

Book Reviews

Michael Chanan. *Cuban Cinema*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2003. xiii, 538 pp.

Originally published in 1985 as *The Cuban Image* by the British Film Institute, Chanan's study is the only comprehensive examination of Cuban filmmaking in either English; in Spanish see Eduardo Noguer's *Historia del cine cubano: cien años 1897-1998* (2a ed. rev. y ampl., 2002). It remains remarkable, given the extent of the film industry in Latin America, how slim the bibliography remains, although there are, in the case of various national films, some remarkable monographs on general and specific themes; Mexico is particularly well represented. Yet although Cuban filmmaking receives internationally the same sort of due accorded to the three giants (Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico), the critical bibliography remains, even in the case of such notable texts as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1993 *Fresa y chocolate* (I do note, however, Carlos Campa Marcé's brief study of the film; 2002).

In seventeen chapters, Chanan discusses the entire scope of Cuban filmmaking. Although his emphasis is necessarily on the post-1959 period—because of the international interest in these films, their general high quality, and their greater accessibility—he does devote five chapters, approximately a fifth of the book, to the pre-Revolutionary period. There is not much in the way of film quality to rescue from this period, but it does allow Chanan ample opportunity to lay the groundwork for the understanding the revolutionary culture from which such an interesting contemporary filmmaking emerges. Chanan is firmly committed to the sociohistorical context for cultural production. Not only do many critics feel that this is in the end the best way to study Latin American film—rather than the auteristic approach that so dominates European and American film studies—but it is particularly advantageous in the case of Cuba, since it would be difficult to sustain that there is much of anything since 1959 than can be called purely “artistic.” Chanan discusses political movements, he discusses the dependence on the Hollywood model, he discusses the politics and the economics of producing films in Cuba, and he discusses the many controversies some of the films have provoked. In sum, it would be difficult to find any better

model than Cuban Film for the complex task of placing the production of film in its multiple contexts, both within the specific society that produces and consumes it and an international audience that has particular reasons for wanting to see it. And there is no questioning the interest in Cuban film: Argentine or Brazilian filmmaking may be more extensive and count some exceptionally fine titles, but neither production makes much of an impact anywhere outside its country of origin (although credit must be given to Spanish viewers who do have some measurable access to Argentine filmmaking). But Cuban film gets around in a way that no other Latin American films do—certainly virtually none of the filmmaking comes from the second or third line of production programs in the countries other than the three giants, with maybe the possible exception of some films from Colombia.

The remainder of Chanan's book is devoted to the post-1959 production, both in terms of the participation of that production in the overall context of the cultural ideologies that hold sway in Cuba over almost five decades, but the fortunate of contemporary Cuban filmmaking abroad. Of special interest for U.S. readers is both what films get distributed in the U.S. (and their fortune) and what films do not experience crossover. For example, Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), was the first postrevolutionary Cuban film to attract considerable attention in the U.S.—and to suffer the consequences of Cold War reactions to it, including attempts at censorship. *Fresa y chocolate* is virtually a cult classic now in the U.S., especially among gay audiences, and it unquestionably markets a post-Soviet image of Cuba. Many other Gutiérrez Alea's other films have also been distributed with measurable success in the U.S.

Chaban has difficulty, however, with Néstor Almendros's and Orlando Jiménez Leal's 1984 *Conducta impropia*. He is wise enough not to merely dismiss it as a non-Cuban film (it was made outside of Cuba and released in French), but he is never able convincingly to engage with its anti-Castro rhetoric, especially as regards the extensively documented treatment of sexual dissidents. On the other hand, he does not mention Julián Schnabel's *Before Night Falls* (2000)—perhaps, I would like to believe—since it is such an ill-conceived attempt to turn Reinaldo Arenas's autobiography into film: Schnabel even changes the details of Arenas's death. But I would have relished a discussion of the miserable screed that is León Ichaso's *Azúcar amarga* (1996), which manages to get almost everything wrong historically and ideologically, only because so many well known Cuban actors, such as Miguel Gutiérrez, were involved in its making. Ichaso is Cuban, but the film was made in the Dominican Republic and Miami. The lack of any discussion made by Cubans outside of Cuba is absent here, which reinforces one nationalistic interpretation of who is Cuban.

