It is perfectly safe to accept Smith as our guide through the often intricate passages that show us how Montaigne cleverly accommodated the censors while giving up only a minimum of his original thought. Smith's sound piece of detective work sheds light on an important remark made by Pierre Villey in his *Montaigne devant le postérité*: "Quelque peine que nous ayons à la comprendre, il faut admettre que, pour un catholique du XVI^e siècle, il y avait là une liberté d'esprit choquante" (p. 92).

However, it is regrettable that the author has not made a better assessment of his potential audience. This is a work that cannot hope for popular appeal and therefore it is inappropriate that the French original has not been kept. One might be more forgiving on this score if the translations offered were smooth and correct. I am afraid they are not. By way of a sample, one should compare the passage dealing with De Bèze, on p. 46 of Smith's book, with the corresponding sentence at the bottom of p. 756 of Frame's *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*. It is also not at all helpful that Smith refuses to give page references. With regard to specific *essais* he leaves us floundering by telling us, "about three-quarters of the way through" (p. 46), "and a little later" (p. 70), "near the beginning" (p. 101). At least it is conceded that "it would do no harm for the reader to look at Montaigne's original French, if possible, for many parts of Montaigne are difficult to translate" (p. 13). "If possible" could only apply if we were asked to check on the original editions Smith used in the British Library, an unreasonable expectation.

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Clark Hulse. *Metamorphic Verse. The Elizabethan Minor Epic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. Pp. 296. Illus. 14. \$22.50

The decade of the 1590s was for England a time of extraordinarily rich and varied literary production, and at least one of the results of this burgeoning was the birth of a new form, the minor epic. Although every major Elizabethan writer except Sidney wrote a minor epic, it is today a neglected form, and, were it not for its major exemplars, Shakespeare (*Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*) and Marlowe (*Hero and Leander*), it would be an almost forgotten one. The reason for this neglect, according to Hulse, is that we tend to privilege literature's "timeless values," the qualities that transcend temporality, whereas the minor epic can only be properly understood within its historical context. The ambitious promise of Hulse's *Metamorphic Verse* is to provide such an historical context, to restore the minor epic to its place in "the network of Elizabethan theory and practice." It is a promise he admirably fulfills, and in doing so, not only does he construct a poetics for the minor epic, but he provides an important model for the criticism of Renaissance literature in general.

The genre of minor epic refers to a body of narrative verse that, although comprising a variety of subjects and approaches, nevertheless draws on two main sources: classical myth and the English chronicles. The term Hulse uses to describe the minor epic is "metamorphic," and he does so first because the largest

and most familiar repository of classical myth for the Elizabethans was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. More importantly, however, the rubric allows him to chart the fluid connections between minor epic and the other literary forms it partakes of: Petrarchan lyric, Ovidian narrative, satire, historical chronicle, pastoral, and epic. Instead of imposing a static system of definition on the minor epic, Hulse explores the workings of this protean form; how, like a kind of literary magpie, it collects elements from other genres, and how it in turn transforms the genres from which it borrows. Part of the minor epic's metamorphic character can be attributed to the absence of a poetic theory that adequately described it or could be applied to it, for it left the form consequently free of the constraints and expectations such a critical apparatus might impose. Like pastoral, the minor epic was a form for apprentices, a kind of experimental workshop where the aspiring poet could practice his art. (Hulse places the minor epic above pastoral but below epic in the Elizabethan poetic hierarchy, making it into an intermediate *gradus Vergilianus*.) Partly because of its experimental nature, the minor epic became the form through which Continental culture was received and disseminated. It is in this capacity in particular that the minor epic can be seen as central to the English Renaissance and consequently, to the emergence of a new literary system.

