

help make cultural studies more relevant to the world that it studies, an admirable aim for cultural studies scholars and historians alike.

Historians interested in exploring the problematic nature of communication in popular culture have a good deal to gain by reading both books. *Slippery Pastimes* offers a wide range of (mostly contemporary and reasonably accessible) case studies while *The Politics of Enchantment* challenges us to re-examine the manner in which we, as scholars, approach the cultural artifacts we examine. My personal advice would be to draw selectively upon the former and delve deeply into the latter.

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Dorothy E. Smith. *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. Pp. 307.

The writing of history is simply not as rote or mundane as it used to be. Parallel with the fragmentation of disciplines and prominence of research in Canadian universities, any historiography in Canada over the past half-century reveals increasingly multifarious perspectives on what and whom to write about, and what argument to use. The introspection imbued in the writing, either conscious or subliminal, has stimulated substantial scholarship into such topics as gender, race, ethnicity, power, communities, and cultures, to name just a few. The result has been a flowering of history in both popular and, especially, academic macro and micro studies, and a realization that anything in the past is open to critical analysis and discussion.

Does this sound roseate? In *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations*, Dorothy Smith argues against the suggestion that these are the halcyon days of academic writing. Further, Smith would contend that all is not well in halls of academe, where certain voices are marginalized and subjectivities denied. Since the universities in Canada have evolved over the past forty years into large bureaucratic research institutes, *Writing the Social* takes on sociological and, by association, socio-historical research and disciplines, uncovering

obvious and nuanced structures and discourses which are antithetical to maximizing communication and democracy in academe. In short, Smith raises flags: all is not well.

This book is instructive and important. It rattles the cage of the complacent academe by deconstructing the order of patriarchal dominance that permeates the ruling relations of the institute. Smith asserts that “the ruling relations...[co-ordinate] the activities of people in the local sites of their bodily being into relations operating independently of person, place, and time”(p. 75). Individual experience, especially the local experience and living of women in the university, take a hit to the effect that agency is objectified into impotence; the active, thinking, feeling individual is forced into activity and discourse antithetical to free discussion and, almost, to free will. In the analogous patriarchal “main business” in modern political economy, for example, women’s other work of child-rearing remains invisible (p. 38). The texts, discursive spaces, and practices of the university control the agent and mediate relations as surely as the agent supports the ruling relations simply by participating. “The development of the ruling relations as an historical trajectory has progressively transferred organization from person to objectified forms” (p. 81). Disciplines and universities are in need of an overhaul.

Writing the Social tackles a host of issues revolving around gender inequality that are rife in sociological writing and, upon close scrutiny, in the historical university. Social historians would do well to read the arguments concerning patriarchy, political correctness, text analysis, and postmodern discourse. Marxist theory is frequently used to analyze relations comparatively within society and the university between genders and intra-gender. Importantly, while discussing theory and practice, historical relativism is given proper acknowledgement. Marxist ideology is discussed with refreshingly thoughtful historical provisos (pp. 44, 80); objectifying powers of sociological texts are studied temporally (pp. 53, 80); the ruling relations are noted since the seventeenth century as having varying and historical degrees of generally increasing pervasiveness, promoting a consciousness of gender differentiation (p. 91); and the knower, an active agent in the social relations of discourse, is not a transcendent subject but “situated in the actualities of her own living” (p. 98), which Smith time and again cautions is lost in sociological texts. The social itself, or “the ongoing concerting and coordinating of

individuals' activities," inseparable from "actual people and [their activities]" (6), is, at its core, sensitive to time and space: "an on-going process...in time and in actual local sites of people's bodily existence" (p. 97). Slams against some streams of feminist thought vilify feminism for discounting the socio-intellectual context of the day; here, *Writing the Social's* very thesis is cognizant of historical context, which is doubly impressive when, with considerable sensitivity, Smith intuitively delineates the nuances and relationships of cerebral feminist, linguistic, and social theories of the present and past.

A definite strength of *Writing the Social* is the very purpose of this inquiry. Smith is on a journey of discovery as a woman, feminist, person, and mother in subjective existence, fighting objectifying (and very powerful) discourses and relations; she is above all inquisitive. Knowledge in all its forms should be fluid and diverse, and the elusive and active nature of "truth" is always in question. Once again, this critical approach is historically aware. "Knowledge...is always in time, always in action among people..." Smith acknowledges her "concern to explore text-mediated discourse as social relations coordinating multiple historical sites and the locally bound activities of local people" (p. 158). What is at the core of how we are incessantly influenced, or coerced, into acting by and reacting to others who effectively determine our everyday/everynight living?