Finally, a perusal of Chanan's book makes it painfully aware of how
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many interesting Cuban films have not made the crossover to English or other languages, films such as Daniel Díaz Torres's and Jesús Díaz's *Alicia en el pueblo Maravillas* (1991)—a film that had considerable problems with censorship in Cuba, Juan Carlos Tabío's *Demasiado miedo a la vida o plaf* (1988), Tabío's *Se permuta* (1984), or even the venerable classic *Lucía* (1969). The collective project (five directors) *Mujer transparente* (1991) has been made available with subtitles through Latin American Video Archives, but it is a price copy that will never have commercial distribution; moreover, its feminist perspective are not somewhat out-of-date, although interesting to see. (Chanan provides at the end of the volume of registry of film distributors, but regrettable omits the Latin American Video Archives; see their website www.lavavideo.org.) Concomitantly, Chanan is probably wise to ignore Cuban films that vie for the dubious distinction of being unabashedly commercial, such as Gerardo Chijona's *Un paraíso bajo las estrellas* (2000), which attempts to cash in on interest in the renewed tourist circuit. It takes place at the refurbished Tropicana and features the star-quality Vladimir Cruz, the object of homoerotic desire in *Fresa y chocolate* who, although he seems still not to have gone gay yet, bares his posterior no less than four times: we have come a very, very long way from *Memorias del subdesarrollo* and *Lucía*.

It is difficult to reproach Chanan on any front, because this is such an excellent study. However, I would like to note that an analysis of the careers of certain stars might have been in order. For example, one would like to study the fine career of someone like Mirta Ibarra. *Fresa y chocolate*'s Jorge Perugorria's international stature is worth considering, although it is not without its sour notes; ditto for Vladimir Cruz, who has done well in Mexican soaps I understand (although, presumably, without baring his derriere until *Paraíso*).

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Gerald N. Izenberg. *Modernism and Masculinity: Mann, Wedekind, Kandinsky through World War I*. Chicago UP, 2000. 257 pp.

Gerald Izenberg has written a masterful contribution to our understanding of the ironies contained in fin-de-siècle modernism. In *Modernism and Masculinity*, he explores attempts by several European artists to cope with a philosophical crisis of masculinity. In this he is following in the footsteps of H. Stuart Hughes, who pointed out in his classic book *Consciousness and Society* the tensions that emerged as intellectuals attempted to comprehend, in Hughes's words, the "disparity between external reality and the internal appreciation of that reality." *Modernism and Masculinity* is a pro-

vocative intellectual history with an avowed “psychobiological approach” (15). The use of only three case studies, however, leaves the reader with questions about the links between these individuals and the broader European experience.

Izenberg seeks to explain the well-known crisis of masculinity as part of a dilemma that emerged from the collision of two contradictory impulses within modernist ideology. For modernists, the artistic vision should solve the problems of a rational, individualistic bourgeois society that estranged humans from nature and each other. Only when art reflected the subjectivity of the human artist, not the objectivity of society, could this alienation be overcome. This emphasis on interiority and subjectivity led modernist artists to the understanding that emotion, empathy, and a sense of unity with nature, characteristics identified with the feminine in the broader culture, would have to be a vital part of their artistic practice. This idealization of the feminine in artistic creation, however, made them afraid of losing their masculinity. The modernist project, for Izenberg, was a search to resolve this dilemma, to create an identity that could be both modernist and modern, where the male could use feminine characteristics and values to produce a better art. He argues that, for these artists, this “masculine appropriation of ideal femininity” (4) was “not a nostalgic yearning for a regressive return to undifferentiated fusion” but “a quest for a restoration of their own creativity” (17). The attempt to refashion masculinity by incorporating the feminine resulted in an “aesthetic revolution” (18). This argument is ingenious, elegant, and intriguing; and Izenberg demonstrates it in the life and work of three fin-de-siècle artists—Frank Wedekind (theater), Thomas Mann (literature), and Wassily Kandinsky (painting).

This approach leaves the reader with questions about the ability for us to generalize about European culture and the aesthetic revolution, which is never defined, and the relationship between the crisis of masculinity as an ideological dilemma and the personal sexuality of individual artists. Izenberg is careful to qualify his claims to avoid the trap of reductionism. He has, in effect, chosen to take a representative core sample from a particular place and time, focusing on a dramatist, novelist, and painter who lived and worked not just in Germany, but specifically in Munich. Yet because the book focuses intensely on the individual artists and their works (in a series of perceptive, sophisticated, and usually convincing analyses), little account is given to the historical context or intellectual milieu that might allow the reader to draw conclusions from the individual cases to the aesthetic revolution and broader ideology. How is the crisis of masculinity patterned by a specifically German or even Bavarian context? How does the crisis of masculinity square with other explanations for the artists’ life and work? How might the crisis of masculinity and its importance for modernist artists differ from that of artists who work in different

media, are not modernists, or are female?

