the abstruse labor that has gone into tracing the progression, reversals, and breaks in
the application of idealist thought through successive chapters there are some vital,
historical absences from this account.

Put in broad terms these absences are contextual, in the full sense of that term. The second
chapter, “Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Revolt Against Empiricism,” is stylistically
representative. It is important to know something of the intellectual background to Col-
eridge’s thought, and here Parker is thorough but the potentially fruitful connections between
ideas are lost by a scrutiny that bewilders. The reader is taken on a closely textual journey
through Coleridge’s rejection of the empiricism of Hume and Locke, the influence of Hartley
and Berkeley, stops en route to pick up Vico, Kant, Condillac, and Condorcet and is
constantly detoured by secondary accounts of the great man and all those above mentioned.
The context is there but in an extremely narrow version, which slides by contemporary events
and makes no attempt to explain, in coherent terms, the broader intellectual, cultural, or
political milieu in which the subject operates.

This is a great pity since it has become a common place criticism of history that it fails to
take its own ideological and philosophical assumptions into account and there is doubtless
good cause to support Parker’s project of bringing the two disciplines close enough together
for historians to glimpse some of the complexities of their position. There is some caution
required though, in the effort of writing a history of history. Early on it became apparent
that what was required of this project was more than an excavation, however precise or
respectful in its handling of the idealist canon. Rather, what is needed is interpretation, not
only of the meanings and intentions of those it includes, but also of the implicit assumptions
of organization, influence, and historical purpose that informed the work of these individu-
als. No intellectuals, not even idealist philosophers, live in a vacuum. This is a history of
philosophy but one which makes few concessions to the intellectual habits of historians in
choosing to emphasize philosophical approaches to historiographical thought.

Certainly the text has interest. Elsewhere I found hints and references that offered to open
up important relationships between bodies of thought. Here the role of idealism and the
influence of Collingwood in particular was interesting and raised questions about the origins
of Leavisite thought; the notion of an organic community, the role of history, and of literature,
in a defense of civilization. The other major area that I wanted to see developed concerned
contemporary historical mores and the apparent antipathy to theoretical approaches, which
has been manifest in British historiography since the war. Where, I wondered, did the
postwar trend of “people’s history,” the work of Edward Thompson and the devastating
in-fighting about Althusserian structuralism and its supposed insidious influence fit in?
There is certainly some nice material here but it is submerged beneath a textual detail and
self referencing scholasticism that does little to support the integration of historiography into
historical practice.

Christchurch University College Canterbury

Lesley Hardy

Daniel O. Bell. *A Pious Bacchanal: Affinities between the Lives and Works of John Flaxman
and Aubrey Beardsley.* (New Connections: Studies in Interdisciplinarity.) New York; Peter

Daniel O. Bell’s study contains within its title two of the book’s principal themes. These
include the conflicting notions of piety, which are characterized as a commitment to
Christian values within an ongoing spiritual journey, and the pagan bacchanal, or celebration of fleshly sensualism. Bell sees both of these elements as being mediated by the experiences of physical pain and suffering that John Flaxman and Aubrey Beardsley endured throughout their lives. John Flaxman (1755–1826), a sculptor, book illustrator, printmaker, and decorative arts designer who was affiliated first with Josiah Wedgwood and later with the Royal Academy, suffered from a debilitating case of scoliosis. The late-nineteenth-century British artist and illustrator Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898) died at age 25 of tuberculosis. Sadly, these themes are reflected in the author’s own biography. As indicated on both the back cover and the Memoriam page of the text, the late Daniel O. Bell was severely disabled by hemophilia and died at age 41. The resonant biographical overlays that shape this study account for the author’s extreme sensitivity to his subjects, and collectively they constitute the strengths and originality of the book as well as some of its most obvious art historical and methodological difficulties.

Bell’s approach to Flaxman and Beardsley is perhaps best characterized as a conservative revisionist one. Taking as his primary evidence the artists’ own writings, first-hand biographical accounts, and the artworks themselves, Bell proposes to strip away the “layers of outdated legends” and “false assumptions” that surround Beardsley and Flaxman (pp. xxxviii, xxxix). In so doing, the author seeks to bring balance to the two artists’ reputations by portraying Flaxman as less pious, and Beardsley as less “Decadent,” than is generally assumed.