As a personal, reflective intellectual journey of sociological thought presented in essay form, *Writing the Social* succeeds in enthralling the reader as an extended text on a woman's struggle with prevailing social and academic practices. Historians of higher education can profit from reading the book, not least for its revisiting of the lamentably faint respect for alternative voices in the academy. The chapter on "Texts and Repression: Hazards for Feminists in the Academy" is particularly interesting, as it delves into the unified and co-ordinating framing of "experience, perspective, and interest" (p. 196) of divergent voices characteristic of the early 1990s "chilly climate" in the Political Science department at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. The gendered grievance was quickly and acrimoniously organized into institutional and juridical discourse – a death knell for sure. Has this kind of objectifying practice happened at other universities throughout time? Smith's dialogue provides food for thought.

Writing the Social confidently goes beyond what it critically engages – postmodernism's eschewing of that which exists

independent of discourse, and this aversion's effect in propelling the theory's fall into the patterned discourse it is trying to deconstruct – and succeeds in adding to what many claim to be postmodern theory's greatest weakness. *Writing the Social* not only challenges but cogently offers solutions to the objectification of knowledge/the knower and the lack of women's lived experience and voice apparent and influential in the discursive order and texts in society, institutions, political economy, and the university. The problem, oft-stated in the book, indicates just how restrictive and oppressive sociological texts can be by nullifying subjective individual experience and perspective. Other voices outside the ruling relations and objectifying disciplinary practices are “subdued,” “regulated,” “standardized,” “consolidated,” and “organized” (pp. 146-56). Idealistic as it is laudable, Smith's solution involves examining the ruling relations, “not only in respect to their content, but also in respect to the relations among people they organize” (p. 94) – in other words, deconstructing dominant discourses and authority. Further, Smith concludes that the solution involves properly using theory as a form of communication to “together ...find out” which part of the intellectual “beast” myriad sociology researchers are holding. Any work that postulates the need for rational discussion based on looking outside the box of traditional socio-historical theory to reveal new perspectives on discursive practices to confront exploitative relations which “stand over against us and overpower our lives” (p. 228) is worth a look.

The reader of *Writing the Social* is comforted by feminist reflections which involve calling into question the epistemological – the “very grounds of knowledge” (p. 30). This remains a fresh and apposite perspective despite the broad familiarity of most readers with the school of feminism, and a reasonable one in a book that tackles fundamental concepts of gender, class, and culture in institution and society. The book is not for the uninitiated in theory, as numerous social, political, and linguistic arguments abound, but to come away from its reading without some insight into an efficacious form of analysis would be ignoring the very power constructs within which we all work and live. Smith challenges everyone to rethink his or her local practices and roles in society and in the university, to theoretically disassemble the ruling relations in which we are all a part, to better understand the institution and its internal structures and discourses as products of our own bidding, and to

seriously consider alternative viewpoints based on personal subjectivities. Indeed, let's together reverse engineer our lot.

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Marcel Boisvert. *L'éducation de la jeune fille de province dans Balzac*. Montréal, Guérin Éditeur, 2000. 242 p.

La Comédie humaine, oeuvre magistrale d'Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850), compte 90 romans au fil desquels évoluent plus de 2000 personnages. À cette imposante étude de moeurs de ses contemporains, Balzac superpose un portrait de la société française qui s'étend de la Révolution de 1789 à la première moitié du XIX^e siècle. Parmi les milliers de figures tracées avec tant de réalisme par Balzac, Marcel Boisvert, professeur à la Faculté des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université de Montréal, choisit avec bonheur d'observer l'éducation de la jeune fille de province plutôt que de l'étudier à travers une histoire classique de l'éducation en France. Son principal questionnement est de savoir jusqu'à quel point la manière dont Balzac dépeint les jeunes provinciales de son temps demeure exacte et conforme à la réalité. Autrement dit, peut-on se fier au regard que jette un romancier sur son époque pour reconstituer fidèlement le passé?

Oui, conclut Marcel Boisvert, à l'issue d'une analyse sérieuse et approfondie de *La Comédie humaine*. Pour en arriver à ce résultat, M. Boisvert devait recourir à des éléments comparatifs qu'il a minutieusement relevés lors du dépouillement d'un impressionnant corpus de mémoires, de correspondances, d'oeuvres littéraires de l'époque, de journaux, d'écrits de spécialistes, d'historiens de l'éducation et d'archives, afin d'étudier le milieu social, l'éducation et la destinée de la jeune fille en France dans la première moitié du XIX^e siècle.

Le fruit de son travail, livré de façon claire et efficace, possède, outre ces qualités, le mérite de demeurer captivant parce qu'accessible au commun des lecteurs. Je dois avouer qu'avant d'avoir lu l'ouvrage de M. Boisvert, je redoutais l'essai hermétique, réservé aux seuls initiés à la littérature française du XIX^e siècle, ce qui heureusement n'est pas le cas. De sa longue expérience auprès des étudiants des collèges classiques, des