These questions are important because they can help us judge if the crisis of masculinity was as important for the aesthetic revolution of modernism as it was in the personal lives and work of three artists. For example, Izenberg argues (convincingly to this non-specialist) that Thomas Mann's work is primarily about the problematic nature of desire, a theme that emerged from the writer's constant confrontation with his own homosexuality and threatened masculinity. Izenberg must somehow relate Mann, who is not usually considered a modernist, and the writer's personal crisis of masculinity to the broader argument about modernist culture. He does so by suggesting that Mann's work was modernist in spirit, not in form, because it broke with the assumptions and concerns of the Bildungsroman and socio-critical naturalism (98), although Mann himself never abandoned conventional narrative. In Mann's case, therefore, the crisis of masculinity did not result in formal innovation as it did in the case of Kandinsky. Color, for Kandinsky, "represented the psyche in strife" (164), art "must be able to communicate its vision of harmony to the viewer and transform him as it did the artist" (172), and "the task of art was the reconciliation of inner strife through the creation of a harmony of opposites on the canvas" (198). Yet Izenberg's discussion of Kandinsky and the importance of masculinity and femininity for his work, though perceptive, is based largely on a close study of texts written years before or after the aesthetic revolution of abstraction, years that witnessed many changes in Kandinsky's formal style that do not seem to have emerged from the crisis of masculinity. The evidence cited to link abstraction to the crisis of masculinity seems largely based on Izenberg's interpretation of one line from *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (199), while much of the narrative that actually treats the invention of abstraction implies that Kandinsky's more mundane, personal difficulties with Gabrielle Münter were perhaps more important than an ideology of modernism.

In the end, it is difficult to say how much we can generalize about European culture from the experience of these three men. What we do learn about them from Izenberg, though, is interesting enough in itself, even if the link between the crisis of masculinity and the aesthetic revolution of modernism can be disputed.

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Stefan Jonsson. *Subject Without Nation: Robert Musil and the History of Modern Identity. Post-Contemporary Interventions*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2000. xv, 376 pp.

Robert Musil's masterpiece, *der mann ohne eigenschaften*, or *The Man Without Qualities*, the first volume of which was printed in 1931, the third posthumously in 1943, has always been a major challenge to literary criticism as it does not seem to fit into any category of modern prose literature. Musil himself was never able to complete this massive tome, as indicated by the thousands of extra pages preserved in his archive with variant versions and alternative continuations. Yet more than any other contribution by a German speaking writer during the twentieth century, this novel proves to be a harbinger of postmodernity, although Musil heavily relied on many historical materials, traditional narrative strategies, and literary techniques. Stefan Jonsson here offers a new reading that promises to open significant new perspectives on this novel insofar as he understands its fundamental message in light of the postmodern quest for the individual's identity and its role within the community or nation. One of the key notions characterizing Musil's novel proves to be, according to Jonsson, negativity, or the lack of an inborn or inherited identity. Insofar as the protagonist Ulrich represents a highly complex type of personality, he also realizes the absence of identity in a world of competing, contradictory, contrastive, and opposing cultural and material forces. Musil was, of course, not the only writer to make such observations, as Jonsson illustrates through an extensive discussion of philosophical treatises by contemporary thinkers such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Lukács, Oswald Spengler, Martin Heidegger, and Hermann Broch. But in *The Man Without Qualities*, this realization gains most expressive form both through the presentation of the protagonist Ulrich, originally named "Anders" or "Other," and his small palace in Vienna where all historical styles are incorporated and the house itself has lost its function of providing an identificatory shell for the inhabitant. The author emphasizes that Musil "represents the social universe as at once too chaotic and too rigidly structured" (73), leading to a fundamental conflict between subjectivity and society. Consequently, and this nicely explains the heavy emphasis on the notion of potentiality as Ulrich's life philosophy, nothing remains firm, and nothing offers aesthetic, moral, or ethical stability. Moreover, Jonsson points out that Musil structured his novel with the help of figures who stand parallel to Ulrich, such as the schizophrenic murderer Moosbrugger and Ulrich's sister Agathe, with whom he eventually develops an incestuous relationship. No longer determined by an absolute and unchangeable identity, Ulrich regularly imagines himself as another personality, especially as these two people serve as possible alternatives for

his own self.