This book, which is based on Bell’s Ph.D. dissertation (University of Georgia, 1991), is divided into two sections. The first consists of interspersed monographs, while the second is devoted to such thematic preoccupations as satyrs, sirens, and severed heads; the feminine ideal; sleep and death; and gods and heroes. The uniqueness of Bell’s perspective provides the reader with an opportunity to rethink the ways in which sensualism and debility crucially informed Flaxman’s and Beardsley’s aesthetic structures. Nowhere is this more evident than in Bell’s analysis of the artists’ self-portraits. When discussing a drawing by Flaxman of c. 1775, Bell perceptively notes the elements of humor, self-deprecation, and uneven social power that thread through the image. In this work Flaxman satirically depicts himself as a humble, bent artist who respectfully approaches a group of arrogant patrons who can barely wait to pounce on the poor artist. In a slightly later sculpture, Flaxman portrays himself as a hunchbacked pawn on a chess set. Bell revealingly reads these early self-portraits as depictions of “the contradictory aspects of [Flaxman’s] artistic personality” in which “the idea of intelligence [is] at the mercy of a malformed body” (p. 12). According to Bell, Beardsley’s self-representations display a similar sense of “self-irony [that] was born from pain” (p. 46). In Beardsley’s imaginary self-portrait A Footnote (1896), for example, the artist depicts himself with a rounded, feminized body; goat-like ears; and feet tethered to a statue of a herm of Pan. Bell proposes a highly creative interpretation of the broken spear that the artist holds based on a close reading of a related painting by the French Baroque artist Nicholas Poussin (1594–1665). Yet Bell ultimately reads this image as “a personal statement of deep despair” (p. 128) and even of Beardsley’s suicidal propensities. However, it is unclear that the artwork itself supports such a pessimistic reading. In presenting himself as chained to a statue of Pan, is the elfin Beardsley commenting obliquely on his own sexual desires? Or could the artist be portraying himself as held captive to the desires of his market, and thus tied to producing the erotically-inflected scenes for which he was so famous? Such intriguing questions remain unaddressed in Bell’s analysis.
Furthermore, Bell’s arguments become problematic in the second section of the book, where the author attempts to demonstrate the influence of Flaxman’s images on Beardsley. As the visual evidence indicates, Flaxman’s spare compositions are characterized by the restrained linear structures and frieze like arrangements of a graceful Neoclassicism. Beardsley’s Art Nouveau drawings are of a fundamentally different formal and expressive character. Bell’s comparisons are not aided by the grainy quality of the illustrations, and too often his assertions of influence seem strained and unsupported. While it is highly likely that Beardsley was familiar with Flaxman’s well-known and widely published book illustrations, Bell concedes that the “name of John Flaxman is never mentioned in Beardsley’s correspondence or by any previous Beardsley scholar” (p. 158). Thus, by placing a structural emphasis on artistic influence, Bell is often forced to reach for speculative and historically unprovable connections, where a more open-ended approach to the artists’ suggestive similarities would have provided a more flexible interpretive framework.

In the end these drawbacks are offset by the meticulousness of Bell’s research, the erudition of his arguments, and his extreme sensitivity to pictorial details. The unexpected comparison of Flaxman and Beardsley presents a fascinating case study on how pain and desire, piety and the bacchanal, are rooted in lived existence yet provide a way to think beyond the conventional limitations of the body. Such creativity is no less evident in Flaxman’s and Beardsley’s remarkable images than in Bell’s highly imaginative and stimulating scholarship. With Daniel O. Bell’s untimely passing, this book will stand as a meaningful and lasting statement of his life and work.

College of the Holy Cross

MARCIA BRENNAN


Stephanie Barczewski’s Myth and National Identity examines the role of the Arthurian and Robin Hood legends in the formation and portrayal of British national character in the nineteenth century. Using a wide variety of literary sources, she explores the ways in which poets, novelists, scholars, and publicists used these myths both to construct and to challenge notions of national history and character.

Barczewski argues that the cultural processes that transformed King Arthur and Robin Hood into national heroes began in the eighteenth century. Both were patriotic icons, and as such were highly serviceable to an age that sought to forge an identity. The Arthurian legend received a boost during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, when it was used to celebrate victories and console the nation in defeat. In addition, it served a specifically conservative purpose, reinforcing notions of a mythical past and of hierarchy and elite dominance that encouraged support of tradition and ancient institutions. The Robin Hood legend was more plastic and served not only patriotic purposes but also those of working class and dissenting groups. As working-class radicalism and reform became more important, the story became more prominent. Likewise, the Robin Hood legend provided a more complex symbolism, as the forest was not only a traditional icon of Englishness but also a symbol of freedom and an escape from oppression.

The book builds a convincing case that in the nineteenth century the two legends became part of a genuine national consciousness, i.e., they emerged as part of a larger narrative that