Metamorphic Verse is organized into chapters that describe the minor epic's relation to other forms. The first chapter considers the problem of genre, while the successive chapters discuss respectively Petrarchan rhetoric, primaevael poetry, painting, history, and epic. Or, as Hulse alternately schematizes it, the six chapters treat the literary topics of genre, audience, the poet, imagery, and fictionality, while the final chapter on epic is a synthesis of all these approaches to a poem. As the double system or organization suggests, Hulse considers each topic both in its relation to the larger system of Elizabethan literature and in formal, literary terms. Each chapter presents a reading of at least one representative individual poem as well as a carefully-researched historical background that illuminates Hulse's critical direction. Given the once fierce arguments between the proponents of formal analysis and those who championed the historical approach to the study of Renaissance literature, this synthesis represents a graceful reconciliation of two critical schools, and, more crucially, exemplifies the direction that the most recent—and some of the most important—criticism of Renaissance literature is taking. Indeed, this yoking of historical and formal analysis is itself a judgment on the limitations of purely formal criticism, since formalism claims to isolate the poem as a timeless entity. Hulse's endeavor is to restore these poems to a temporal context, and, in so doing, he not only recognizes that "what distinguishes the art of the Renaissance and earns it that name is its historical self-consciousness, its awareness that style is continually in flux" (p. 91), but he also effectively demonstrates "that the form of any poem is metamorphic, that it depends in each case upon a vantage point and a provisional set of assumptions" (p. 282).

Although the minor epic has traditionally been divided into two main categories according to subject matter—erotic verse and historical complaint—Hulse collapses this distinction in his chapter on Renaissance historiography, "Chronicle, History, Legend," where he charts the shifting boundary between history and fiction. This chapter is, in my judgement, the best in a fine book (although the discussion of *ekphrasis* and *Lucrece* also has outstanding virtues). It demon-

strates Hulse's already evident strengths—his scholarly range, his persuasive readings, and his theoretical sophistication—and it offers an important legacy for other scholars. "Chronicle, History, Legend" explores the fictionality of a literary text through the examination of the poetic careers of Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton. Both poets began as poetic historians by writing minor epics, and both eventually wrote full-scale historical epics. But the need to accommodate historical chronicle to poetry led each of them to question the nature of historical fiction: "Was poetry just lies or could the humanist dream of literature as a social force prove itself true? Was history just a chronological record of what happened or was it a narrative designed or even invented by the historian?" (p. 195).

Through an analysis of representative works, Hulse traces a poetic evolution as Daniel moves increasingly away from fiction and towards fact, as he abandons poetry in favor of prose, and as he makes the authority of the poet subordinate to the authority of his sources. *The Complaint of Rosamond* (1592) exemplifies Daniel's belief in the ability of rhetoric to make the past accessible, but by *The Civil Wars* (1595), events or acts have already taken precedence over the power of language. In his last project, *The Collection of the History of England* (1612), Daniel subverts his own words and defers to the authority of his sources. Michael Drayton provides a useful contrast to Daniel, since although he wrestles with the same poetical-historical dilemma, he never forsakes fictive language.

Underlying the choice between poetry and history there is, of course, a fundamental assumption about the relationship between society and language. What Hulse suggests is that the writing of history for the sixteenth century was an intensely political act, and that Renaissance poets and historians alike believed that the use of language had social consequences. They debated, for example, the moral duty of a poet or historian to his ruler; Virgil may not have been in great moral jeopardy when he wrote propaganda for Augustus, but Lucan was surely in graver peril writing under Nero. English poets and historians faced similar questions in writing their own history, in deciding whether to anchor the English past in myth, or, like William Camden, to divest history of its fictional origins.

These questions, like the modern critical questions Hulse addresses, are related. For if we see literary language as separate from ordinary language—as the formalists do—then there are no political or social consequences in the writing of literature. If, on the other hand, we see ordinary language and literary language as one and the same, as both producing a culture and being produced by that culture, then the resulting pattern of relationship is infinitely more complex, and, as *Metamorphic Verse* demonstrates, correspondingly rewarding.

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