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VICTORIAN PIETY PRACTICED

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Suzy Anger, *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005)
Leslie Butler, *Critical Americans: Victorian Intellectuals and Transatlantic Liberal Reform* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007)
David M. Craig, *John Ruskin and the Ethics of Consumption* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006)
Laura J. Snyder, *Reforming Philosophy: A Victorian Debate on Science and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006)

For some time, there has been reason for imagining that we live in neo-Victorian times. We are awash in restless evangelicals, profligate of stern and apocalyptic advice. We have had praying leaders who imagine that foreigners, usually with beards, require reform and invasion. Celts threaten secession and the Union is extolled. There is much talk of families, education, and the anxieties of class. Our novels grow long and vexed, and even have plots. Historians seek the common reader and write meandering narratives, full of metaphor, which may be purchased at railway stations.

It was not always so. Forty and more years ago, modernism offered a leaner creed. There was secularism and laughter about gods, the alien was thought a wry entertainment, fragmentation was a hope, and everyone shaved (except women who had been to Paris). Most of these four books make that moment seem very remote, for they argue that the period from the 1830s to 1900 is intellectually, even morally, instructive. Laura Snyder ends,

> [William] Whewell and [John Stuart] Mill believed that the opposition of conflicting opinions could lead to truth. It is not surprising, then, that both of them supposed that by debating each other on the important issues of the day, truth would emerge. The revelation of truth would, they expected, lead to the reform of science and society. In these final pages I have suggested that, even today, we can use their insights in attempting to achieve these reforms. (334)

David Craig tells us that "Ruskin's moralistic criticism deserves a renewed hearing, especially among democratic liberals" (360) Leslie Butler recommends liberal

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Victorians' critical patriotism and "their notion of liberal cultivation" and believes that "recognizing the robustness of this older liberalism might help us to enrich our own" (268).

The exception is Suzy Anger's *Victorian Interpretation*, which seems refreshingly uninterested in moral reform and instead argues for the Victorians as part of the origins of intellectual modernism, even postmodernism. In our times, she claims, "self-reflexivity about the processes of understanding is pervasive: knowledge is historically and culturally situated, facts are theory-dependent, subjectivity is involved in all representation; in short, interpretation is always at work." Anger is a scholar of English literature, and hence the occupant of a professional space in which such assertions used to be habitual, but which now sound perhaps a little musty. It is my impression that the younger literary scholars are more drawn to the "historically and culturally situated," somewhat less to the "theory-dependent." Still, even if Foucault fades, subjectivity remains a preoccupation, so Anger may command an audience. Hers is a brief, concise, unfussy and worthwhile book. It has been usual, she claims, to trace the intellectual genealogy of the modern habit of hermeneutical interpretation to the German Romantics (especially Schleiermacher), whose offspring included Nietzsche and Heidegger. It has been usual, too, to exclude the Victorians from this genealogy. Anger believes this to be an error. To be sure, the Germans influenced the British (Coleridge, Carlyle), but there was also an indigenous hermeneutical tradition, existing in parallel, which arose "largely because cultural and historical factors similar to those that led to the development of a general hermeneutics in Germany were also present in Britain" (1–2). The trajectory is similar—what began as the exegesis of scriptural texts became the interpretation of secular literature—but there were English variations,which Anger explores by examining, in turn, Newman, Carlyle, Eliot, and Wilde, with side glances at Carroll, Arnold, and Pater, among others; these discussions alternate with chapters that examine various forms of discourse (the law, natural science, literary criticism).