The author rightly emphasizes that Musil discards the expressionist philosophy and aims for a new realization of human existence, strongly influenced by mysticism. Jonsson discusses the mystical experiences at length, but he fails to comprehend their fundamental meaning as he does not see them in light of their medieval origins and their powerfully religious connotation (see my study "Mittelalter-Rezeption im Werk Robert Musils," *Forum. Materialien und Beiträge zur Mittelalter-Rezeption III*, ed. R. Krohn, 1992). Ulrich and Agathe enter the world of mysticism in order to lose themselves and, perhaps, to regain a new identity in a religious union with the Godhead, though here this might be the experience of love itself. Musil certainly operated with the liminal condition (91), but it was not only with the intent to explore the total loss of selfhood in light of an alienating reality, as the final chapters of this book demonstrate. Jonsson correctly argues that Ulrich searches for "an alternative definition of subjectivity" (93), yet he does not fully comprehend the existential dimension of the mystical universe. In other words, Musil discovered the pathway toward postmodernity not only through a rejection of his own world, but also through a rediscovery of the Middle Ages, as demonstrated by Ulrich and Agathe's reading of medieval mystical texts (see my study "The Never-Ending Story of the (German Middle Ages), in: *Rocky Mountain Review* 55, 2 [2001]).

Jonsson also explores Musil's postmodern handling of space, time, narration of characters, irony, the authorial voice of the narrator—all well-known aspects characteristic of Musil's famous opus. These elements, however, support his claim that the writer aimed for a postmodern understanding of reality and laid the foundation for a new definition of human existence.

One of the key concepts developed by Musil was, as Jonsson points out, "negativity," as reality is here viewed through the lenses of the sense of possibility ("Möglichkeitssinn"; 144). This also explains why Musil could not complete his novel as this new sense also undermined the possibility of reaching a closure at a time when the world portrayed (pre-1914 and also pre-1930) was on the brink of collapse. Utopia is implied, but also undermined because of the chance for dystopia. The term "negativity: therefore seems to be too strong and does not fully capture the new concept of reality as developed in this novel. Ulrich's abandonment of his identity in favor of a pluralistic personality cannot be equated with "negativity" (159), instead "potentiality" would best circumscribe Musil's intentions, which in turn prepares the protagonist for his encounter first with his sister Agathe, and then with the world of medieval mysticism. Nevertheless, Jonsson is right on target when he observes that the novel searches for new notions of ethics and subjectivity (163).

The last two chapters prove to be the most exciting as the author not only fully incorporates even the third, fragmentary book of Musil's novel, but also contextualizes the entire text, reading it in light of the historical dilemma faced by the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the dawn of World War One. The way out for Musil appeared to have been the breaking of all traditional moral taboos and ethical norms, insofar as Ulrich begins to identify with the murderer Moosbrugger and enters a love relationship with his sister Agathe. The monstrous dimension serves as the catalyst for Ulrich to gain access to a new world where the subject succeeds in reestablishing itself through the union with the ghastly criminal—symbol of the schizophrenic distortion of reality—and the angelic sister who seeks limitless love at any prize. To illustrate his point Jonsson refers to some of Paul Klee's paintings, one of which also serves as cover illustration.

In the last chapter the author examines the significance of *The Man Without Qualities* as a critical mirror of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The latter collapsed under the weight of conflictual nationalities and a growing sense of loss of identity as all political, economic, and military movements were met by contradictions, oppositions, and counter-movements, leading to a total standstill out of which only war seemed to offer a solution. Jonsson rightly suggests that Musil's novel powerfully reflects this tragic situation against which both Ulrich and Agathe, and Rachel (Jewish) and Soliman (Black African) protest through their incestuous respectively miscegenatious love relationship. "They are all monstrous because of their ability to symbolically destroy the ideological order that ascribes identities to persons" (249). This does not, however, mean that they embrace total negativity, as Jonsson argues. Instead, they break through the barriers of social, individual, ethical, and moral norms and traditions and explore the space of individual utopia in face of modern anonymization, the establishment of mass community, war hysteria, and absolute materialism. Indeed, Musil's novel emerges as a utopia, but based on scientific experimentation with love and mysticism as the new *modus vivendi*. Jonsson powerfully opens many layers of meaning in *The Man Without Qualities* and also contextualizes his interpretations both in theoretical, literary-historical, and historical terms.

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David Aram Kaiser. *Romanticism, Aesthetics and Nationalism. Cambridge Studies in Romanticism* 34. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. 154 pp.

David Kaiser's ambitious study analyzes how Post-Enlightenment theoreticians have approached the complex relationship between aesthetics and politics. Kaiser's motivations for writing this book stem from his frustration with the "extreme apolitical aestheticism of de Manian deconstruction" (8) but also his belief that new historicism has overlooked the political as an important category for Romantic thinkers. Kaiser makes it clear that he is "committed to retaining the concept of individual agency" (8-9) and that he is in agreement with Habermas inasmuch as "he appears to be the only major contemporary theorist who seeks to make a case for reforming rather than rejecting the central elements of the liberal tradition of subjectivity" (9). Kaiser focuses his study on the German and English traditions, though his sole representative for German Romanticism is someone who, in mainstream German scholarship, is not considered a Romantic; namely Friedrich Schiller. The study would have benefited from the inclusion of more representative German Romantic thinkers, such as the Schlegel brothers or Novalis.

