



August 8, 2012

**Evaluation of *Forrest Reid: the Tom Barber Trilogy*,
edited and with a study and notes by Michael Matthew Kaylor**

I have read these two volumes, comprising an edition of a classic text, a study, and notes, with great care, in order to evaluate their suitability as a habilitation.

I will summarize my evaluation immediately by saying that this work more than meets the requirements of a habilitation thesis in the field. Indeed, I have seldom encountered material so magnificently handled in terms of scholarly sophistication, meticulous detail, and powerfully persuasive affect.

Every evidence of dynamic and groundbreaking critical performance is present here.

The Edition

Dr. Kaylor's scholarly commitment is immediately obvious in the text of Reid's trilogy itself. The edition is clear, clean, and eminently accessible. He limits his interventions so that the reader is allowed to enjoy the pleasure of the text, to encounter this "minor" writer's work with the pleasure that it merits. The sensitivity and the density of this trilogy, with its fine attenuation between the imaginative and the prosaic, with its keen awareness of hyper-sensitive adolescence, is a worthy revival of a text that has been neglected, if not virtually forgotten. That the edition is "unencumbered" by distracting interventions, but still available for the first time as a scholarly edition is a great contribution to modernist critics and to readers of works relevant to that period and inclination.

The Study

The study remarks a consummate and nuanced scholarly accompaniment to the edition. Kaylor has produced here a superlative work, beautifully written, carefully weighted, and impeccably researched. While scholarly editions often impose a determination on the work in question, this study is nuanced and elegant, itself worthy of literary influence.

It begins by positioning the critic, Michael Matthew Kaylor, in terms of his awareness of Forrest Reid as a subject, the critical reception that Reid's work has been accorded, and most of all the direction of the study, which is to unpack the biographical and creative elements of desire and eroticism as synthesized within *The Tom Barber Trilogy*. Dr. Kaylor's open admission that the personal becomes a part of the context of all reading and writing is bold and transparent and persuasive. If only more critics were willing to suspend their constructedly objective positions and to embrace the sensibility that great literature will inevitably arouse.

Kaylor's study proceeds by offering a biography of Forrest Reid, asserting that prior readings of this "cameo" life were inhibited by an unwillingness to engage with its passions and bountiful experiences. Again, Kaylor's scholarship here is detailed, impeccable, and yet eloquent in its development. The tale of Forrest Reid, from child to adult, from student to apprentice to tea trader to student again, from innocent to artist, from frustrated friend to desirous lover, from conflicted and yet determined writer to rather sad recluse, is incredibly well-developed, with Kaylor providing wonderful commentary at the same time as the "biography" is accompanied by meticulous evidence in the notes. Kaylor does not hesitate to address the Uranian and homosexual yearnings evident in Reid's writing, and he melds the life and the art under discussion with an artless eloquence that is transparent and subtle. Even while there is much invisible in a life, Kaylor is able to shed light on the details of that life through letters and references as well as Reid's own writing and the writings of those who shared his milieu.

Kaylor investigates every aspect of Reid's writing, from its poetic intensity to its employment of "supernatural romance," to his wonderful elaboration of boys' pleasures and pains, pets and penitential fears. He provides a summary and study of the reception of Reid's work, a close analysis of his influences and his contemporaries, and a thorough critique of the works, along with valuable information on the concrete elements of Reid's life as it is reflected in his writing.

The study concludes with an analysis of the Tom Barber trilogy, an analysis as nuanced and complex as the novels themselves, thus wrapping together the edition, the biographical material, and the critical context and its affects. The appendices, the descriptions of photographs and the copious notes all comprise a rich and satisfying evidential palette.

Most of all, this text is fine disquisition on Uranian prose, on the sensibilities that contribute to its aesthetic, and on the disambiguations of innocence and aspiration as well as sacred and profane love at a particular time in history. The "respect and sympathy" that such texts are seldom accorded informs Kaylor's work but never interferes with the quality of his scholarship, the impeccable adroitness of intellectual engagement evident here. Ultimately then, this study contributes enormously to knowledge about modernist class, gender, and sexual orientation, but also to the more nuanced corridors of comradeship, democracy, intelligence, and desire as it is articulated in works of art.

Kaylor's contribution here has been not only to provide a fine and virtually classical elucidation of a heretofore neglected writer, but to unpack the author of sixteen novels, two autobiographies and many other works, and to argue persuasively for the importance of context: of an age, of the subtlety of time, and of the finality of inscription.

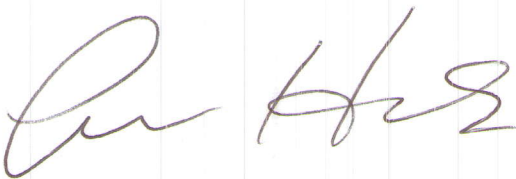
This work shows the extent to which Kaylor appreciates the texture of allusion; his reading dances between the contemporary and the mythical with a fine discernment, all the while documenting an acerbic awareness of the contingencies of the body. He manages, in these volumes, to bring together "body, mind, and heart" in a stunning calibration.

Conclusion

Without reservation, I would assert that this work more than fulfills the requirements of a habilitation thesis in the field. In fact, it achieves much more than similar works by many other scholars. How fortunate for your university that you can claim this very fine writer, critic, and colleague working in your midst.

Dr. Kaylor shows himself to be an eminent scholar. He would be considered so at any respected research institution in the world. This exceptional work presages an incredible productivity and ongoing engagement with superb literary scholarship.

I recommend, without hesitation and without any reservation, that Dr. Michael Matthew Kaylor be accorded all the recognition that this work prompts. Masarykova University in Brno should be proud to claim him as a faculty member.



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