In outline, this analysis may not be as original as Anger claims. The notion that the Victorians were intellectually and methodologically sophisticated seems to be something that every intellectual generation needs to rediscover by itself, since Lytton Strachey's wondrous dismissal remains stubbornly lodged in our intellectual genome. But Anger is fairly distinctive in suggesting that these Victorians are not just an intellectual by-way, curious to observe, but deeply influential on modern critical practice, not least because their form of hermeneutics retained more sharply than the Continental tradition the ghostly presence of the Bible and so retained a sense that there was indispensably an ethical dimension to interpretation. She traces a more-or-less tidy progression. Her Newman is someone who believed that interpreting the Bible was culturally

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and historically contingent, was not governed by authorial intent—that is, by the "sacred writer" rather than God—and hence that modern religious authorities are at liberty to control and reinvent the meaning of the Scriptures. Carlyle ("the eye sees . . . what the eye brings means of seeing") is credited with a more systematic attempt to make all the world's history into a biblical text of endlessly various meanings, but is seen as someone who, being an ex-Calvinist, nonetheless insisted that, in interpretation, truth is at stake; Carlyle is hence "transitional." George Eliot is viewed as crossing more firmly into the realm of a secular hermeneutics, ethical even if irreligious because she wished to stress the primary obligation of human sympathy and understood that the varieties of interpretation complicated how one person could understand and reach out to another. Lastly, Anger deals with Oscar Wilde, the hero of her piece for his "explorations of subjectivism, intersubjectivity, and intention [which] open the way to almost every prominent interpretive position in twentieth-century theory" (35, 61, 96, 165).

This analysis is schematic, perhaps too much so, given how much the Victorians relished quirky idiosyncrasy. It is more persuasive in its account of how some Victorians thought, than it is in showing how these ideas got from Oxford in 1890 to the University of Calfornia, Irvine in 1990. Moreover, although the formal ambition of the work is to reinstate the British hermeneutical tradition, the fact that the Continental tradition provides the vocabulary with which Anger approaches these matters has the odd effect of turning these very British figures into aliens, speaking awkwardly words that come, with more abstract scope and confidence, from less particularist thinkers elsewhere, whether it be Gadamer in Heidelberg or Ricoeur in Paris. Anger wishes to startle us into seeing something new in the Victorians and she chooses to gloss the Victorian words ("beauty," "sympathy") with more modern ones ("intersubjectivity," "forestructure"). This is her right, to jar the reader.

I remember once attending a conference, at which the Mississippi novelist Ellen Douglas gave a reading from her work, then on the next day attended a session in which her work was discussed. She came escorted by a literary critic, who offered an interpretation of what it all meant. Douglas, who is modest, sat silently and benignly as these interpretations whirled over her head. The scholars present grew restive, until one asked if the author herself had a view on the matter. It turned out that she did and, with that, the critic was forced into the background, indeed into silence. This was, no doubt, a shamefully old-fashioned incident. Anger reminds us again that the hermenutical tradition insists that authors have no special standing and, presumably, the scholars ought not to have been restive. Indeed Anger tells a nice story (135–6) about the Browning Society (b. 1881), which was "the first founded to study the works of a living author." Its debates were intense if not rancorous and, in due course, it naturally occurred to the members

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that Browning himself might adjudicate. One of the society's founders, F. J. Furnivall, "whenever an interpretive conflict arose . . . simply wrote to Browning." So, "in response to allegorical readings of 'Childe Roland,' for instance, Furnivall insisted that 'he had asked Browning if it was an allegory, and in answer, on three separate occasions, received an emphatic "'no"'." Most people thought Browning ought to know, but some felt this authority was a nuisance. "One member 'deprecated Mr. Furnivall asking Mr. Browning the meaning of his poems, and remarked that by doing so, there would be no need of the Browning society.'" Dead authors are, in this sense, convenient for hermeneuticists, as are dead gods.

Still, though Anger has the right to jar, she does so at a price. Her Victorians are kept at arm's length. Their words appear, but somehow not them, in the intimate complexity of their personalities, circumstances, conflicts, even rhetorics. This happens, too, in Snyder's *Reforming Philosophy* (a little) and in Craig's *John Ruskin and the Ethics of Consumption* (a lot). The former is a close reading of the dispute between William Whewell and John Stuart Mill over the nature of induction. This sounds arcane, but is surprisingly familiar territory. Mill, of course, is a major industry, a figure whom few can avoid encountering, whether with skittish distaste and respect (as with Stefan Collini) or glazed enthusiasm (almost everyone else), and many Mill scholars know that this dispute is of great importance to fathoming Mill's curious mind and still more curious influence.[1] As for Whewell, his has been a minor industry, first mooted by E. W. Strong in 1955, but gathering strength in the last twenty years with substantial works by Richard Yeo, James Henderson, and Menachem Fisch, who has also edited with Simon Schaffer a collection of essays.[2] Anger, indeed, mentions Whewell as one of her own (85, 89–91). He has been a reliable workhorse, regularly trotted out for a good quote and a better anecdote, especially by Cambridge historians and

[1] Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 121–69; *idem*, *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 119–43.

