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displayed women's bodies to titillate male immaturity. I hoped that learned soft pom might make my fortune. There remained over a hundred fabliaux to translate (a spectral $40,000!). As things tumed out, Playboy accepted just one more submission, which I asked to have printed under a pen-name. I had begun to suspect I should not tell potential employers that I had consorted with bunnies. Meanwhile, in conference papers, I was speaking the three-letter words aloud. Not surprisingly, I found it easier to say "con" than "cunt," but eventually I graduated to blurting out the words in English, expressing myself in terms that adolescent boys might use to turn each other on. It is this academic persona that is arguably analogous to Burns' female characters: a 38-year-old novice academic, clad in a green leather miniskirt, tensely and excitedly evoking pricks, assholes and vagina dentata within the walls of a venerable men's club. I was flouting some of the norms of male scholars, but I was also deeply dependent on their approval. My fabliau language even became, among other things, a formn of flirtation. When a few established academic men responded, I was not above tuming to them for help with my precarious career.

If Bums had been present to give me the same plurivocal reading she gives her characters, she might have recognized another figure "both male-constructed and specifically female." She might have asked (as she does in a delightful meditation on movie queen Mae West) if misogynist language, spoken in the voice of a woman, serves different purposes from that spoken by a male. I cannot judge Mae West, but I will say that in those days I spoke with little consciousness of whether my language served the interests of other women or those of my male "authors." Happily, time and gender awareness have marched on, and it is gratifying to have a scholar like Bums use a product of my fabliau phase to further her feminist project. She cites my article, "Sexual Language and Human Conflict in the Old French Fabliau,"2 building on its conclusions in a way that I myself never have. She takes issue with a book that played a small role in silencing my bodytalk: Howard Bloch's The Scandal of the Fabliaux (University of Chicago Press, 1986). Bloch, an erudite medievalist who is

fluent in post-modem critical discourse, argues that fabliaux are not about sex or bodies at all; they are only, he asserts, about language. My study, which assumes that they are about both, is absent from his list of useful fabliau work.

Bumns, while acknowledging the ingeniousness of Bloch's essay, points out its reliance on precisely the Freudian/ Lacanian discourse that treats women's bodies as signifiers of the absent phallus. His denial of any corporeal referents to sexual words obscures the role that sexual speech can play in maintaining gender-based power structures. Bums and her feminist medievalist colleagues are as handy as he is with the tools of contemporary theory, but they challenge its heady excesses and reject perverse academic splittings of mind from body.

Women scholars can have a difficult time integrating diverse preoccupations: their disciplines may be obsessed with philological and iconographical minutiae; their academic careers may place them in settings where their "professional voices can only be heard through the fillter of [their] gendered anatomy"; their commitments to personal wholeness and political effectiveness cry out for wisdom and balance. Though such concemns are often lived as fragmenting, they have enhanced one another to produce Bodytaik.

1 Peter Brown, The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity (New York; Columbia University Press, 1988); Caroline Walker Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion (Cambridge, MA: Zone, 1991). A younger generation of revisionists includes Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury, Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

2 In Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol.24, no.1 (1982), pp. 185-210.

Ice follies

by Jeanne Kay

Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions, by Lisa Bloom. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 163 pp., $34.95 hardover, $ 14.95 paper.

G ENDER ON ICE is not a book about women, but a feminist critique of a quintessentially Euro-American male activity: turn-of-the-century polar explora-

tion. It is part of a recent and long-overdue effort among revisionist scholars to rewrite the old sexist and racist histories of exploration, travel and discovery. Despite the book's subtitle, American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions, the content is actually more wide-ranging. Lisa Bloom retraces the expedition accounts of the American R Jbert E. Peary in the Arctic, with secondary analyses of narratives by Peary's African American aide and co-explorer, Robert Henson; his American competitor, Frederick Cook; and the Englishman Robert Scott in the Antarctic. (Scott's Norwegian nemesis, South Pole discoverer Roald Amundsen, is only briefly mentioned.) Bloom's retelling of these polar expeditions will seem familiar enough to aficionados of exploration narratives, but she analyzes the texts from the critical perspective of social theory. Nobody comes off well. Bloom describes how American "manliness" in the waning days of the frontier became conflated with a rigorous outdoor life, scientism, technological mastery and patriarchal leadership. In Britain, ideal manhood, as exemplified by Robert Scott, meant loyalty to the Empire, heroic suffering and sterling character. On polar expeditions, white men retained the detached gaze of Authority, indigenous people remained the Other. The local Inuit were treated only as cogs in the expedition machine. Robert Henson and (Mrs.) Josephine Diebitsch-Peary could accompany Peary to the Arctic only by skillfully sustaining prescribed domestic, subservient roles in harsh conditions and remote regions. Their own published expedition narratives might vary from the Great Man's but were not permitted to undermine it.