The first chapter introduces key concepts applied throughout the study. By summarizing several thinkers (Max Weber, Adorno, Habermas), Kaiser describes the post-Enlightenment definition of modernity and subjectivity. Although modernity began "with the goal of emancipating the individual subject," the "material processes of modernization, as they are institutionalized in modern economic, political, and scientific structures" (16) end up destroying the same structures necessary to sustain the individual subject. Romantic thinkers responded to this predicament by trying to fuse ideas about aesthetics with Enlightenment notions concerning the formation of the state based upon the autonomy of the subject. Kaiser introduces his final main concept, the symbol, in Chapter Two and invokes a dialectic that views it as simultaneously illustrating and embodying "the true." Kaiser outlines its importance in Coleridge's thinking and discusses the theological background of the symbol. He also discusses what he views as a distortion among some twentieth-century thinkers, such as Adorno and Benjamin, who constructed a political theory around the notion of the symbol as a model for totalitarianism.

Chapter Three is an analysis of Schiller's Letters on Aesthetic Education and focuses on Schiller's estimation that aesthetic work harmonizes man's dual nature. For Schiller the sphere of aesthetics is one of freedom because it is here that the individual can reconcile the material world and the moral law. Kaiser's reading of Schiller is narrow in that he does not grant Schiller's

theory any inherent validity beyond that it “provides an important framework through which we can understand and assess Habermas’s theories of the public sphere and communicative action” (41). For Kaiser, Schiller seems to be worthy of consideration only because he helps elucidate Habermas. There is hardly any historical context in the chapter beyond aligning Schiller, perhaps too eagerly, with Kant. Nevertheless Kaiser clearly draws out how Schiller can be understood as negotiating Enlightenment universalist values and Post-Enlightenment notions of cultural nationalism.

Chapters Four through Six provide analyses of the art-state dialectic in the works of Coleridge, Arnold, and Ruskin. Although the focus is still quite specific, Kaiser does a better job here of sketching in the complex historical discourses from which these ideas emerged. The Coleridge chapter focuses on a late prose text that deals with issues concerning the desired role religion, as represented by the Church, should play in the State. Kaiser focuses on Coleridge’s concept of Clerisy as central to the idea of aesthetic statism because the clerisy represents for Coleridge “an institutional expression of the logic of the symbol” (68). A key difference from Schiller is that Coleridge is more interested in the abstract idea of the union between national culture and universal reason than in how the aesthetic sphere will actually promote individual subjectivity.

In Chapter Five, after making references to a strand of criticism that places Mathew Arnold in line with cultural conservatives like T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis, Kaiser discusses the similarities and differences between Coleridge’s and Arnold’s thinking on aesthetics and politics. In a rather sudden detour, Kaiser discusses the political theories of John Stuart Mill, whom he describes as a “nonaesthetic liberal theorist” for whom the aesthetic sphere is an entirely private affair. For Kaiser, Arnold is a cultural nationalist, but his notion of the so-called best self is nevertheless based on German Enlightenment notions of subjectivity. Arnold’s conservatism is based on his narrow view of the aesthetic canon. Kaiser is critical of Arnold’s refusal to acknowledge that the theoretical assumptions of his claims are based on Coleridge’s notion of the symbol.

Chapter Six presents Ruskin as a thinker who combines the old with the new. Referring specifically to a late essay entitled “Sesame and Lilies,” Kaiser looks at the way in which Ruskin constructs a gendered aesthetic sphere. Ruskin adheres to a hierarchical view of society that is suspicious of modern subjectivity. Unlike the previous thinkers, Ruskin does not assign art a special role as a potential transformer of society, but sees it as one element among others. Kaiser’s analysis reveals Ruskin’s chivalric notions of the relationship between men and women. Kaiser seems content to diagnose Ruskin as the most anti-modern of his group of thinkers and one

cally cast him in the role of arch-conservative.

