

personal relationships, his depiction of women—disregards documentation, artistic conventions, and comparisons with other Victorian representations. For example, mentioning narratives Brown wrote and attached to his paintings, Bendiner does not analyze them. Such literary appendages were common practice, and Brown's deserve study in the context of Victorian calligrams.

Theory might illuminate topics Bendiner raises, then abandons or reduces: feminism for female images; Bakhtin for carnivalesque humor; social history (Marxist or not) for representations of the poor. Social or art historical contexts are ignored regarding Brown's Manchester, or Italian sources for religious paintings. Insisting that the painting of John Kay escaping a mob is degrading and parodic, Bendiner ignores Brown's allusion to the Descent from the Cross which interjects seriousness and irony. Bendiner insists that humor nullifies dignity in tragic scenes (e. g., *The Death of Tristram*). But Brown's undercutting chivalric subjects is as profound as Rembrandt's undercutting classical subjects. Bendiner repeatedly attacks the hanging cabbages in *The Last of England*, which, he insists, deflate the subject, although they signified long voyages and were not intended to be humorous. Bendiner condemns Victorian interiors' lack of "simple order" (pp. 50-51) and "disunity" (p. 50), then overreads them, without evidence, as expressing anxiety over a "godless, meaningless universe" (p. 51), a cliché of Victorian loss of faith.

Citing theories of humor from Plato to Baudelaire, none of which we know Brown read, Bendiner misses a likely source: Carlyle's rhetorical methods parallel Brown's representations—disparity between minor details and major events and "heroes," multiple perspectives from all classes, sarcasm at tragic moments, the irony of an event's significance becoming comprehensible only much later. Chastizing Brown's Cromwell paintings, Bendiner never compares them with Carlyle's or others' representations of Cromwell, which were popular Victorian subjects. While suggesting categories for Brown's humor, Bendiner concludes that his humor's "marginal character" is "a modifier, not the primary focus" (p. 35) meant to "distract the viewer from the titular subject" (p. 25), though more likely it reinforces a satiric Carlylean vision of history. After 1870 Brown's compositions become decentralized to better serve this vision. Bendiner concludes that Brown's humor, realism, and archaism share a negativism rooted "in his views of society" (p. 87), an unproven reduction. Indeed, his late paintings are often celebratory. Similarly, Bendiner's criticisms of Brown's color assumes a "unity" from which Brown departed, rather than explaining Brown's color theories.

Idiomatic style, ill-argued and unproven assumptions, disregard for scholarly debates, and even of issues Bendiner himself raises harm this book. Brown's contemporaries considered him the most intellectual of artists; his remarkable *oeuvre* deserves deeper contextualization and a more sustained analysis.

Arizona State University

JULIE F. CODELL

Linda Gertner Zatlín. *Beardsley, Japonisme, and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1997. Pp. xiv, 304. \$70.00. ISBN 0-521-58164-8.

In this well-illustrated and carefully researched volume, Linda Gertner Zatlín examines the largely unexplored relationship between Japanese art and the works of the late-nineteenth-century British artist and illustrator Aubrey Beardsley. In adopting such a comparative approach, Zatlín has not only contributed a new dimension to Beardsley studies, but she has

aply used the monograph as a means to raise larger questions regarding late-Victorian attitudes toward national identity, gender, and sexuality. Her book provides valuable insight into what happened when well-established social conventions came up against the sharp tip of Beardsley's pen, and the pointed critique embedded within his cutting-edge artistic practice.

The study picks up where Zatlin's first book on Beardsley, *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics* (1990), leaves off, with a discussion of the ways in which Japanese erotic art was instrumental in shaping Beardsley's ability to create artworks that were at once powerful enough to challenge accepted moral standards yet sufficiently subtle to avoid the censors, a measure of discretion necessitated by the Obscene Publications Act of 1857. According to the eyewitness account of the great German critic and art historian Julius Meier-Graefe, Beardsley owned and lived with a set of sexually explicit Japanese prints. While most British artists remained unreceptive to such works, Beardsley learned and adapted much from these images and incorporated a number of their stylistic and iconographical elements into his own innovative book designs, magazine illustrations, and advertising posters. As Zatlin persuasively demonstrates, Beardsley's approach to Japanese art was less a rigid or coherent program of assimilation than a loose and skillful adaptation of elements such as asymmetrical compositions, bold flat patterning and ornamentation, the calligraphic intertwining of text and image, and the suggestive cropping of figures, particularly in theatrical and erotic scenes, to imply a sense of action continuing beyond the visible edge of the page. Through her expert knowledge of Beardsley's *oeuvre* combined with her command of the technical and conceptual intricacies of Japanese prints, Zatlin's analysis does full justice to Beardsley's own understanding of Japonisme as a blend of fantasy, delicacy, and expressive power.

