

Book Reviews

Lucile C. Charlebois. *Understanding Camilo José Cela*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1998. 187 pp.

This book was written for the series "Understanding Modern European and Latin American Literature" published by the University of South Carolina Press, designed to introduce undergraduate and graduate students and non-academic readers to the salient works of major modern writers. Arguing that Cela's literary opus parallels the development of contemporary Spain, Lucile Charlebois situates the literary contributions of Spain's 1989 Nobel Prize winner against the backdrop of evolving Spanish history, from Civil War to dictatorship to democracy. She posits that, as a non-exiled writer, Cela is particularly representative of the struggle for self-expression in Spanish society amid monolithic governmental control: "As his career began to flourish, Cela made it a point to distinguish, oftentimes harshly, between the institutionalized management of culture, which he grew to abhor, and the true Spanish aesthetes, who had a decisive influence on his own writing" (3). In this light, Charlebois notes that his early roles as Nationalist soldier and government censor must be viewed in the context of his literary works and the complexities of that phase of Spanish history.

Indeed, Charlebois identifies caustic social and political commentaries as major motifs in Cela's *esperpento*-type representation of the state of humanity. She marks his insolent and iconoclastic characters as the artistic heirs of other famous renditions of Spanish culture, such as sixteenth-century rogues, Goya's distorted monsters, and Valle-Inclán's vision of reality as "*esperpento*" 'grotesque farce' (8). While her book emphasizes Cela as a Spanish writer, Charlebois also underscores the many technical innovations and thematic concerns that make him a pioneer of novelistic experimentation who quintessentially expresses many contemporary concerns in Western culture. For her, the confusion of genres and of truth and fiction produces works that allow for multiple levels of interpretation of human reality: "What you see is not what you get, as the outer layers, when peeled back, conceal a human emotion, suffering and exuberance that transcend the Hispanic realm and define human-kind in universal terms: life, love, death, and truth" (7). As a writer who draws inspiration from the particulars of his own milieu in order to ponder common human experi-

ence, Cela is, for Charlebois, a world-class author who has continued to hone his craft long after his initial fame garnered from *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (1942) and *La colmena* (1951).

Charlebois's study is divided into an introduction, ten chapters (each of which focuses on a separate novel), and a brief conclusion. The book begins with a useful chronology of the major events in the author's career and ends with a selected bibliography that details Cela's works (including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and travel books) as well as critical studies of his texts. Charlebois's introduction traces the famed novelist's biography and literary career, and provides an overview of prominent thematic and technical devices in his works. As Cela is best known for his novels, Charlebois features these in the body of her text. Organized chronologically according to dates of publication, the ten chapters deal with the following titles: *Pascual Duarte and his Family*, *Rest Home*, *The Hive*, *Mrs. Caldwell Speaks to Her Son*, *San Camilo, 1936*, *Oficio de tinieblas 5*, *Mazurka for Two Dead Men*, *Cristo versus Arizona*, *El asesinato del perdedor*, and *La cruz de San Andrés*. Her analyses cite existing English versions of Cela's novels, modifying them or providing her own translations when necessary.

Each chapter summarizes the general plot of the novel (when there is one), discusses the often complex structure, and explains the principal narrative techniques and themes. For those novels that boast hundreds of characters, Charlebois singles out the most prominent ones for discussion and briefly refers to many of the others, providing a good sense of the cacophony in Cela's works. Along the way, she sketches relevant extratextual details, such as how Cela's experience with tuberculosis germinated into *Rest Home* or how censorship affected the publication of certain novels.

This book is an informative, condensed study of Cela's major prose texts. While it is probably too general for those who already have a solid understanding of Cela's works, for its intended audience of students and non-specialists this volume provides a useful introduction to the considerable opus of one of Spain's leading novelists. Moreover, its treatment of the author's more recent work may be valuable to readers familiar only with Cela's canonical texts such as *La familia de Pascual Duarte* or *La colmena*. Charlebois argues against evaluating Cela's importance only in terms of those early works: "To approach Cela's novels in this way is myopic at best and misguided at worst. Without minimizing their (seminal) importance, *Pascual Duarte*, *Rest Home*, and *The Hive* are only the first fruits of a fifty-year career that was built upon an unwavering commitment to creative renewal. The novels that come after these attest to Cela's dedication to his craft" (130). Whether or not readers agree with that statement, Charlebois's study certainly opens up the trajectory of Cela's extensive work to a broader audience.

