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The title of this Canadian contribution to Law and Literature — *Adversaria* — carefully indicates, Anne McGillivray informs us, the "avoidance of canonical closures", and the collection offers critical perspectives on law and on literature drawn from semiotics, narratology, postcolonial theory, new historicism, rhetoric, political and economic theory, together with essays offering a more indigenous method arising from an exchange of information, method and values between literature and law, as in the essay of Lawrence Douglas on *Billy Budd*, and in Stephen A Cohen's paper on law, equity and ideology in *The Merchant ofVenice*.

The sheer diversity of material indicates yet again the unhelpfulness of classification and nomenclature. Guest co-editor McGillivray, in her introductory piece *Recherche Sublime*, does put to air the aging "law in literature" and "law as literature" distinction, though with appropriate caution, recognising that the most important achievement in this area has been the breaking up of "fields" and "areas", and that any attempt to retrace intellectual boundaries will quickly become the target of the next offering.

It is difficult, on the evidence presented in her own collection, to agree with even the most tentative of her comments, that "perhaps Law and Literature is less a movement or a field of study than a critical methodology – and an intimate one at that". If Law and Literature is a movement, it is characteristically a restless centrifuge, a concentric and nomenclature. Law, as a closed and self-subsistent discourse, is harried, deconstructed and dispersed, and the very use of the term "literature" creates restlessness — at one end of the spectrum, by those who feel that literature is being neglected or overridden or "read down" for legal purposes — and at the other, by those who feel that the very term "literature" functions as an unwarrantable boundary, as insidious in its prescriptions and shibboleths as legal discourse itself.

For all its diversity, though, *Adversaria*, with its inclusion of critical analysis of Melville, Shakespeare, Kafka, of indigenous Canadian writing, of Godwin, Inchbald and Wollstonecraft, does seem to indicate that the literary centre may hold for just a little longer: that literary texts will evoke

curiosities that will invite methods that will spill over into legal critique. Despite the vast achievements of "Law and Literature" in generating spectacular lateral disciplinary shifts, McGillivray's introductory comment that "direct exposure to literary materials can be a powerful impetus to reconceptualising law and overcoming boundaries set by the intensive focus of doctrinal or disciplinary study" still defines the central impulse, if one adds to the concession that literature too, has been extensively reconceptualised in the process.

The special virtues of this collection lie in its rich historical and imaginative range, as well as in its diverse critical arsenal: against all charges of galloping disciplinary dispersal must be set the fact that each of these essays, whether on Margaret Vincent, a seventeeth-century English filicide, by Betty S Travitsky, on the *Ulysses* trial, by Paul Vanderham, or on Kafka, by Frederick C. DeCoste, has so much to say to the others. The collection opens with a stately, idealistic but searching "conversation" on writing and legal pedagogy by James Boyd White, and critically traverses areas ranging from Mary Polito's analysis of discursive strategies in early modern legal handbooks, through review of "canonical" and non canonical literary texts, to review of legal judgements, statutes, traditional theory, and modern court-room discourse. To all of this, the dense historical trawling evident in this collection adds a special dimension of critical wisdom, with the prismatic vision, the multiple deconstructive devices of modern critical method further extended in exposition of the shifting historical perspectives, and an understanding of the evolutionary dimension in the textual strategies of law. As such, the collection provides a useful and wide-ranging bibliographical resource, and a useful starting point for any graduate contemplating work in the field.

In some essays, the "work in progress" element is evident, with explorations in rich materials not yet adequately conceptualised; in Christine L Kreuger's essay on indecent assault depositions, for example, some step in the argument that would bind together her conceptual framework and her empirical base seems yet elusive, and in some other essays, the rage for theoretical order is in danger of topping and tailing the texts and the issues in question. Gary Boire, in his essay on the "sentencing" of indigenous reality back into the syntax of the colonising law. The mission is, however, lost at points in the fine toil of theoretical elaboration, and the occasional breaking into expositional clarity, as in his throwaway comments on Swift (page 211), reveals a lack of critical subtlety likely to pull the plug on his whole critical enterprise. Fractures of this kind leave the reader wary, both of the wider conceptual drift and of the insights offered about less familiar and accessible texts.

The great lesson we can all learn form law — the lesson that "Law and

Literature", in particular, has taught us — is that the achievement of an order of words — a textual order, a theoretical order — is seductively gratifying, and can easily be mistaken for an order of things: that mere verbal symmetries may authorise all manner of misreadings and omissions. Comparisons are odorous, perhaps inappropriate across such a range of particularity of Alexander Forbes on Johnson, Blackstone and Natural Law, which, if operating on safer ground and less intellectually adventurous than many other essays, offers an exacting pursuit of a rich and subtle concept, effectively expounding Johnson's own ventures beyond the confines of established discourses.

Where does it all lead? From the outset, when scholars started linking and capitalising Law and Literature, the lure of praxis — of making a real legal difference — was evident in many essays, drawing the charge from Judge Posner that this was surely the "falsest of false hopes". While the collection does include a detailed interdisciplinary exploration in court-room discourse drawing on the "disciplines of law, narratology, social semiotics, and rhetoric", by Jill Tomasson Goodwin, there is no judicial contribution of the kind that has marked, in Australia and the United States, the passage of Law and Literature out of academia and into legal practice. Key questions arise, in this context, of how far Law can follow the lateral shifts of Literature and criticism. "Those who understand", Alan Dershovitz suggested, on a recent visit to this country, "cannot judge", and this controversial point, together with the whole — authoritative, legally sanctioned judgement — is not directly addressed in these essays. In some respects, Anne McGillvray's introduction tells its best truths when it is at its most flippant. "The primary attraction of Law and Literature", she writes, "is that it is (sometimes) fun, (mostly) interesting and (possibly) healing". The "healing" dimension, though, surely lies in that crucial passage towards practice, towards legal writing itself, and it would be interesting to see, from Canada, as we have seen elsewhere, signs of a shift from evolving critique to a more sensitized legal authoring. For those infected with Law and Literature — and there are now, in their number, some distinguished writers of law — Law is no longer a field. Law is a crossroads. Law is a switch board. Law is our most intensive form of cultural self-consciousness. How far, in Canada, has the infection spread?