While Zatlin's discussions of Beardsley and Japonisme are both suggestive and enlightening, when the reader reaches the third component of her title project, "the perversion of the Victorian ideal," her analysis becomes more problematic. Zatlin frames her discussion around Beardsley's use of the figures of the grotesque and the voyeur as strategic vehicles for social commentary, ones which enabled Beardsley to expose and subvert the sexual power and social authority of Victorian men. According to Zatlin, Beardsley employed humorous, physically distorted figures of satyrs, angels, hermaphrodites, and fetuses as a means to disclose the "unacknowledged sexual tension in 1890s England" (p. 175), while using their expressive deformations "in an allegorical manner to make social criticism palatable" (p. 173). Extending this theme in the final chapter of her study, Zatlin argues that Beardsley's frequent inclusion of a grotesque figure whom she terms the confrontational observer "represents the late-Victorian male who leered at pictures which involve sexuality. Through this figure, which directly implicates the human being outside of the frame, Beardsley turned the leering consumer into a voyeur" (p. 220). Unquestionably, Beardsley's provocative images were designed to shock their viewers and to stimulate controversy. Yet it does not necessarily follow that Beardsley's works effected the kind of social critique in functional or practical terms that Zatlin identifies. On the contrary, the extreme nature of Beardsley's subjects enabled his audience to resist any direct identification with the self. In the critical press Beardsley's drawings were repeatedly denounced as "morbid," "repellent," "repulsive," "slimy," and "evil."

Zatlin herself acknowledges that Beardsley's late-Victorian audience failed to recognize the connection between the artist's grotesque figures and sexual tensions in contemporary society. Given that Beardsley's viewers were unable or unwilling to acknowledge these

figures as reflections of current social conditions, to what extent can they be said to have functioned as such historically? While to our eyes, Beardsley may have pointedly used Japanese art to critique British social conventions and notions of cultural superiority, Beardsley's choice and treatment of subjects only seems to have facilitated his opponents in dismissing his works as an accretion of "otherness," including the otherness of sexual immorality and of foreign cultural influences.

A similar question can be applied to Beardsley's images of women. While many of Beardsley's depictions of powerful female figures clearly fall outside the restrictive boundaries of late-Victorian feminine respectability, it remains an open question as to whether Beardsley's images constitute positive or appealing portrayals of women. The grimacing faces, sidelong glances, defiant stares, and sexual displays of figures such as Herodias and Messalina may mark these women as active, forceful, and self-sufficient, but it does not necessarily mean that contemporary viewers, male or female, would have found these figures attractive, admirable, or sympathetic.

Zatlin's study clearly demonstrates that Beardsley was fascinated by the nexus of pleasure and transgression. Through the formal intricacy and technical refinement of his drawings, Beardsley was able to achieve an aestheticization of often raw and grotesque sexuality. In so doing, his crisp black and white lines blurred any fixed categorical boundaries between ugliness and allure, repulsion and attraction, and enabled him to realize, as Meier-Graefte put it, "a union of divided worlds." By placing these provocative issues in the context of Japanese art, Zatlin's book affords a new perspective on Beardsley's works and raises compelling questions about how such a sophisticated artistic practice might be approached methodologically.

*College of the Holy Cross*

MARCIA BRENNAN

Peter D. McDonald. *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914*. (Cambridge Studies in Publishing and Printing History.) New York: Cambridge University Press. 1997. Pp. xi, 230. \$59.95. ISBN 0-521-57149-9.

By the end of the nineteenth century, it was apparent that the Education Acts that were passed between 1870 and 1891 had brought about a social and cultural revolution in the late Victorian literary world. The extension of education downward by way of the ubiquitous board schools had produced a large, newly literate (or semi-literate) population, which gave rise to a new "mass" literary market that was said to extend from the depths of Whitechapel to "a dreary little lost town at the north of Scotland" (p. 5). This sudden democratization of the literary culture was understandably greeted with horror and contempt by the traditional "gentlemen scholars" and the old fashioned "men of letters." Their wrath was only increased by the fact that they could neither guide, nor control, nor profit from this highly lucrative new literary market. Men like Edmund Gosse, Henry Harland of the *Yellow Book*, and W. E. Henley of the *New Review* could only respond with ineffectual diatribes.

By employing the general methodology of the "literary field" theory of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, Peter McDonald successfully presents the pre-World War I publishing world as a narrow but significant aspect of some of the larger themes of modern British social history. To simplify the confusing nature of the late Victorian and pre-war literary revolution, it would be tempting to make an important distinction between the "purists" and the arriviste "profiteers." But this will not do because there were purists in