

straight woman, for that matter) who “puts on” femininity in order to assuage male anxiety is performing a qualitatively different (and probably much more self-reflexive) act than the male viewer who disavows his femininity or homosexuality through excessively masculine behavior. To group both of them under the aegis of gender performance elides the ways in which the preservation of masculine heterosexuality is the unspoken concern of both masquerades.

Berenstein’s discussion of the relationship between spectatorial identification and character action on-screen is flawed in much the same way. At times, in her analysis of individual texts, she claims that character and spectator action mirror one another; at other times, she argues that they do not. Berenstein’s reading of the on-screen suffering of female and male characters is likewise inconsistent. Female suffering/screaming on-screen is evidence of a performance of gender, while male suffering on-screen and just outside the frame is simply male suffering (89–92).

Similar inconsistencies mar Berenstein’s arguments about spectatorial desire. While she reads the refusal of male spectators to reveal their terror/horror at horror movies in general as a cover for homosexual desire (53), the screams of female spectators function as a cover for sadistic pleasure at the spectacle of male suffering in mad-doctor movies (89 and 123). With little more than a quote from Bela Lugosi to back up this claim, Berenstein contends that the popular model of male spectatorial sadism should be inverted; it is actually female spectators who take pleasure in the suffering of male characters despite the fact that female characters are still the most spectacular victims in horror films.

This critique is not meant to diminish the value of *Attack of the Leading Ladies*. Berenstein presents a particularly meaningful analysis of historic material, and her archival work is the most thorough project on classic horror I have seen to date. Indeed, archival work such as hers offers a valuable corrective to much film criticism, and other critics and theorists would do well to follow her model in providing thorough and interesting discussions of the ways in which textual meaning circulates within a larger economy of cultural signification. Readers interested in a useful historic analysis of classic horror need look no further than this book, although readers in search of a cogent model of spectatorship will need to look elsewhere.

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The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy

By Robert B. Ray. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. \$39.95 cloth; \$18.95 paper.

Flipping through this book, you find three introductions, pebbly video stills sans captions, a chapter with topics ordered alphabetically, a game of Exquisite Corpse Q & A (“What is Polly’s kiss? A gesture, sweet and minute”), and strings of such sentences as this: “The actress (Ann Rutherford) and the character (Polly) anticipating the age to come: *rutherford* (‘a unit of radiation’), *poly* (‘a polymorpho-nuclear leukocyte’).” One might just end the review here. Those eager to enter another theme park for the literati may be enticed by *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy*. If you find the ludic ludicrous, this is not for you.

But stopping at first impressions would be rash, for the book aims to make an argument. I believe it runs this way. In the 19th century, modernity (the city, capitalism, etc.) triggered a “crisis of legibility” in which ordinary life became opaque. This crisis occurred within several domains of culture: the detective story, the *physiologies* of character types, and above all photography. The photograph is a fragment, a trace of that stubbornly material existence which cannot be reduced to abstract schemes, particularly schemes of language. Cinema constitutes both a development out of photography and the effort to harness its disruptive power (by means of narrative, which is coextensive with language).

But according to this book, one avant-garde tradition unleashes the power of the image. This line of thought is emblemized by the Parisian Surrealists’ celebration of free association around the fragment. It is continued by Roland Barthes’ notion of the “third meaning” and Derrida’s grammatology. Film studies has neglected this antitraditional tradition, but by returning to it we can rejuvenate an academic discipline that has become mired in stale, repetitive readings. We should cultivate new modes of attending to images; we ought to model film research on *Nadja* and *Flaubert’s Parrot*. The more unpredictable our critical writing, the more exciting and informative it will become. And the author insists that this sort of criticism creates more than a buzz. It yields knowledge. In fact, the surprise produced by experimental criticism produces information in the Shannon-Weaver sense of unexpected novelty.

For these reasons, we are expected to avoid taking *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* as only another transitory product of tenured hijinks in the seminar

room. Yet where knowledge is at stake, claims should submit to critical questioning. If my summary of the book's tacit argument is even roughly right, a lot of questions might be posed. Here is one: How is the argument supported?

Partly by examples chosen from a few Hollywood films, mostly from the Andy Hardy series. Shots and scenes are plucked out, linked to others or to quotes from favored theorists, meditated upon along Rutherfordian/polyleukocyte lines. Here's another sample: Censor Joseph Breen's name is "one letter away from signifying the sexual act most actively suppressed: breed" (187). The author also supplies autobiographical reminiscences (e.g., a conference session at which an avant-garde mode of lecturing was greeted with silence), gratified reports of how his book's title bewildered his colleagues, classroom exercises in free association that have proven successful at the University of Florida, and substantial excerpts from exemplary student papers.

The book's argumentative drift also appeals to authorities. For a book seeking to point the way to an avant-garde criticism of the future, the landmarks look distinctly familiar: Paris/Berlin 1920s (Breton, Brecht, Benjamin); Paris 1966–1970 (Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Godard, Brecht again, above all Barthes); United States 1966–1970 (computers, Shannon-Weaver information theory, Walter Ong, and McLuhan). Much of the book consists of quotation and paraphrase of such thinkers, and each idea enunciated is taken to be self-sustaining, needing no evidence or argument. This indicates the book's obedience to contemporary academic norms of "top-down" theorizing, where the argument moves by hopscotching among citations.