In the final chapter Kaiser turns away from the nineteenth century in order to analyze “the legacy of aesthetic statism” in twentieth-century theory. He contends that most twentieth-century theory tends to separate aesthetics from politics. His exception to the rule is the Frankfurt School in general and Habermas in particular. Kaiser provides a succinct overview of the basic dilemma the aesthetic realm faces in the twentieth century: it can either remain detached and politically ineffective or it can surrender its autonomy and become a part of the social network as a whole. For Kaiser, Adorno is the proponent for the first option and Habermas for the second. The final section focuses on attempts to reinstate the aesthetic sphere within the Habermasian framework of communicative reason. The narrow focus on the intricacies of arguments within the Frankfurt School and its disciples is a slight letdown after the intellectual breadth of the previous chapters. Kaiser becomes caught up in the vicissitudes of Habermasian and post-Habermasian thought, which lessens the impact of his own conclusions. One can see how much he wants to hold on to the idea that individuation occurs through acts of socialization. How convincing readers will find his argument that in the twentieth century, “what takes the reconciling role of the aesthetic sphere is the universality of basic forms of intersubjective speech acts,” will depend, in the end, upon how persuasive they find Habermas’s theories of communicative action.

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Adelaida López de Martínez and Harriet Turner. *The Cambridge Companion to the Spanish Novel: From 1600 to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. 304 pp.

Those who believe that the novel as a critical concept can only be apprehended through its history will find *The Cambridge Companion to the Spanish Novel: from 1600 to the present* a useful one. The editors’ purpose is to trace the “development of the modern Spanish novel from the seventeenth century to the present” (1). When talking about “the modern Spanish novel” (and not only Spanish, for that matter) *Don Quijote de la Mancha* comes immediately to mind. Hence Miguel de Cervantes’s masterwork constitutes, according to the editors, “a fundamental element” (1) in the trajectory of the genre from its origins to the present day. Just as we are about to commemorate the fourth centennial of the publication of *Don Quijote*, Part I (1605), it is worth stressing the fact that the Cervantine model has by far exerted the most influence on the history of the Western novel and rightly so, I would add. The ubiquitous quixotic mirror, whether

transparent or fragmented, has manifested itself for the last four hundred years in an ever-engaging dialectics between reality and imagination, realism and idealism, history and fiction, referentiality and textuality.

The volume is divided into three parts. Part I, "Since Cervantes, deals with the rich legacy of Don Quijote and the picaresque novel (Anthony J. Close) and with the novel of sensibility during the Enlightenment period, a forerunner of nineteenth-century realism (Rebecca Haidt). Part II, "The nineteenth century, explores relevant issues pertaining to romantic and realist fiction: an ideological approach to the regional novel (Alison Sinclair); *folletín* as a Spanish response to the hegemony of French literature (Elisa Martí-López); the tension between mimesis and discourse in the realist novel (Harriet Turner); the relation of fiction to history in Benito Pérez Galdós's forty-six volumes of *Episodios nacionales* (Geoffrey Ribbans); the way women wrote about themselves vis-à-vis their views on the working classes and the colonial subjects (Lou Charnon-Deutsch); the aesthetics of decadentism in turn-of-the-century Spain, as epitomized in the works of Ramón del Valle-Inclán (Noël Valis). Finally, Part III, "The twentieth century," analyzes the anti-realist stance of modernist and vanguard fiction (Roberta Johnson); two offspring of realism in the second half of the century, the testimonial novel and the novel of memory (Gonzalo Sobejano); the prevalence of style and discourse in the experimental novel of the 1960s and 1970s (Bradley Epps); the boom in women's narrative during Spain's transition to democracy (Akiko Tsuchiya); the political motives behind cinematic adaptations of literary texts during the years 1982-1995 (Isolina Ballesteros); a cultural analysis of the Spanish novel in the age of globalization and the end of history (Teresa M. Vilarós); last but not least, the recourse to metafictional devices with which novelists comment on the nature of their own fiction (Randolph D. Pope).

Professors Turner and López de Martínez are to be commended for gathering such an impressive array of scholars to write about their field of expertise with such a degree of clarity and acumen. Furthermore, every contributor succeeds in framing the content of his or her article in the literary and the historical contexts out of which a particular movement or sub-genre have emerged. This adds to the goal of the Cambridge Companion series of reaching a wide readership, ranging from the undergraduate student to the specialist. While the quality of each individual contribution is highly satisfactory, I have reservations about the overall design of this volume. Its subtitle being "From 1600 to the present", I see no reason why most of the articles should focus on the nineteenth (six) and the twentieth centuries (seven) to the detriment of the novels produced during the 1600s (one) and the 1700s (one). More specifically, I am concerned that such an imbalance will only help to perpetuate the stereotype about the insignificant role of eighteenth-century Spanish fiction for the development of the

genre paradoxically enough, this is the opposite claim that Professor Haidt makes in her study.

I will conclude with a word about editing. The article by Professor Vilarós contains serious inaccuracies regarding names and dates that should have been detected prior to their publication. The novelist Mañas's first and middle names are José Ángel, not "Juan Manuel" (257) or "Juan Antonio" (260). His *Historias del Kronen* appeared in 1995 instead of in "1971" (260), even the precocious Mañas would have had a hard time completing a novel on the very year he was born! Lastly, the failed military coup during the Spanish transition took place on February 23, 1981 (the infamous "23-F"), not on "21 February" (261). Professor Vilarós's carelessness notwithstanding, a better job of proofreading would have easily emended these errors, which are simply unacceptable in so prestigious a press as Cambridge University.