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Siegfried Mews (ed.). *A Bertolt Brecht Reference Companion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997. xviii + 430 pp.

It is conceivable that the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism will also spell the end of Brecht's reputation as one of the major writers of our age. Up to his death, he never wavered in his outspoken support for communism, and his criticism of Stalinism was comparatively muted. In addition, his works and theories are so overtly tied to socialist thought that they might appear hopelessly outdated to a new generation of students and young scholars. To counteract the impression that Brecht is doomed to be a "very dead, white male writer" (1), Siegfried Mews has put together the present anthology, in which tried and true approaches to Brecht stand side by side with poststructuralist re-visions of his legacy.

In his introduction, Mews offers a biographical sketch and a critical assessment of all of Brecht's major works without shrinking from discussing those aspects of Brecht's life and politics that have come under criticism. Reinhold Grimm ("Alienation in Context: On the Theory and Practice of Brechtian Theater") succinctly outlines Brecht's rejection of Aristotelian theater, his alternative project of the epic theater, and explains the meaning and sources of the concept of *Verfremdung* (alienation), discussing its untranslatability and underscoring the importance of Russian formalist thought for its proper understanding. In "Brecht and the Problem of Influence," Christine Kiebuszinska not only traces the importance of Marx, Hegel, Korsch, Benjamin, Lukács, Stanislawsky, and Diderot for Brecht, but reads Brecht's collaborative writing style, his rejection of the concept of intellectual property and the autonomy of art, and his appropriation of literary traditions and their reworking in montage, *Verfremdung*, etc. as an anticipation of the poststructuralist dismissal of the exalted status of the literary text and its creator. Karl-Heinz Schoeps ("Brecht's *Lehrstücke*: A Laboratory for Epic and Dialectic Theater") discusses all of the *Lehrstücke* and the specific aesthetic and political problems they raise. Taking his cue from what may be Brecht's most famous line, Herbert Knust ("First Comes the Belly, then Morality") traces the importance of the metaphor of food and ingestion and its complex relationship to changing conceptions of morality, not only for all the major literary works (of particular interest is the pun on *Gericht*, meaning both court of law and meal, in the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*), but also for his theoretical writings (e.g., his rejection of "culinary" theater). Christiane Bohnert ("Poetry, History, and Communication") discusses Brecht's poetry cycles in the context of both subjective and objective history while finding room for the close reading of individual, strategically important poems. Stefan Soldovieri in "War-Poetry, Photo(epi)grammetry: Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*" looks at a lyrical cycle where Brecht combined cut-outs of war photography with poems and investigates Brecht's critique of photography and its claims of objectivity and

historicity as well as his view that the poems are supposed to retrain our gaze by "correcting" the photographic images and unmasking their ideological content. In "Dialectics and Reader Response: Bertolt Brecht's Prose Cycles," Sabine Gross looks at Brecht's often neglected prose and contemplates the tension between his intention of instilling critical thinking in the reader and his authoritarian gesture of slyly scripting the reader's response. Marc Silberman ("Brecht and Film") describes the stages of Brecht's rather intense engagement with cinema as a new media with unknown political implications from the early 1920s to his death and suggests that in the development of the epic theater Brecht used techniques he first encountered while working on his film scripts. Barton Byg ("Brecht, New Waves, and Political Modernism in Cinema") describes Brecht's legacy in contemporary film theory as well as in modern film up into the 1990s by directors such as Godard, Straub/Huillet, and Yvonne Rainer. In "Brecht Contra Wagner: The Evolution of the Epic Music Theater," Vera Stegmann places Brecht's use of music in the anti-Wagner tradition of Busoni, Stravinsky, Les Six, and Satie, and, by using *The Threepenny Opera* as a main example, proceeds to describe how the use of music contributed to the devices of epic theater such as *Verfremdung* and *Gestus*. Thomas R. Nadar ("Brecht and His Musical Collaborators") retells the stages of cooperation between Brecht and Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler, and Paul Dessau, and briefly sketches Brecht's theory of music. In "Brecht's Marxist Aesthetics," Douglas Kellner shows the centrality of communist dissident Karl Korsch's theories for Brecht's political education and subsequent thought, focusing among other things on their respective responses to Stalinism. In an attempt to defend Brecht against traditional feminist charges of sexism, Laureen Nussbaum ("The Evolution of the Feminine Principle in Brecht's Work: An Overview") not only traces the depiction and development of female figures through all of Brecht's major works, but also psychologically connects Brecht's artistic output to the women who dominated the respective stages of his life. Using, among others, Benjamin's views on translation and comparing different translations of Brecht, Michael Morley ("Negotiating Meanings: Thoughts on Brecht and Translation") identifies the specific problems of translating Brecht and shows what is at stake. In "Brecht and the American Theater," Carl Weber presents in detail the trials and tribulations Brecht's plays had to undergo in order to be staged in the U.S. from the 1930s to the present and skims over the impact Brecht had on the production of American playwrights. Comparing Brecht's and Paulo Freire's pedagogies as a starting point and looking at all major Latin American countries, Marina Pianca ("Brecht in Latin America: Theater Bearing Witness") traces both Brecht's influence on and the history of staging Brecht within the theatrical-cultural scene of the various countries in the context of their tortured political history. And finally Michael Bodden ("Brecht in Asia: New Agendas, National Traditions, and Critical Consciousness")

