

few. And yet, simply to list the texts in all their generic and linguistic variety speaks compellingly to Newman's argument for the centrality of the goddesses in medieval Christian imaginative literature and devotion.

The penultimate chapter, "Maria: Holy Trinity as Holy Family," is Newman at her theological and critical best. "What if Freud had been a medievalist?" (245), she asks not entirely whimsically. "He would have spoken with the voice of Jean Gerson" (290), who, like many a churchman and secular medievalist since, found Mary's incestuous, if heavenly, intermarriage with her divine Father and God-man Son, as imaged in the Coronation of the Virgin by the Trinity, not only distasteful but threatening, promising as it does unmediated union with the divine for every elect soul. Newman notes that what sets Freud (and Gerson) off from the medieval poets, artists, liturgists, and mystics who invoked the goddesses so flamboyantly in their imaginative creations is that "Freud was a pessimist," whereas the latter were "transcendental optimists who believed that 'with God all things are possible'" (283). It is this sense of possibility—for imagination, for creativity, but, above all, for belief—that makes all of Newman's work, and this book in particular, such a joy but also such a challenge. Artistically as well as religiously, Newman herself believes in the possibility of our divinizing ascent.

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Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary Theory in Social Context. *Robert Matz*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pp. xi+188.

This book would have been better served by the title of the dissertation upon which it is based, "For Profit and Pleasure: The Writing of Social Transformation in Elyot, Sidney, and Spenser" (Johns Hopkins University, 1995). Robert Matz really is not interested in defenses of literature per se, and he certainly is not concerned to examine the whole field of "defending literature in early modern England." What he has provided, far more modestly, is linked studies of three sixteenth-century authors in their capacities as champions of literary study or of literary production. As the original title indicates, what Matz is most interested in is how and why his three authors champion literature in the name of the Horatian commonplace, "aut prodesse . . . aut

delectare,” for profit and pleasure, for instruction and delight. In Matz’s study, profit and pleasure were a mobile pair of terms for arguments and representations through which literary-minded gentlemen attempted to wrest a form of cultural capital out of their otherwise endangered inclinations, tastes, and talents.

“Horatian poetics,” Matz writes, “marks a struggle between dominant and subordinate members of the sixteenth-century elite” (1). Sir Thomas Elyot was minor gentry, yet he posited a humanist revision of aristocratic culture that was hostile to its traditional, prehumanist warrior mentality, though it was also deeply conservative. Sir Philip Sidney, of course, was high gentry, if not as wealthy as he might have been, but he found himself called upon to represent all the highest ideals of courtly culture: *sprezzatura* à la Castiglione; the militancy of the Protestant Reformation; the traditional values of aristocratic privilege; and the self-fashioning impulses of self-made men. Edmund Spenser’s problems with status, privilege, Protestant ethics, and the accumulation of wealth are so well known that they hardly need rehearsing. These authors felt called upon to defend literary endeavors by way of “Horatian poetics” not so much to exonerate the literary *per se* as to “mediate,” as Matz frequently puts it, between the conflicting claims placed upon these authors by the social and cultural contradictions in which they were enmeshed.

So far so good, and what ensues are three apparently cogent and sure-handed, if overly discursive, accounts of the three authors. We follow parallel trajectories as Elyot tries to remake society through learning in *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), as Sidney tries to remake the courtier through the apologetics of his *Defence of Poetry* (1595), and as Spenser tries to fashion the new middle-class gentleman in the second book of *The Faerie Queene* (1590). But something is wrong here. Matz’s theses, so far as his work can be said to have such, are a bit slippery. What cultural contradictions is he talking about? What does it mean to say that either through poetry or polemics these authors are “mediating” those contradictions? What does it mean to say that the contradictions at issue have to do with “cultural capital,” rather than (say) an intellectual conundrum as old as the pre-Socratics (i.e., how can the fictiveness of poetry be justified in a society that makes a sharp distinction between the fictive and the real)? Matz recites the principles of his analysis again and again and, in doing so, repeats commonplaces culled from Pierre Bourdieu, on the one hand, and the past twenty years of new historicist and Marxist literary criticism, on the other (as well as a good deal of historical material from the work of Laurence Stone), even while also asserting that there is something highly original about his analysis. Indeed, Matz claims that

