Jonathan V. Crewe. *Unredeemed Rhetoric: Thomas Nashe and the Scandal of Authorship*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. 135 pages.

Richard A. Lanham. *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976. Paper. 252 pages.

Rhetoric and truth are totally and hopelessly irreconcilable *systems*; the problem is solutionless. Language is always rhetoric and can never reach reality and truth, so everything anyone ever says automatically deconstructs, and all that one can, post-Derrida-enly, do, is to toss about some somewhat-paradoxes somewhat denied or re-and-dis-manufactured, with some fleetingnesses of jargon (which terms may not touch truth, by non-definition, for then they would be antirhetorical and antidestructive and hence disloyal, not to mention self-inconsistent): such jargon as "radical dislocation" "antiworld" "violent negativity" "power" "theatricality" "radically alienated" "truly sophisticated" "demonic" etc. That range of notions (more-or-less [and-more-or-less-elusively] desiderated) is opposed – quite firmly and polemically and absolutely opposed, without deconstructive or ironic reserve – to "Puritan rationalism" or "rationalistic rigor"; and opposed to "good order"; and (mostly) opposed to "decorum."

Am I parodying Jonathan Crewe's book (and not a few others)? No. I am *paraphrasing* Crewe's book, especially pages 89–90 and 111, then here and there, and drawing a few inferences. The quotations are all quotations from Crewe's.

Am I irritated and bored with such doings? Well, yes, in truth, and my style shows it. Are the irritation and boredom relevant? Well, yes, in the sense that they are decorous, that is, proper, that is appropriate and just. But since my impressions and responses are not infallible, assertion is insufficient. Some argument is in order.

Crewe writes of Shakespeare, "(To what extent is the work of Shakespeare critically accountable in terms of its responsible 'themes?' If Shakespeare is not fully accountable in such terms, what is the nature of the unreduced excess in his work?)" Everything not truth/theme as such is "unreduced excess." The simplification of that dichotomizing is total, and any book about Shakespeare instantly refutes it. There is more to talk of in Shakespeare than *that*. Theme (paraphrased or simplified or deeply complicated in style and subject) connects with other things. An elegy – which has grief for one theme – may be sad in tone. Thus tone and theme are *related*, because relatable. Some excess is reducible; some is not even excessive.

The chief principle of connection between theme and rhetoric is decorum. Crewe dismisses decorum with rapid contempt (he needs to, to maintain his dichotomy and deconstructing), attacking Rosemond Tuve's "rigid prescriptions," but then goes on to praise, as against Tuve, the richer and more flexible decorum in *The Arte of English Poesie*. Which is a fatal admission for Crewe's case. If decorum is a rich and complex concept (as it beautifully is in the criticism of Rosemond Tuve and in the English Renaissance), then Crewe's basic and

irreconcilable opposition between rhetoric and truth breaks down. The connections are real, complex (often in tensions); and therefore valid criticism is (1) difficult, (2) possible. Nor does decorum subsume all of the relations of instruction and aesthetic delight. There are many connections good critics can use to see through, with, and by.

It is not just that Crewe wrote an unfortunate parenthesizing, easily refutable. The spirit of the paragraph is permeating. Nor is it that there are not real problems involving the opposition of plain and figured style, or between rhetorical skill and moral truth, or in the relation of language and reality and truth, or in the place of metaphor(s) in discourse. Such problems exist, richly discussable and illuminable. (Aristotle and Wittgenstein and Max Black and quite a few others have valuable things to say thereon.) It is that the radical scepticism implicit in much discourse since Nietzsche's epistemological blundering, is neither necessary nor finally defensible. Such scepticism should not be simply assumed as evident-to-the-sophisticated.

Or reached by crude disjunction. Crewe tells us that certain critics and the English Renaissance writers themselves, "especially Puritan ones," have sought "a language of final order and ultimate significance." (The "Puritan" is a typical enough move of his polemics: seeking truth is Puritan, and thus Bad and Repressive), and goes on to say, "The author is always situated in a language already misappropriated, duplicitous, and subject to rhetorical exploitation," adding shortly thereafter "the mere cultural presence of rhetoric . . . 'postpones' and renders infinitely problematical the desired outcome." Either perfection or chaos. Not perfection; therefore chaos. So goes the implicit disjunctive argument, which is valid, but whose first premise is false. For better and worse writing, greater and lesser understanding, are possible, and happen. *Therefore* Crewe's premise fails. There is a middle ground we often inhabit. Were it really true that language is always and wholly "duplicitous," language would not be "duplicitous," but "infinite" and no sentence could ever get said, much less be understood or misunderstood.

Crewe, in moving the only-too-familiar counters around, adds little to the real debate and dialectic. Nor very much to the understanding and appreciation of Nashe. He tells us, up front, "I am using Nashe . . . to make a point." But how can he? How can anyone not delight in Nashe? Or not be frustrated by his brilliantly silly excesses? Nashe wrote of Gabriel Harvey, "his invention is over-weaponed." Which is surely and accumulatively true of Nashe also. Nashe is great fun to read, for a while. And has much of subtlety and pungency to say in and through his genius and over-genius of style. Where's the puzzle? How most of all – here's the real mystery – can anyone write of Nashe without praising highly and gladly the few but very great lyrics for which we owe permanent love and gratitude?

One owes Richard A. Lanham scholarly gratitude for his earlier study, the lucid *Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, which, by examining specifically and generically and cross-classifying and sorting out, is a great help to the student of rhetoric and in the good bargain a valuable and revealing analysis of the structures and limits and confusions in Renaissance rhetoric. His book *The Motives of Eloquence* could use some of that complexity of analysis itself. Lively and wide-sweeping, it bases

all on a simple division between "serious" man and "rhetorical" man, which bears a near analogue to the division between truth and rhetoric of Crewe's scepticizings.