Indonesia, China, and Japan, Brecht was appropriated by political theater, adapted to local traditions, and used for the construction of a national culture.

The anthology should prove useful to both graduate students and scholars who are not entirely familiar with Brecht by helping to gain easy access to important problems and trends in Brecht criticism. The fact that all quotes and terms are translated and that bibliography heavily emphasizes publications in English will make it particularly useful for the non-Germanist. However, while the bibliographies of the individual contributions are detailed, they are by necessity limited in scope, and the general bibliography is probably too selective to successfully serve general reference purposes. Furthermore, the editor chose to have the contributors focus either on texts previously marginalized or on themes and critical problems covering the entire *œuvre*. This decision is not without its virtues, especially since the recent *Cambridge Companion to Brecht* is centered around Brecht's plays and theater practice and neglects areas such as prose and film. But since the book does not, in the words of the editor, "seek to replicate information easily available elsewhere" (xi), the Brecht beginner who develops a need for further bibliographic information and a more in-depth covering of individual works and the scholarship dedicated to them will therefore probably feel the need to augment her reading with additional sources.

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Rainer Nägele. *Echoes of Translation: Reading Between Texts*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1997. 120 pp.

Echoes of Translation is not a book about translation in any conventional sense of the word. We might try that again, by breaking that sentence into a number of fragments. What you will not find here is "convention" or even "sense," if by that we are to understand meaning unproblematically bound to the word. Nor is Rainer Nägele's book about translation. Not only does "translation" in this remarkable volume fail to fulfill the more or less comfortable conditions of a definition that seems to promise sense as one moves from one language to another: "translation" is also no topic that Nägele approaches from an external, academic position, a comfortable distance from which he is able to tell us what translation is. If translation is a "reading between texts," it is here in this interstice that Nägele finds his place, or fails to, in the readings and translations that he performs.

We might begin again and speak of the return this book makes in Nägele's considerable critical corpus to Hölderlin, Kafka, Benjamin, Baudelaire, and Freud. He stages them among the modernists in the latter's break from a Romantic narrative of self-conscious return and all that return implies, philosophically and ideologically. He will stage these writers again as ruptures in a modernism that walls itself off from the anarchic threat of the postmodern to come.

We might suppose, then, that there is much they have in common: Hölderlin's deflections in the moment of self-consciousness (5), Freud's recognition of the impossibility of self-analysis, Benjamin's break from psychologism—Benjamin's *Ur-sprung* or dialectical image, Hölderlin's magic bolt, Freud's interpretation as radical dissection (26-27), the modernist caesura (28). Perhaps. But Nägele does not offer us a theory prior to or separate from the praxis of reading. Theory is not given to us, but it is, nevertheless, made possible in this praxis. What engages Nägele is the encounter with the "idiosyncratic singularity" (5) of individual moments in writing. The "echoes" of Nägele's translations, then, are not repetitions, not self-reflections, but rather resonances between particular moments of a single writer, or of several writers, and also of what we conventionally call the critical text and its object. Echoes without localizable origins, echoes as fragments rather than reconstruction (10). Here in this "experiment of a *Darstellung* [presentation] through intertextual echoes" (29) there is no "guarantee [of] any kind of objectivity and readability" (21), even though with respect to each of these authors, Nägele writes of a certain "recognition" (21), a heightened understanding (23) that is bound to happen.