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Mark R. McCulloh. *Understanding W.G. Sebald*. Columbia, S.C.: U of South Carolina P, 2003. xxiv, 193 pp.

W.G. Sebald burst onto the literary stage late in life. After about 20 years of teaching modern German literature at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, he published his first non-scholarly book, a series of prose poems, *Nach der Natur* (*After Nature*), in 1989. He followed it up in quick succession with a volume of prose pieces, *Schwindel, Gefühle* (1990, *Vertigo*, 2000) and *Die Ausgewanderten* (1992, *The Emigrants* 1996), a collection of four interconnected stories of people who fled persecution in Germany and who are haunted by the past. *The Emigrants* made Sebald a big critical and financial success in the English-speaking world when it appeared as the first of his books in translation, gaining praise from luminaries like Susan Sontag and Cynthia Ozick. Sebald's next two novels, *Die Ringe des Saturn* (1995, *The Rings of Saturn*, 1998) and *Austerlitz* (2001, *Austerlitz*, 2001) reached bestseller status in the US and in the United Kingdom while remaining moderately successful in Germany. Though Sebald would not have approved of the characterization, at least some of the success can be traced to his status as a writer of "holocaust literature" – the fact that *The Emigrants* was the first book published in English gives some indication as to the marketing of Sebald's writings. Shortly after *Austerlitz* appeared, Sebald was killed in a car accident at the end of 2001, leaving behind some book-projects that were later published in German (not yet translated), *Campo Santo* (2003) and (with the painter Jan Peter Tripp) *Unerzählt* (2002). Together with his scholarly writings and a few short pieces pub-

lished in various venues, this is Sebald's oeuvre, somewhat modest in size but for a German writer unusually successful on the international scene.

It is this success that has spawned McCulloh's book-length guide to Sebald's works, a first in English. Following the rather rigorous format of the series in which it is published, the book begins with a thumbnail sketch of Sebald's life ("Introduction") and a short chronology of his life. The body of the book consists of six chapters, one introducing what McCulloh calls Sebald's "literary monism," one each on his major books and closing with a chapter that tries to situate Sebald in German and European literary history and postmodern literature. This concluding chapter also draws on Sebald's various essays. The chapters on Sebald's writings are somewhat awkwardly ordered by date of publication in English. The volume closes with a selected and selective bibliography, mostly of British and American reviews (with some commentary), and a useful index. All quotes of Sebald's texts are given in the original German in the notes. At times, McCulloh addresses issues of translation explicitly, in particular in the chapter on Vertigo. Differences between the German and English versions of the books such as changes in the names of characters and in the photos inserted into the text are mentioned but little is made of these differences.

The volume is not so much a scholarly study but a running commentary to the books with extensive retellings of the stories. McCulloh freely acknowledges the challenge he faced: "In interpreting Sebald, it is difficult to avoid retracing his intricate narrative connections." (80) He attempts to address this difficulty by developing the notion of "literary monism" (1) as the conceptual framework for Sebald's style where everything is connected and literature represents this web of connectedness. This sort of holism is presented as a literary device with generous references to literary borrowings from Marcel Proust and Thomas Bernhard to Franz Kafka, Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges to Johann Peter Hebel, Joseph Conrad, Adalbert Stifter and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, to name just a few. McCulloh places Sebald in the tradition of travel literature, detective novels, and, surprisingly (and not very convincingly, I believe) in the tradition of political writings represented by Rolf Hochhuth and Peter Weiss. The chapter on *The Rings of Saturn* relies heavily on the Freudian notion of the uncanny to explain the leaden atmosphere evoked in many parts of that book. Austerlitz is presented as an exploration of erasure of time and a struggle to regain memory and the past. The chapters on the individual books also include a brief characterization of the reception they received upon publication in both the German and the English speaking world.

Overall, the volume is useful, highlighting connections between Sebald's books and to other authors. The overall tone is laudatory and does not leave much room for a critical appraisal. Two obvious lacunae in Sebald's works, their complete lack of humor and the neurotic avoidance of

physical erotics between sexes (while eroticizing the object world) are not addressed. McCulloh tries to distill a “grim humor” (13) out of some passages and speaks of “visual jokes” (9), but that all seems rather flat and as unconvincing as Tim Parks suggestion that there is a strong element of comedy in Sebald’s writings. The theme of homosexuality is noted but not explored.