Crewe mostly sides with the rhetorical antitruth convolutings: he tells us on page 8 that "rhetoric as an opposing and putatively superior *principle* to logic . . . cannot seriously be defended"; on page viii that he will take "a principle of . . . rhetoric (opposed to logic) . . . as the inalienable basis of my discussion." The contradiction is even plainer in context.

Lanham sees the serious and the rhetorical, not in balance or in resolution, because that would undo the distinction, but as vacillating randomly throughout and thus constituting Western intellectual history. But the distinctions are far too simple to carry such a huge burden. Classes overlap; these 'classes', if they can be kindly granted that name, wantonly and intricately and confusingly overlap, such overlap undercrumbling the scheme Lanham would market, and explain all by.

Serious man, we are told early, has a "central self, an irreducible identity" in relation to others and to a reality which can be known. Clarity and sincerity are consequently the central rhetorical goods. Rhetorical man, however, concentrates on the word, on memory, on the skillfully garnered and maximed, on proverbial wisdom's "decorous fit into situation." The opposition between the serious and rhetorical is irremediable and the shifting to and fro among the twain provides "sophisticated" history. But suppose some maxims can be true? or even false? Or suppose some of the decorous fitting *fits* and suppose some does not? The philosophy instantly deconstructs and we are back among the actual and intermixing complexities of rhetoric and truth, morality and self-serving (overlapping categories themselves), pleasure and duty – which help to form real human and rhetorical and philosophical history, as once Lanham well understood.

It is bothersome that Lanham, who as a student of rhetoric was one of the best at showing the complexities of rhetorical interclassification, overclassification, and misclassification, should offer such a dividing into vagued twoness.

In practice Lanham often finds the classes mixed, using that truth as a club to club Plato's Ideas (any stick will do to beat Them these days) or in praise of Shakespeare. But, since any sentence is not a sentence unless it is (1) referential – referring outside of itself, not part of an entirely enclosed system (2) in words syntactically structured, the commingling is universally present in all discourse, and cannot therefore serve as a critical standard to judge better and worse discourse. Sentences, in words syntacted, can be true or false; and some are better written than others. Language has reference and rhetoric; not all rhetoric is playful, divisive, or insidious; not all reference is solemn. Lanham's distinctions do not hold.

Lanham knows much and has responded much to a range of literature. Hence the book is often interesting, awarely reflective, witty, and such, and one can learn and enjoy from such moments. (Learning and enjoyment are not mutually exclusive). The actual rhetorical analysis in the book – the analysis of how rhetorical figures work in a given rhetorical and literary situation – is always valuable. One wishes there were more of such analysis in the book.

Yet, among the virtues of thought and livelinesses of style, one also finds some curious judgments, often intimately inveigled with the theory and trends at work. Thus Lanham writes, "high seriousness . . . requires a conception of human character as single, solid, substantial, and important." It does? What of the opening of the *Divine Comedy*? or the dark sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins? Lanham's strange sentence is not a casual error or misjudgment; it is central to his dichotomizing.

Here, as too often elsewhere, the twin hand puppets take center stage, and block the view.

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Le Cosmos de Dante par James Dauphiné dans les *Classiques de l'humanisme*, Les Belles Lettres: Paris, 1984. P. 213.

Voici une nouvelle étude sur l'Homère du Trecento. Son auteur, James Dauphiné, s'est fixé pour objectif d'expliquer au sens littéral du mot la vision cosmologique de Dante telle qu'elle se révèle dans la *Divine Comédie*. En effet plus qu'une exposition philosophique du système dantesque, James Dauphiné veut montrer au lecteur la dimension poétique de la vision du poète florentin; c'est pourquoi tout en se référant ici et là aux autres ouvrages de Dante comme le *Banquet* et la *Vie nouvelle*, il a placé au centre de sa sphère d'étude l'éblouissante *Divine Comédie*. Les termes que nous soulignons caractérisent la thématique même qui soutient la vision cosmologique de Dante.

La livre de James Dauphiné est constitué de quatre parties inégales: *Les sources* (pp. 11-26), *la hiérarchie* (pp. 27-44), *le voyage* (pp. 45-93) et enfin la plus ambitieuse et de loin la plus importante, *poétique et imagination* (pp. 95-153). En outre l'auteur a cru bon d'ajouter en appendice quatre études. Les deux premières sont consacrées à des précurseurs de Dante, Restoro d'Arezzo et Bonvesin de la Riva qui tous les deux ont cherché à atteindre Dieu. Les autres appendices traitent de Dante: *Dante et la signature des étoiles* et *Dante et l'Odyssée: forme et signification*.

Il n'y a pas de mentor plus éclairé que James Dauphiné pour nous mener sur les pas de Dante dans sa quête de l'Infini. En fait ce livre est une partie de sa thèse de doctorat d'état, *Les visions poétiques du cosmos de Dante à l'aube du XVII^e siècle* (1981). Nous savons aussi que James Dauphiné s'intéresse tout particulièrement à la symbolique. C'est dire que nous avons à faire à un auteur sérieux, bien documenté au fait de toutes les doctrines philosophiques et théologiques qui avaient cours à cette époque.

Dans les trois premières parties, l'auteur donne au lecteur tous les outils nécessaires pour comprendre la quête de Dante et le processus de son ascension. Il expose d'abord d'une façon exhaustive les sources utilisées par Dante puis explique le système dantesque de la hiérarchie en le comparant à celui de Denys, de Grégoire ou même à celui du *Banquet*, oeuvre précédente de Dante. C'est grâce à cette hiérarchie que Dante peut s'élever de cercle en cercle des profondeurs ténébreuses de l'enfer jusqu'à l'Empyrée le plus radieux puisqu'il n'y a pas de