[2] E. W. Strong, "William Whewell and John Stuart Mill: Their Controversy about Scientific Knowledge," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16 (April 1955), 209–31; Richard Yeo, *Defining Science: William Whewell, Natural Knowledge, and Public Debate in Early Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Menachem Fisch, *William Whewell, Philosopher of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Menachem Fisch and Simon Schaffer, eds., *William Whewell, a Composite Portrait* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); James P. Henderson, *Early Mathematical Economics: William Whewell and the British Case* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996).

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historians of Cambridge.[3] He was, after all, once the victim of Sydney Smith's gentle malice and this alone guarantees immortality.[4]

So abundant has been the secondary literature that Snyder is hard put to justify her book. I am not sure she is persuasive, but her formal justification is that no one else has looked at the debate "in its entirety"; that is, not merely at the narrower debate over scientific method, but at the larger discussion about moral philosophy, political economy, and the relationship between mind and society. However, she is anxious to keep aspects of Mill and Whewell in focus, so she has also decided to diminish "the role of other prominent thinkers who were equally enmeshed in the contemporary debate over science and society" (3), such as Richard Whateley, John Herschel, and others. This runs the danger of falling between stools. It evades that larger debate, because focused on Mill and Whewell. But it also evades much in the thought of even these two, who both did and thought things remote from this particular debate. Still, the book is very valuable, partly because Snyder is a historian of the philosophy of science, and this training often yields fresh insight. But she is also widely knowledgeable about British intellectual history and often surefooted.

As is usual, Snyder is on Whewell's side. Hardly anyone who has examined this debate recently ends up defending Mill, who was, in this matter, peculiarly obtuse. However, in the short term, Mill was thought to have won, mostly because Whewell's stress on the role of genius was thought to be undemocratic and haphazard, though Whewell, who was little enamored of democracy, would not agree with haphazard.[5] The basic issue was simple enough. Whewell, who was

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3 See, for example, Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 287, 372, 377; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England, 1783–1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 610; Charles Coulston Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology: A Study in the Relations of Scientific Thought, Natural Theology, and Social Opinion in Great Britain, 1790–1850* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), passim; Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 71, 80, 344, 346.

4 "Someone having said of Whewell that his *forte* was science, 'Yes,' assented Sydney Smith, 'and his foible is omniscience'": quoted in I. Todhunter, *William Whewell, D. D., Master of Trinity College, Cambridge: An Account of His Writings with Selections from His Literary and Scientific Correspondence*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1876), 1: 410.

5 This is argued in Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 179. On Whewell's elitism see Peter Searby, *A History of the University of Cambridge, Vol. 3: 1750–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 450, which quotes Whewell on the discovery and dispersal of "Fundamental Ideas": "One idea after another, of those which constitute the basis of science, becomes distinct, first in the minds of discoverers, then in the minds of all cultured men, till a general clearness of thought