Like the polar expeditions she describes, Bloom covers a lot of territory. Gender on Ice begins with a discussion of the Euro-American concept of the poles as empty spaces on the map, a tabula rasa onto which imperial ideologies could all the more easily be projected in the absence of confounding evidence. Accounts of the Cook and Peary expeditions and the debate over who, if either, was the legitimate discoverer of the North Pole are followed by an extensive expos? of the National Geographic Society. Bloom criticizes the Society's activities in dazzling breadth: its alleged cover-up of Peary's failure to reach the North Pole; its practices of selling "memberships" rather

than magazine subscriptions and of promoting a governmental agency image; its profits from Kodak's new photographic technologies and armnchair tourism; the discourse of nationalism and imperialism; the photographs of African and Asian women presented for the delectation of white male voyeurs; the multicultural phoniness of its recent videos; the Eurocentrism of photojoumnalists Martin and Osa Johnson in East Africa; and its general whitewash of colonialism. (There's more, but this suggests the general scope.)

Bloom's focus then reverts to polar exploration and the divergent imperial ideologies of Peary and Scott. She concludes with sections on the Falklands, Vietnam and Gulf Wars as recent expressions of the Euro-American, technophile male need for remote virility testing-grounds.

W rITH THE ENTIRE TEXT exclusive of footnotes under 140 pages, the book is a little like certain memoirs of Arctic exploration in which the survivors are trapped out on the ice floes, scrambling from iceberg to iceberg. A series of leaps onto floating footholds makes a route of sorts, but it is different from a panoramic survey, a detailed chart of new waters, or a successful execution of the stated purpose of the journey. Bloom is an excellent storyteller who gives to the well-worked materials of the Cook-Peary and Scott-Amundsen polar rivalries a sense of excitement, freshness and currency. But the logistics linking Africa and Antarctica are not always clear.

Bloom's critical feminist interpretation of exploration history is skillful, yet I feel I've heard the gist of her basic arguments before. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, in his 1948 introduction to Jeannette Mirsky's history of Arctic exploration, To the Arctic!, argued that most Arctic histories were too nationalistic or moralistic to be credible. The Canadian Arctic raconteur Farley Mowat suggested in 1967 (The Polar Passion) that Peary was a bigoted, egomaniacal, lavishly-financed, ungrateful jerk. So powerful American white men at the turn of the century were racist, sexist, nationalistic technophiles? Bloom's disclosures of the themes are disturbing, but they are hardly news.

The National Geographic Society is made to bear all the evils of modemity. Bloom sums up:

So far, I have shown how the National
Geographic masquerades an image of
itself as a goverrmental discourse and
assumes the status of an elite men's
club or the authority of a professional
geographical institution. It enjoys the
privileges of associating itself with all
of these fictive identities without ac-
tually being any of them. Most strik-
ing is how it indulges in these self-im-
ages to claim more authority, prestige,
and glamour than it would otherwise
be entitled to if it presented itself for
what it actually is-a commercialized
discourse of mass culture. (p.65)
Pardon my cynicism, but the Society is here
being singled out for practices adopted in
whole or part by nearly every Washington-
based scholarly or special-interest associa-
tion. National Geographic magazine no
doubt deserves its share of criticism (for ex-
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Moving with lively ease from Aristotle to Lily
Tomlin, Frances Gray explains the tradition in
which women have been relegated to the status of
'1 Q : | object rather than producer of humor. The author
traces the various ways in which jokes, like sex,
- ;: - 0 : ~have been figured as something men do to women,
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For the Southern woman of the old tradition,
appearances are vital, for the ideal woman is
defined by both her physical appearance and her
actions. Ellen Glasgow's career-long attempt to . . ..
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War South from family plantation to New York

