frye’s criticism so that my book can move on to new explorations of . . . sometimes unexplored or underexplored areas of his work and the desire not to repeat the fine explanations of Frye, especially of *Anatomy of Criticism*, that Denham, Balfour, Hamilton and others have produced. (25)

This ambivalence about offering another overview of Frye’s main ideas leads Hart to suggest that “those who know the whole of Frye’s work well” (but who would claim that?) may want to skip these chapters altogether. A more likely reason to do this is simply that Frye’s books themselves are a better source than most of the synopsis and commentary on them. They were written with undergraduate teaching in mind, and well-read students find them far more accessible than much of the other critical reading they are given for courses. The later sections of Hart’s book emphasize that Frye was a skilled writer with long-held artistic ambitions. Whether or not Frye would have made a good novelist, his wry, carefully structured, and often colloquial prose offers an ideal medium for his ideas, one that must intimidate most of Frye’s commentators.

The real contribution of this book lies in the later thematic chapters on history, education, mythology, and ideology, and on Frye as a visionary critic and as a creative writer. Hart persuasively insists that Frye differs from many of his contemporaries because he is not at root a dialectical thinker, but rather a pursuer of a coherent visionary structure. Frye has this in common with such poets as Yeats and Stevens, and it is not surprising when Hart shares archival discoveries that show how seriously, and for how long, Frye cherished the idea of publishing a “creative” work alongside his critical productions. Hart quotes Frye, in a notebook of uncertain date, confessing that

All my life I’ve had an ambition to write fiction, either as series of novels, or as one big novel. Some of the motivation is dubious: I want to prove to myself that I can be “creative” in the conventionally creative genres. (Hart 268)

Eventually Frye’s desire fades to the wish to “leave, like Santayana, one work of fiction behind” (268).

There remains an enormous amount of work to be done on Frye's papers (which Hart points out fill thirty to forty metres of shelves) and Hart, like Robert Denham, has helped to prepare some of the ground. The most useful future studies of Frye will be those that isolate and offer a new perspective on one aspect of his work, as Hart's later chapters do.

HARRY VANDERVLIST



Diane Elam. *Romancing the Postmodern*. London: Routledge, 1992. pp. 206. \$69.95.

We are all familiar with efforts in recent years to postulate commonalities between postmodern thought and the social and aesthetic values of past writers and philosophers. Indeed, the MLA annual bibliographies assemble a steadily proliferating catalogue of studies devoted to Shakespeare and deconstruction, Cervantes as a metafictionist, Milton and the postmodern, the postmodern Kierkegaard, Joyce and poststructuralism, and so on. *Romancing the Postmodern* falls into this category of endeavor. As its title implies, Diane Elam's book is a kind of mutual illumination study that seeks a better understanding of both the romance and postmodern theory by identifying ethical and epistemological values the two hold in common.

For Elam, romance is the "signature" of the postmodern (2). It would seem that the success of her project will depend in large part on her ability to define romance in a relatively coherent, relatively compelling manner. Yet clarity and coherence of definition are not the author's aims. Citing Derrida's well-known essay, "The Law of Genre," Elam argues that romance is a genre that is marked by "excess" and hence that it does not permit generic codification in the conventional sense. She characterizes attempts to define romance as "modernist." ("Modernist" and "modernity" are her terms for positions marked by substantialist or essentialist biases and stand as antonyms for "postmodern" and "postmodernity.")

Though an "excessive" genre, romance (inevitably) holds a few basic attributes in Elam's view. In its preoccupation with the subjective and relativistic, romance stands in contrast to realism which deals with ontological fixities. Romance is a peculiarly feminine form preoccupied with small-scale and often domestic narratives. In her view, both romance and feminism are peculiarly attuned to human temporality and serve as exemplary models for the analysis and understanding of history. She goes so far as to assert that "within postmodern romance the figure of the woman is what allows the work of remembering to be performed" (16). According to Elam's reading, the romance has enjoyed little prestige within the family of novelistic subgenres and, as we see in scholarly attitudes towards popular romances