

the same moral objections as discussed in the previous chapter in that it is either ineffective or deceptive.

Clanton has provided his readers with a gift. Those who have interest in the classical American tradition will benefit greatly from Clanton's discussion of the tradition's relationship with religion. Philosophers of religion are now given a place from which to delve deeper into their field and explore arguments and philosophers they may not have given much consideration to in the past. As Clanton states toward the end of his book, some of these arguments need more consideration and development. However, even those that do not may still provide benefits to the reader who is willing to learn from the mistakes of these philosophers.

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Mendenhall, Allen. *Literature and Liberty: Essays in Libertarian Literary Criticism*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014. 164 pp., hardback, \$84.00

Review by Jason E. Jewell

Literary criticism is a field that mystifies many people. Although its goal of evaluating and commenting on works of literature is straightforward enough, the theories that inform the work of many critics often muddy the waters. Some employ arcane terminology that makes them inaccessible to the uninitiated. Others make assertions that defy common sense, e.g., that an author's intent has no bearing on how a reader should interpret his work, or that a laundry list has as much intrinsic literary merit as a Shakespearean play. It's little wonder that some have blamed literary critics for destroying their love of literature.

For decades, Marxist theory has occupied a preeminent place in the field of literary criticism. (I recall one of my conventionally liberal history professors' stating around the year 2000 that "Marxism is dead everywhere except in English departments.") The Marxist critic views works of literature, as well as those works' forms and meanings, as products of particular social institutions that reflect a particular ideology. The Marxist critic evaluates these works according to how "progressive" they are. Christians and others

who reject the materialist assumptions undergirding Marxism need different ways to approach literature. In *Literature and Liberty*, Allen Mendenhall presents libertarianism as an alternative lens through which to view works of literature as a means of understanding them better.

The economist Thomas Sowell has written that much of the academic work that calls itself "interdisciplinary" is in fact *non-disciplinary* when it fails to require the actual mastery of multiple disciplines. Fortunately, Mendenhall's work is not vulnerable to this critique. As the holder of both a Ph.D. in English (this book was published when he was a doctoral candidate) and a law degree, Mendenhall is well qualified to write on the intersection of literature, political theory, and law. However, those without any background in one or more of these fields, or who have never been acquainted with libertarian theory, may find this collection of essays difficult to navigate. In fact, the first literary scholar asked to review this book handed the review copy back after a few weeks, saying, "I don't get it. I'm not saying it's wrong or bad. I just don't understand it."

What has Mendenhall done in *Literature and Liberty* that is so unusual? For one thing, his true interdisciplinary background allows him to critique literary studies from both the inside and the outside. He writes, "A person gets used to the smell of his own house; sometimes it takes a rude guest to point out when the house smells funny." What smells funny? "I have heard professors in the classroom present critiques of capitalism that have no basis in economic research or reality. . . . much of what they criticize is a vulgar caricature of capitalism that does not represent the things capitalism means to me or other serious capitalists: freedom, liberty, mobility, voluntarism, peace, originality, exchanges, creativity, cooperation, prosperity, happiness, health, trade, production, beauty, collaboration, ingenuity, variation, diversity, mutuality, agency, and independence."

Fortunately, Mendenhall's libertarian lens is not the simple replacing of an anti-capitalist lens with a pro-capitalist one. Whereas Marxism places great emphasis on a person's cultural conditioning as a result of a society's prevailing ideology, libertarianism allows for a much greater degree of human agency without denying that cultural conditioning can take place. It also pushes back against the erroneous belief of Marxist critics that all human motives are economic as well as the belief of many conservative critics that economic motives are somehow separate from other motives of human life. Moreover, it recognizes that economic activity such as the setting of prices in the marketplace is a much more bottom-up affair than Marxists tend to recognize or appreciate.