At times McCulloh tends towards the bizarre. At some point, something is characterized as particularly ironic because Germany is “a country where keys are often meticulously labeled” (50). Surprisingly, McCulloh repeats one of the most trivial stereotypes about Germany, i.e., that it has suppressed its (Nazi) past (1, 11, 129). He suggests that the difference in Sebald’s popularity between the English speaking world and the German-speaking world may lie in the fact that “Sebald will never find favor with Germans who insist on looking only forward, never looking back” (25).

These aspects diminish the value of this book which would have benefitted from more thorough editing to catch misspelled names (such as Spielberg and Donald Southerland) and too many mistakes in the German quotes (three on p. 164 alone). But as a first guide to Sebald, it might still be useful.

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Dale E. Peterson. *Up From Bondage: The Literatures of Russian and African American Soul*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000. 249 pp.

In the Prologue to *Up From Bondage*, Dale E. Peterson writes:

What is perhaps even more remarkable than this sensed affinity between modern black and Russian modes of artistic expression is how little the phenomenon has been remarked upon. Despite the amount of attention currently devoted to studies of ethnic and postcolonial literatures, the scholarly world has little noted nor long remembered the significant moments when African American writers and thinkers have called to mind the emancipatory example of nineteenth-century Russia’s soulful writing and music. (1)

Peterson examines the development of Russian and African American “soul” and charts a series of significant and sustained cultural affiliations that span the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While our contemporary interest in multiculturalism will certainly continue to produce questions about which marginalized groups share the greatest affinity and whether

these affiliations are the predictable by product of exploring ethnic identity, Peterson's volume is a huge step toward breaking the silence that has surrounded this phenomenon. *Up From Bondage* acknowledges the social circumstances that gave rise to the ties between Russian and African American literary figures without needing to defend or vilify either the literary Left or the Soviet Union. This volume is a meticulously researched tome that reflects a fully developed critical understanding of both the Russian and African American traditions. The bibliography alone is an outstanding contribution to an area of research neglected in both Russian studies and African American studies.

Peterson's presentation of this complex affiliation is thoughtful and convincing. He moves from the questions of why such an affinity might arise in the Prologue to a discussion of the parallel advances in proclaiming the "ethnic self-consciousness among Europe's cultural step-children, the Russian Slavs and the African Americans" (14) by Peter Chaadaev and Alexander Crummell in the nineteenth century. The emergence of cultural nationalism is discussed in the next chapter, charting the rise to prominence of Ivan Kireevsky in the Russian context and W.E.B. DuBois in the American. Peterson centers much of his work on W.E.B. DuBois's concept of "double consciousness," which informs the deep affinity between DuBois and Fyodor Dostoevsky in their roles as literary ethnographers of their respective traditions. Peterson's discussion in the chapters that follow moves along a spectrum of literary intersections which includes Ivan Turgenev, Charles Chesnutt, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Maxim Gorky, Valentin Rasputin, and Gloria Naylor. The final chapter's discussion of the modern cultural intersection is a fitting conclusion to this seamless presentation. "Response and Call: African American Dialogue with Bakhtin" brings together Peterson's discussion of DuBois's "double consciousness" and his analysis of Bakhtin's "double-voiced" discourse. Of Bakhtin's influence on contemporary African American literary and cultural theorists, Peterson writes:

It is no accident, then, that the most influential texts of Russian and African American literature have tended toward formal anomaly and "hidden polemic," departing strategically and willfully from the expected conventions of good form while also self-consciously adhering to the protocols of higher culture—the letter of the European literary laws. No wonder, then, that Bakhtin's socio-linguistic theory of literature as utterance writ large, as a contextually formed struggle to disrupt or modify operative cultural conventions, found a particularly warm reception among the present generation of well-read and theoretically informed African American intellectuals. Given all that we know about the uncomfortable dialogue of emerging nationalisms with the ruling assumptions of European civilization, it makes sense that

Russian and African American thinkers have been engaged in a never-complete (ex)postulation of a similar difference from the standards of Western literacy. (199)

This chapter brings Peterson's argument full circle and reasserts the premise that opens the volume, that in the last century crucial leaps forward in African American literature were accompanied by broad statements of affinity with Russian literary thought.

The literary material from which Peterson draws is both deep and wide. This range, combined with Peterson's facility within both realms of scholarship and his acute understanding of both the Russian and African American conceptions of soul, nation, and identity make this book a satisfying read. *Up From Bondage* is an ambitious study made worthwhile by Peterson's ability to sustain a cogent argument spanning a period from the earliest proclamations of Russian and African American self-awareness to very recent developments within the African American canon.

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