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moonlight. The heroine's struggle for indepen-
dence and subsequent growth reflect many of the
dilemmas faced by southern women, and in fact,
by all American women in the early twentieth
century.
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"Allakasingwah, Peary's Inuit mistress, as shown In Peary's book Northward Over the Great
Ice (1898)." From Gender on lce.

cessive boosterism and blandness, I should think, more than anything), but nowhere does Bloom acknowledge the Society for bringing global education to the masses at a time when academic geographical societies turned up their noses at them; or for its extensive collections of rare and hard-to-find books by female travel writers and explorers. I share Bloom's condescension toward generations of AmeriCan men who tumed to National Geographic and its "anthropology" photos for thrills in the days before Playboy and its ilk, but I thought that this practice was common knowledge.

IGUESS I WOULD FEEL better about Gender on Ice if it acknowledged in its own construction the standards that it criticizes. This problem is endemic to postmodem analyses restricted to the dominant society's texts. Bloom correctly exposes Eurocentrism as a biased, subjective perspective, yet she does so from a "white" position. She scarcely addresses the irony, to indigenous peoples, of the whole notion of the "exploration and discovery" of lands they settled long ago. We never learn the native Greenlanders' own name for their ethnic identity: Bloom announces in a footnote that she will simply call all of them "Eskimo." Her research includes few references to the ethnographic literature, let alone any travel of her own to the Arctic to speak with elders about their own histories of Arctic "exploration and discovery." The one Native woman of note, Allakasingwah, appears fleetingly, described as Peary's "mistress and mother of his illegitimate son" in a caption to a nude photograph of her.

Bloom criticizes National Geographic magazine for printing pictures of lightly dressed or coqucttish women of traditional societies, then includes three of them in her own book. This makes me wonder whether Bloom has applied a double standard to the Peary and National Geographic magazine photographs she duplicated. For it is my society that defines women's breasts as highly erotic and in need of covering for modesty's sake, not Inuit or Zulu society of the tum of the century. I would be far more critical of the Society if Bloom had dis-

covered that unwilling subjects were photographed in violation of their own cultural values than I would be if I leamed that people of another country and time accepted nudity with indifference as a normal part of daily life, and had no objection to being photographed. Bowdlerism is no more appealing when it is presented in the language of deconstruction and social theory.

Bloom's feminist critique of masculinist values neglects the considerable role of Native women in a number of Arctic expeditions. One would never leam from Gender on Ice that Indian and Inuit women participated in a number of Euro-American expeditions as outfitters, interpreters and bearers. Native women, for example, prepared much of the clothing used by Peary's parties. One would like to know more about Josephine Diebitsch-Peary (and her female nurse), who accompanied Peary on his 1893 Greenland trip, especially given recent interest in Victorian women's travel narratives. Despite the fact that Diebitsch-Peary's efforts required considerable personal stamina and courage, Bloom characterizes her rigidly as "framed by her publishers, by her husband, and by herself in terms of her racial and sexual identity." In other words, Bloom also stereotypes her as a male-oriented literary construction. Surely these women were limited by and subjected to patriarchal oppression, but their own stories and initiatives nevertheless merit more consideration.

Gender on Ice never quite unpacks the essential masculinist obsession with heroism. Exploration and discovery are as old as Ulysses, as new as Indiana Jones. It's easy enough to dismiss Peary's megalomania and Scott's suicidal romanticism, but not the fascination the poles have held for many nationalities and personalities over the centuries. While Bloom attempts to update the heroic preoccupation by mentioning the Gulf War, I believe something far older and more crosscultural is at root: compare Joseph Campbell's The Hero's Journey .

I discovered the moral limits of Bloom's approach in her dismissal of the intense physical suffering experienced by many polar explorers, notably those of the (Sir John) Franklin and Scott expeditions. Disfiguring scurvy and frostbite, starvation, the lingering death of fellow crew members and unanticipated over-winterings through the

long Arctic night-these were common features of nineteenth-century Arctic exploration. Small wonder that Peary's new "scientific" planning retained the decades-old tradition among white Arctic travelers of adopting Inuit dress, travel, shelter and food, as well as of hiring native hunters and guides; yet Bloom subjects his efforts to sarcasm. Pain should never be dehumanized, no matter how masculinist or "modern" Peary's attempts to alleviate it might have been, no matter whether the sufferers appeared to be imperialist sexist clods.