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a Cambridge mathematician, historian of science, and, as was familiarly said, "polymath," had argued that scientific discovery was not merely a registering of facts, dispassionately gathered, but arose from the dialectic between hypothesis, imagination, and research. For his part, Mill was waging a larger campaign against "the notion that truths external to the mind may be known by intuition or consciousness, independently of observations and experience," because this doctrine was "the great intellectual support of false doctrines and bad institutions."[6] He decided to attack Whewell, whose cultural authority was great. (He was master of Trinity College and many were the thinkers who trotted to the lodge to seek his ruling on sundry matters.) This dispute was not done in rapid fire, was not the sort of intellectual firestorm that now agitates the correspondence columns of literary reviews, but was enacted in stately leisure. Mill first wrote about Whewell's shortcomings in the *System of Logic* (1843); Whewell replied in *Of Induction, with Especial Reference to Mr. J. Stuart Mill's "System of Logic"* (1849); Mill offered a rebuttal in the third edition of the *System of Logic* (1851) and reviewed Whewell's *Lectures on Systematic Morality* in 1852; and Whewell, who died from a riding accident in 1866, had just written a criticism of Mill on Auguste Comte which was published posthumously. They never met, only one letter was written by one (Mill) to the other (Whewell), and the dispute was surprisingly decorous, given their known characters. For all his pained reserve, Mill could be an intellectual streetfighter and Whewell was notorious for being an intellectual bully, loud and ungentlemanly.[7] In truth, Mill missed the mark so badly that Whewell felt little need to bring out the heavy artillery. This was so not only because Mill blatantly misunderstood and misprepresented Whewell, who had never argued that empirical research was irrelevant to scientific research, but because Mill knew little or no science, hardly ever read it, and used a friend to crib the odd fact for him (Snyder, 152).

The condundrum, some claim, is that Mill was the liberal and Whewell the Tory, yet the former seemed to insist on the irrelevance of the human imagination and the latter was content to sanction its role. This can be seen as a vexation. Intellectual Tories are supposed to cling stubbornly to fact, to God, to rigidities,

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illuminates the land; and thus the torch of knowledge is handed forwards, thousands upon thousands lighting their lamps as it passes on; while still from time to time some new Prometheus catches a fresh light from heaven, to spread abroad among men in like manner."

6 Mill's *Autobiography*, quoted in Snyder (4).

7 There was a student parody of Whewell, which requested that "the Master may not disturb the devotions of the congregation by his loud responses: that Mr. Whewell may learn the manners of a gentleman." See D. A. Winstanley, *Early Victorian Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 392.

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and to worry mightily when frisky young minds start talking about creativity, invention, freedom—all the themes which liberals are supposed to admire and encourage. It seems to be a subtle vexation for Snyder, who responds by quietly diminishing Whewell's credentials as a conservative and turning him into a flexible moderate with Tory moments (e.g. 222–4). I do not find this persuasive—partly it does not seem to me to be a conundrum, at all. European intellectual history is littered with conservatives, who have insisted that mind is necessary to hold the world together: Maistre, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger. It is equally littered with reformers who mistrust mind: Marx, most of all. Political and social ideology does not ineluctably structure attitudes towards creativity; the relevant issue seems to be what minds might be used for, not whether minds can be used. Mill damned intuition, because so many intuitionists (like Coleridge) were conservatives. My own impression is that Whewell was a thorough Tory, which seems tolerably clear from the many books on his peculiar Cambridge world. About this world, Snyder is as informed as she is rational. She has read Winstanley's *Early Victorian Cambridge*, which shows good taste on her part, but understandably stopped short of Peter Searby, Noel Annan, and John Gascoigne, as well as the many quasi-antiquarian works that Cambridge people so lovingly produce, by way of self-congratulation. In these works, Whewell appears as someone who complained about impertinent young Fellows (to whom he denied keys to enter the college), insisted on the ancient primacy of mathematics even when adding analysis to the curriculum, thought modern science ought not to be taught, arbitrarily moved nude pictures around in the Fitzwilliam Museum so that "very young persons of both sexes" need not be shocked and corrupted, and regarded dissent as a "great evil." Certainly the government thought Whewell was a Tory; his predecessor as master, Christopher Worsdworth, delayed his resignation until Lord Melbourne had left office and Sir Robert Peel had come in.[8]

Religion loomed large in Whewell's imagination and he carefully structured his approval of scientific innovation in ways that would not disturb a conservative Anglicanism. Religion dominates in David Craig's *John Ruskin*, too. Craig is evidently a believer, indeed someone who wears his religious heart on his sleeve. Since the same can be said of Ruskin, an infidel can only read this book as a puzzled bystander who has blundered into a synod by mistake. Most puzzling is genre. It is not theology, it is not history, it is not intellectual biography, and only rarely is it literary criticism. It is a long, indeed too long, reverie on the contemporary

[8] Winstanley, *Early Victorian Cambridge*, 79, 141, 405–7; Laurence Fowler and Helen Fowler, comps., *Cambridge Commemorated: An Anthology of University Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 197–98; Searby, *University of Cambridge, 1750–1870*, 445–55; Noel Annan, *The Dons: Mentors, Eccentrics and Geniuses* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 119.

