

"Poetics is about production (*poiesis*). There can be no analysis of the form or content of production without a theory of labor." (p. 9) In literary theory, labor has been repressed or made invisible, and in fact it now comes forward to tyrannize the product, making the product (the poem) not the consequence of labor but the inexplicable result of a magical expedition into the world of appearances (Merwin and Strand, for instance, seem to fuel this mesmerized fascination). Current American poetry too comfortably mimics the dominant cultural ideology to *produce! produce!* Questions of market and audience are generally only diversions from the more fundamental analysis of labor. Logic, money and tyranny were united in ancient poetic theory to become a poetics of invisibility, whose end (to cite Aristotle) is the production of that which does not exist in nature rather than the just distribution of that which does. In a society straining at the bit to use nuclear energy where solar would do as well, such a perspective is marvellously appropriate. But for Aristotle, says Shell, "Poetry is a counterfeit human production as vexing as incest." (p. 101) To be counterfeit is not necessarily bad if the prevailing currency supports a tyrant. In fact this would appear to have been the fulcrum of successive avant-gardes. A traditional motivation of poetry has indeed been a kind of linguistic incest, the desire to occupy another person's words. Whenever poetry, like Gyges, observes another man's wife undressing, a reactionary diplomacy sets in like a virus: mind mints money, minces words, and poetry refuses to acknowledge the nature of the labor that produced it and the community of laborers within which it has to exist. Criticism stops being a poetics (i.e. "about production") and becomes instead an alternative currency (which tries to work out an exchange value with poetry on a strictly commodity level). Shell's book is a useful challenge to language-thought-full poets, because in practice as well as theory an overdeveloped attention to language can make it, too, a commodity subject to the tyranny of -- "X" (which, like the sphynx's riddle, has two arms, two legs, and forges signatures).

PETER SEATON :

AN AMERICAN PRIMER

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JAMES SHERRY :

A,B,\$.

The Ground: Looking closely at words increases their materiality-- Curves of letters, repetitions of shapes and phrases and sounds. That and the materiality of discourse, definitions that turn back on themselves ("contagious hospital" is the famous example) begin to generate new meanings. Yet since the 18th century, the tendency toward standard-