Gender on Ice is one grim little volume. But although it is only partially successful, it does make a noteworthy effort to correct the gender biases and naive assumptions of the early generations of Arctic histories. 4

Restoration comedy

by Jean McNeil

The Restorationist: Text One, a Collaborative Fiction by Jael B. Juba, by Joyce Elbrecht
and Lydia Fakundiny. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993,429 pp., $24.50
hardcover.

I DON'T ENJOY BEING intimidated by a novel. It doesn't often happen, not because of great intelligence on my part, but because ideas presented in fiction are rarely beyond comprehension. But critical discourse, jargon and a certain juxtaposition of ideas within an experimental framework can put off a reader and reviewer of general fiction like myself.

If I were to apply the criteria I usually depend upon in judging a novel to The Restorationist: Text One, I would conclude that it doesn't work as a novel. It does not give satisfactory form to any one narrative; it doesn't coalesce around the usual central points of fiction like character and story, or promote the successful suspension of disbelief in the reader. But as a work of-as the jacket blurb describes it-"formed chaos," the question is not whether the novel "works" in the conventional sense, but what is it trying to say? And why?

The Restorationist is, I think, a complex intellectual argument in the guise of a novel. It is likely directed at a small audience of academics and practicing postmodemists (it's part of the SUNY series "The Margins of Literature'). While I found the "metastructure" of the text top-heavy and ultimately distracting, I was captivated by the ideas

being aired more than by the novel and the story it tells.

The two main themes of the book are strange bedfellows: one is how central language is to late twentieth-century cultural discourse, including the fragmentation of said language; the other is mystery, both with regard to plot in a conventional whodunit and the authorial use of language and viewpoint, given that the "true" identity of The Restorationist's narrator remains a mystery to the end.

The conventional whodunit, of course, I can come to grips with. In the main narrative it is 1977, and Elizabeth Harding Dumot, a Southem-bom academic, has bought a crumbling antebellum house in Tarragona, a small town on Florida's gulf coast. Apparently she wants to get back in touch with her Dixie roots. So she takes on the task of restoring the house to its former glory-hence the most obvious meaning of the book's title.

The "author" is Jael B. Juba. Whether Juba is actually the other authors, Elbrecht and Fakundiny (whose names appear on the book jacket and may themselves be pseudonyms), is unclear. In any event, Juba, the ostensible guide to the novel, makes her appearance in "Psychemes"-separate texts that discuss how and why she is writing the parallel story of Elizabeth Harding. These sections progressively become Juba's dialogues with herself. And the postmodem plot thickens, so to speak, in the use of the first-person narrator in both the psychemic and Elizabeth Harding stories.

It is obvious from such a setup that the real subject of The Restorationist is the relationship between writer and text, author and persona, narrator and character. Ironically, for a book that seeks to butcher the sacred cows of fiction writing, Elizabeth Harding's story is perfectly crafted. It shows talent in the handling of pace, dialogue, plot, structure and narrative-the very ingredients in conventional novels that are most praised by the mainstream.

The authors throw in a whole grab bag of conventional genre fiction plots, accompanied by an impressively maintained sense of menace. Even while the narrative heads into potboiler land-ghosts, murder, family feuds, Haitian refugee smuggling, the KKK and a child pomo ring are just a few of the TV-mini-series-type situations that unfold as Harding begins the arduous task of restoring her cnum-

bling house-it retains its intelligence.
But in textual terms the act of restoring is also a metaphor for construction, deconstruction, or merely giving a new interior design to the status quo, depending on the reader's critical heritage. In The Restorationist, restoration-of author, text and narrator-occurs in many psychological and structural layers. But it is a restoration-in-reverse, as when old layers of wallpaper are peeled away to expose the bare plaster, the essence of the wall.

Juba takes away the notion of the omniscient, dependable narrator; not only does she show herself to the reader, but she discusses the progress and the process of the novel. There goes one layer. Next, she dismantles the authenticity of the character of Elizabeth Harding by discussing her creation and its limitations. Then she calls for a moratorium on the suspension of disbelief that the reader of a novel traditionally employs. She displays the process behind the writing of a novel-the aborted passages, the self-questioning of the writer, the false integrity behind the writer's construction of the novel as a finished object.

There's more humor in this exercise than I'm letting on. It's not clear how far the writers have shoved their tongues into their cheeks, but their Southemers are caricatures,

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