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moral relevance of Ruskin's views on consumerism. The gist of it is that "Ruskin's social criticism aims to provoke consumers to exercise their moral imagination" and that this criticism was "practical." That is, Ruskin "relocates ethical reflection in people's practical decisions about how to order the ends and goods that they pursue by choosing to commit to some activities over another." These choices "lead to the development of the virtues that shape the character and judgements that people make." This seems to mean that, if we buy virtuously, we become virtuous and so buy virtuously, and so on. What this may mean for wandering through a mall in Minneapolis or Newcastle is not clear, at least to me. Can I buy jeans? Pickled herrings? Italian shoes? I think Craig is saying that I need to believe in God to know, though he is understandably evasive about making so bald a claim. But his book is unintelligible without such a claim. "I side with Ruskin," he writes, "on the importance of imagining other people's circumstances, needs, and contributions and the goods that we already do or might agree to share with others in the larger community." So do I, I suppose, at least in theory, though this could get too morally demanding by the time I get to the fourth aisle in the supermarket, past the broccoli and deciding on the olive oil. However, "I also claim," Craig adds, "that a practiced piety for the sources of one's existence is a necessary reminder of these obligations" (14, 107, 201). For my own part, I am very out of practice when it comes to piety, so it looks as though my ethical shopping is doomed.

It is a matter of some interest that the above books come from English, philosophy, and religious-studies departments. No doubt, Victorian studies have long been interdisciplinary, and certainly early (if not always late) Victorian intellectuals were seldom reluctant to venture many genres or to mix them. Whewell was a mathematician, but also a historian, a student of tides, a political economist, a moral philosopher, a scholar of Gothic architecture, a translator of German literature, and a versifier upon the theme of Boadicea. However, no longer do polymaths write about other polymaths, but specialists about polymaths. The effect is chastening, if beyond desirable remedy. What is studied seems to go in and out of focus with worrying regularity—this thing seen, the next missed, the third only quasi-contextualized. Added is that all these books are by North American scholars, writing about ineradicably British authors. This adds fresh barriers to understanding. No doubt, as I have every reason to know, it works the other way around, too, when British scholars write about Americans. My sense is that the price of this disconnection-cum-connection is that one ends up trusting the words on the page too much, not quite knowing how the words sound, and how others then heard the words. So Whewell's flat Lancastrian accent—he was the parvenu son of a master carpenter—which was gradually gentrified as he aged and prospered and lost touch with his relatives, is missing here. Yet no English person, historian or not, would doubt that five

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minutes of hearing the voice would tell as much as reading several hundred pages of Whewell's views on Francis Bacon, at least about his sense of social class, if not his grasp of logic. And who can doubt that a master of Trinity College was as much, if not more, the arbiter of class as of metaphysics?

Only Leslie Butler inhabits a history department and only she formally hazards the transatlantic. She enters a field scarcely unpopulated by those who understand that, at least from Emerson onwards, there was a loose Anglo-American community of reformers, who visited each other's homes, published in each other's periodicals, lectured at each other's universities, and dangled each other's children on their knees.[9] Butler's book clearly sits on the American shore, in that she is chiefly interested in how this community effected American reform, rather than British reform. Gladstone is taken for granted, not explored. Nonetheless it is her strength that she is very well read in recent British scholarship about the Victorians and knows her Stefan Collini, Eugenio Biagini, John Burrow, Jon Parry, and the rest. Indeed, since this community was a sort of Oxbridge–Ivy League exchange program, she knows aspects of the British scene possibly better than the American scene west of Cornell and south of Philadelphia. Butler's is that difficult venture, the collective biography, but she makes a good case that she is, indeed, describing a community, which consisted at its core of Charles Eliot Norton, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, George William Curtis, and James Russell Lowell. They were in dialogue, among the British, with John Stuart Mill, Leslie Stephen, Matthew Arnold, James Bryce, and (mostly with hostility) the late Carlyle (he of "Shooting Niagara"). Suspended between these worlds was Goldwin Smith, who started at Oxford, moved to Cornell, and ended up in Canada. Not the least merit of Butler's book is that she is nicely aware that communities have their quarrels, that intellectual villages fight over who makes the sandwiches at the annual fete, and so she carefully plots the tensions, transatlantic and intramural. In particular, there is an absorbing discussion of how the Americans dealt with