The figures and works to which Mendenhall applies this lens in this volume of essays are many and varied, ranging from Geoffrey of Monmouth's

12<sup>th</sup>-century work *The History of the Kings of Britain* to Shakespeare to E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, along with many others. Most of the chapters deal with some aspect of the treatment of law in the works under consideration. For example, Mendenhall calls Geoffrey's work "a history of the rise of law," arguing that Geoffrey responded to the factional nature of the British legal system in the generations following the Norman Conquest of 1066 by crafting a narrative in which the establishing of a unified legal system plays the central role. In a good example of applying libertarian insights to literary texts, Mendenhall shows how Geoffrey's use of symbols and images to establish law's authority (and thus the authority of the king) tracks with libertarian theorist Murray Rothbard's discussion of the methods by which the state legitimizes itself. (Rothbard wrote in his prominent essay "Anatomy of the State" that the state relies on intellectuals to create an ideology according to which the state's rule is seen as preferable to all existing alternatives.)

Another chapter focusing on the connection between law and literature is the second, "Liberty and Shakespeare." In fact, this chapter provides a survey-in-miniature of the entire subfield of "Law and Literature." Mendenhall shows how attorneys, some of whom who are not career academics, have made meaningful contributions to the study of Shakespeare. He even holds out the possibility that in the future most important literary scholarship might originate outside of universities' English departments, which too often have gotten bogged down in outmoded Marxist criticism. In general, Mendenhall urges the pursuit of collaboration across interdisciplinary lines so that scholars can take advantage of each others' expertise in a world where disciplines have become so highly specialized.

Not all the book's essays deal directly with the intersection of law and literature. The shorter chapters on Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Hazlitt focus respectively on the concepts of individualism and literary criticism itself. Mendenhall also gives us a chapter in which he critiques Alan Gribben's "sanitized" edition of *Huckleberry Finn* that occasioned so much public comment upon its release in 2011; Mendenhall connects this subversion of the novel's original text to the "cultural Marxism" that arose in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in the writings of theorists like Herbert Marcuse.

Allen Mendenhall's *Literature and Liberty* is a thought-provoking work that provides new looks at a number of classic texts from a perspective that is, quite frankly, refreshing given the current climate of literary criticism. Readers interested in canonical texts, political theory, law, or economics will find something worthwhile here.

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Whatmore, Richard. *What is Intellectual History?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016. 180pp., hardcover, \$59.95.

Review by Shawn D. Mathis

The history of ideas, or intellectual history, is defined as a "study of past thought [that] ought to be a process of moving from mountaintop to mountaintop." Dr. Richard Whatmore, author of *What is Intellectual History?*, serves as Chair of Modern History, Director of the Institute of Intellectual History, and Professor of Intellectual History at University of St Andrews. He was educated at both University of Cambridge and Harvard University. *What is Intellectual History?* is a look at the identity, history, method, practice, and relevance of intellectual history in the present and future. The book is a concisely written volume, yet the concepts are expansive, covering important aspects of an entire discipline. Whatmore concludes, "The intellectual historian seeks to restore a lost world, to recover perspectives and ideas from the ruins, to pull back the veil and explain why the ideas resonated in the past and convinced their advocates. Ideas, and the cultures and practices they create, are foundational to any act of understanding."

According to Whatmore, "The aim of this short book is to give general readers a sense of what intellectual history is and what intellectual historians do." The task of the intellectual historian is "to work out what stand the author would have taken had they been faced with the controversies of today." Whatmore's training and his intent in the study of intellectual history centers on the reading of "historical authors...to find out what they thought about the issues that mattered to them." Key themes considered in the volume include the work of the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual historians. Intellectual history stands juxtaposed to all disciplines in that each has its own history of thought. The intellectual historian has faced an array of challenges due to the lack of receptivity of the discipline through the years. To this end, "Intellectual historians, whether dealing with sophisticated philosophical utterances, long-standing cultural practices or spontaneous expression of national prejudice, seek to explain the origin and extent of such opinion, the history of which is never straightforward."

For perspective on the work of the intellectual historian, Whatmore writes, "Every person thinks. People present their thoughts in many different guises. These require careful reconstruction in order to understand what people are doing, what the ideas being enunciated meant and how they related to the broader ideological cultures in which they were formed." Early discussions of