his analysis defies all new historicist thinking on the subject up to now; such thinking, Matz argues, has too comfortably identified with the literary power of the Tudor authors it ought to have been explaining. But Matz never really establishes the terms of his analysis either theoretically or empirically and never brings to light the material struggles and contradictions to which the analysis is supposedly devoted. Matz's arguments frequently depend on forced analogies, undemonstrated assertions, vague generalizations, misrepresented citations, and linguistic sleight of hand. And they are expressed in an excruciatingly turgid prose. We thus get "explanatory" statements like this one: "Because the rhetorics of Sidney's Protestant moralism and feudal nostalgia are products of his anxiety about courtly culture, rather than representative of that culture, these rhetorics can never be fully integrated into the *Defence*" (73). What's that?

Matz's approach is often up to the task of dealing with the straightforward limitations of Elyot's book. But Matz's foggy verbiage simply cannot accommodate those two masters of indirect communication and analogical thinking, Sidney and Spenser. Matz doesn't seem to appreciate the difference between an analogy, a simile, a metaphor, an allegory, a homology, and a coincidence, not to mention between intended and unintended irony. But how are connections to be made between Sidney's self-deprecating jokes about Italians and his gallant death on the battlefield—to the effect that both are to be seen as of a piece with regard to Sidney's social anxieties—if the differences between the things being connected are not first appreciated? Or how, to give another example, can claims be made about the latent content of *The Faerie Queene*, as, for example, the claim that the Bower of Bliss is a repository of Spenser's "anti-courtly" Protestantism, if it is not first of all acknowledged that Spenser is often slyly ironic in his use of "dark conceits" and frequently constructs homologies between phenomena that are only apparently the same? Matz does not seem to appreciate the idea, in the case of Sidney, that the life may not always hold the key to the works, that discrepancies between words and works and deeds are the common coin of both biographical and literary study. Nor, in the case of Spenser, does Matz allow that if the Bower of Bliss in some way refers to courtly culture, it is not "the court" *tout simple*—that Spenser is discussing a degenerate example of what life at court can be so that Acrasia's government is at most a seductive travesty of Elizabeth's, and cannot therefore be taken, *tout court*, as an expression of anticourtly sentiment.

And there is a fundamental question to be asked of the project. Granted, Tudor writers often had recourse to the Horatian terms of "pleasure and profit." But isn't it fair to ask whether, in defending lit-

erature in any epoch, under any cultural pressures, any other terms could be used? When would one not say that poetry (or literary study) is worthwhile because it yields profit and pleasure? Under what circumstances might one be able to establish that “profit and pleasure” is particularly germane to a particular era? One might assert that a Horatian poetics is especially appropriate when some other form of poetics—that (say) of Plato, Aristotle, or Longinus—seems less compelling. In that case, one would need to make the argument that Tudor writers embraced the Horatian model at the expense of other models, for reasons specific to Tudor discourse. But Matz does not make this argument; and in fact it can’t be made. Elyot, Sidney, and Spenser were as much Platonists as they were Horatians; their defenses of literature commonly appealed to the inventive and productive capacities of poetry and humanist study rather than to the benefits they yielded or the sensibility they reproduced. “Only the poet,” Sidney wrote, “lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another Nature.” That is not Horace; the very notion would have made Horace gag. But Matz argues as if the Platonic dimensions of his authors’ thought simply weren’t there; nor does he begin to address the issue that Horace’s *Art of Poetry* was far more influential in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than it ever was in the sixteenth century.

Matz concludes his book with a discussion of the failings of new historicism (by which he means, predominantly, the work of Richard Helgerson and Louis Montrose) so far as such work has argued that the pleasures of poetry in the Tudor era were politically significant. He then proceeds to an excursus on the relevance of Horatian categories, as he has explained them, to the current crisis in the humanities. Far from being a particularly apt figure for the sixteenth century, Horace turns out to be a man for all seasons; so much for historical specificity. Matz wholly ignores the work of a younger generation of new historicists who have written on the Tudor defense of poetry—scholars like Frances Dolan, Mary Ellen Lamb, and Peter Herman—and he draws scantily on the work of older scholars. But he does wander into the domain of contemporary cultural studies and the topic of the corporatization of the modern university. Few readers of *Modern Philology*, I think, will be illuminated by following him there.

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