[9] In recent memory, one must single out John G. Sproat, *"The Best Men": Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); Robert Kelley, *The Transatlantic Persuasion: The Liberal-Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969); James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); James Turner, *The Liberal Education of Charles Eliot Norton* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); and Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Belknap, 1998). But, arguably, literary scholars have been more assiduous, for example Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Paul Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections: British Culture and the Formation of American Literature, 1730–1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

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Arnold, who articulated much of their creed but did not concede that Americans were adequately cultured.

For the most part and with gentle skepticism, Butler's is a defense of this liberal generation, whose roots she traces to the onset and experience of the Civil War. It has been usual to dismiss them as hopelessly genteel and mostly ineffectual, as mere Mugwumps squeezed between Gilded Age plutocracy, party corruption, populist insurgency, and imperialist ambition. Butler makes only a modest case for their effectuality, by pointing to them as makers of educational and literary institutions, but mostly seeks to rehabilitate their astuteness, sincerity, and scope, and to recommend their concept of "cultivation" and their sense of the necessity of cultural criticism, which might foster individual development. This requires some nimbleness of explication and a modest amount of editing (saying less about Dante, more about democracy), but roughly comes off. The research is impeccable, the detail nuanced, the portraits convincing, the argument ably sustained.

Hers is not an encouraging story, indeed perhaps even less encouraging than she is willing to admit. Her liberals did, after all, more or less fail, and Butler's self-imposed task of necromancy is necessary, because their cultural moment is so dead. But then the Civil War had unreasonably raised their hopes and, because they sat in seats of cultural power (Harvard, the *Atlantic Monthly*), they imagined that their minds might effect improvements in their world. They presumed the transatlantic world would get more democratic, more liberal, and less religious, and that civic life would gradually enrich. This is not how it turned out. Annexing the Philippines and butchering its inhabitants was how it turned out, Theodore Roosevelt's brainless manliness was what they were obliged to contemplate at the end of their lives. They complained, but nobody much remained interested. In time, American modernists would dismiss their accomplishment and forget their context. When Henry May published *The End of American Innocence* in 1959, he was, in fact, not unaware of what Butler now says. His second chapter, "Practical Idealism," as a portrait of the generation Butler has described, is not unsympathetic. As May observed,

> however insipid the American credo of 1912 seemed to the next decade, we must remember that it had lived through the nineteenth century . . . had come to consciousness in the midst of a devastating and revolutionary civil war . . . [their] moral cosmos had been subject to a succession of earthquake shocks.[10]

Still, the subtitle of his book was "a study of the first years of our own time, 1912–1917," which in effect alienated the relevance of the time before 1912, and

[10] Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time, 1912–1917* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969; first published 1959), 9.

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claimed modernism as "our own," however ambivalent May may have been about modernism.[11]

Four books are not much of a sample, but, for what it is worth, it is striking that these works share a distinctive sense of historical trajectory. There is the nineteenth century, there is "us" (a category often invoked and seldom defined), and there is little in between. It used to be that T. S. Eliot, William Butler Yeats, James Joyce, and their ilk haunted Victorian studies and made it struggle for legitimacy. Only Leslie Butler has a lingering sense of that challenge, but even she seems to sweep it aside with confident ease. The rest, with the partial exception of Suzy Anger, do not seem to care. We are being asked to seek truth, be patriotic and robust, moralistic and liberal. Spring break in Midlothian, by way of re-enacting Gladstone's pious campaign, anyone?

[11] An ambivalence clear even in this book, but most clearly in his autobiography; see Henry F. May, *Coming to Terms: A Study in Memory and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

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