It also moves by appeal to a rather startling analogy. The new film studies, we are told, will be like science. It is a "method" guided by "research questions," and its exercises are "experiments" that test "hypotheses." The models for this science are, surprisingly, Surrealist writing and Derridean grammatology, both of which have been purportedly "confirmed" by evidence. Yet real science—the sort that cures diseases and jets academics to conferences—depends on hypotheses that can be *disconfirmed*. "What is Polly's kiss?" is not a compelling scientific research question because no answer can be wrong. Where there is no possibility of error, there is no chance of knowledge. Similarly, science strives to be noncontradictory in its findings. The discoveries of biology or astronomy ought not to countermand laws of chemistry or physics. How *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* can reconcile, say, Shannon's fundamental theses about information engineering with Derridean grammatol-

ogy, Surrealist automatic writing, and Benjaminian materialism remains obscure.

In pursuing the analogy to science, the book displays some confusion about what constitutes a "method." The steps taken in conducting a scientific experiment are publicly available and replicable by disinterested parties. To offer various free-association games as new "methods" is to conflate scientific method with any procedure that can be spelled out as a series of steps. Instructions for casting spells on your enemies can be listed procedurally, but they do not constitute an experimental method. Moreover, scientific activity involves both discovery and justification. Important discoveries have been made by serendipitous insights, but they were proved to be reliable only by being subjected to rigorous, intersubjectively plausible interrogation. You can build a reading of *The Maltese Falcon* by consulting a Ouija board, but that does not justify the case to a skeptical reader. You will still have to appeal to the protocols of reasonable inference and argument.

Above all, science as a form of rational inquiry demands that members of the community criticize one another. This does many useful things, including weeding out wacko theories. (Admittedly, many contemporary humanists do not want to weed out wacko theories.) By contrast, this book offers no criticism of the theorists it cites; vague and equivocal ideas such as "inner speech" and "simulation" are never probed. The same goes for the results achieved; you can't criticize a critic's divinations of rutherfords and breens. No surprise, then, that the text does not analyze its own enabling assumptions. Why assume that all films are photographic? Why believe that by adopting narrative form, cinema is committed to "language" in any sense? Why presuppose that the whole of film studies reduces to ways of reading movies? (There is, for example, historical research, not to mention empirical analyses of audiences, some of which constitute *real* experiments.) Similarly, there are reasonably plausible accounts of attention which would explain why we might scrutinize and imaginatively elaborate a still image, but the book entertains none of them.

At one point the book suggests that its use of science is just a literary conceit. The model is pataphysics, "a science of exceptions." But then what sort of knowledge can this generate? Purportedly not the sort valued in our "positivist culture" (99). (Interestingly, about half of adult Americans do not believe that the earth travels around the sun, and three-quarters think that dinosaurs were roaming the earth when the first humans appeared. Positivist culture has been a flop.) The question of what kind of knowledge can

be created by this method is made murkier by the book's constant equating of knowledge with novelty. According to *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy*, the most radical surprise will yield the most "information" in an engineering sense. But information in this sense is not identical to knowledge—that is, justified, true (or reliable) belief. In information-theoretic terms, unexpected lies are just as "informative" as unexpected truths.

What links the arguments by example, authority, and analogy are, it should now be evident, some standard strategies of reasoning and rhetoric. Again, *The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy* shows itself to be farther from the vanguard than it might hope. The commentary on theorists is, as is common today, governed by associative links forged among *aperçus* rather than by inferences from evidence to conclusion. As for the book's rhetoric, it has a familiar ring. We are promised a method that fights stuffy tradition. The enemy is the very academy that nurtures the innovative enterprise. The method promises not only pleasure but also political and cultural resistance. Above all, novelty is the only value, more important than truth or plausibility.

Again, none of these claims is defended in detail, and I suspect few would stand up to scrutiny. It all adds up to a surprisingly orthodox line for a project that would reinvent film studies. Ironically, the traditions that this book condemns as mundane once claimed exactly the same cutting-edge goals and values. Perhaps any professedly avant-garde criticism ought to consider the possibility that "progressive" art and its associated commentary have, over a century, built up their own clichés. Anybody trying to make the academy more avant-garde might reflect upon the academicism of the avant-garde itself.

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Charlie Chaplin Intimate Close-Ups

By Georgia Hale. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1995. \$32.50.

Opposite Attraction The Lives of Erich Maria Remarque and Paulette Goddard

By Julie Gilbert. New York: Pantheon, 1995. \$32.50.

Tramp The Life of Charlie Chaplin

By Joyce Milton. New York: Harper-Collins, 1996. \$32.00.

Although new publications on Chaplin have appeared almost continuously since 1915, the quantity and quality of books on the artist have increased noticeably in the last 15 years. Some of these books were produced to mark the centennial of Chaplin's birth in 1989, but a major reappraisal of Chaplin and his work was already underway in the early 1980s, initiated by Kevin Brownlow and David Gill's BBC documentary *Unknown Chaplin* (1983), and by David Robinson's formidable *Chaplin: His Life and Art* (1985). Hale's and Milton's books contribute, numerically at least, to this new wave of books on Chaplin, while Gilbert's *Opposite Attraction* touches on Chaplin indirectly.

Gilbert's principal subjects are Paulette Goddard and her fourth and last husband, Erich Maria Remarque, but since Goddard was Chaplin's third wife, co-starring with him in *Modern Times* and *The Great Dictator*, any comprehensive discussion of Goddard will necessarily involve Chaplin. Unlike Chaplin's second wife Lita Grey, who entered a forced marriage with him in her late teens, divorced him acrimoniously two years later, and published a ghosted tell-all potboiler in 1966, Goddard was at least 21 when she met Chaplin, previously married, financially independent, and exceptionally shrewd. She lived with Chaplin for approximately eight years and remained on cordial terms with him. Unfortunately for Chaplin scholars, however, she never felt compelled to write her memoirs.

But Goddard did reminisce about Chaplin, and these recollections, preserved in the Paulette Goddard Collection at New York University, help to fill a major gap in our knowledge of Chaplin's personal life.