And so Nägele's chapter entitled "Echolalia" takes us on a dizzying and brilliant trip, from author to author, from text to text, from one language to another, from what seems to be language as sound-play to what seems to be language as theoretical commentary on the nature of language. We move, almost fall, from Benjamin to de Man reading Benjamin, to Hölderlin, to Baudelaire, to Sophocles, to Brecht, to Kafka, to Nietzsche, sometimes riding on the echoes of a phoneme, sometimes on a similar turn of phrase. As Nägele puts it: "In order to talk of the echoes and their effects, our own presentation has to enter in the indirect discourse of the echoing texts" (42), as indeed it does. As readers we are displaced from fragment to fragment, with no certain sense of where we are going, nor even of the author's intention, precisely. Thus Nägele performs the baroque mode of reading of which he also speaks. And yet along the way we learn much about different ways of posing and understanding the question of language.

With the chapter entitled "Recalling the Gods" a certain calm returns in exemplary close readings of texts by Hölderlin, Baudelaire, and Nietzsche. With the patience, precision, and subtlety the reader of Nägele's criticism

pagan gods in Baudelaire, of the relation between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and of invoking the sacred names of the gods as an “allegorical staging of a loss of experience” (58) in two poems of Hölderlin (“Die scheinheiligen Dichter” and “Germanien”). Nägele marks the complexities of naming, phenomenality, and allegory. “Nature,” “Mother,” “Helios,” “Dionysus”: these are the names we learn to reread here, however haltingly.

“Translations of Eros,” like the chapters before it, boldly performs the inextricability of theory and praxis. The third stasimon of Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Baudelaire’s “A une passante” are read in relation to their translations by Hölderlin and Benjamin. It is not only a question of translation from language to language, then, but also from antiquity to modernity—as Freud would have it, a shift from Eros, an insistence on the drive itself, to its object. Ostensibly reading a few lines of *Antigone*, Nägele recasts the entire play, both the relations among the characters and the forces that surround them. He goes on to show the way in which “A une passante” inverts the trajectory of the third stasimon in which one moves from an apostrophe to Eros to a narrative of another order. Eros figures as a spirit of love and peace but inexorably as well as a figure of discord. We are made to recognize it, over and over, moving as a force of dislocation, transport, metaphor, so that what seems the anchor of a thematic investigation in this chapter becomes the unstable shift that translation has come to imply, the experience of the fugitive beauty of unstable meaning. It is the experience of becoming rather than standing still or standing pat. What we encounter here in Nägele’s readings, themselves translations, are always allegories of a philosophy of language.

If in Nägele’s readings we experience what Benjamin, in his essay on translation, describes as a plunging from abyss to abyss while threatened by the depths of language, still, Nägele tells us, no text that aims at moments of truth can avoid taking risks (25). His own text is no exception in this regard. What punctuates his thinking, in prose that might often seem immersed in a realm withdrawn from the political, is an exceptional sense of the place of the ideological. Nägele makes clear the potentially ruthless moralism implicit in regarding language as vehicle for the expression of a real presented outside it (17). We read as well of the connection between consciousness in Hegel and European anti-Semitism, between nationalism and globalization, of the way in which a turn to the issue of the Holocaust is said to redeem a critic suspected of deconstruction (18). Nägele’s readings between are also a reading of the logic of exclusion, which he himself risks by the exceptional courage of his praxis no less than by his theoretical openings.

Nowhere is this more incisively the case than in a much briefer text, “Gespräche im Gebirg” ‘Conversations in the Mountains.’ To be sure it is a text not available to an English-speaking audience. Published in German,

which Nägele speaks of as “almost (not quite) my native language” (3), it appears in a volume, *Liechtensteiner Exkurse*, whose title names the writer’s homeland while reminding us that, inevitably, a homeland is that from which we are bound to turn. No doubt Nägele would say that this essay is “untranslatable,” that to translate it would be “unthinkable.” But it is to this essay that I would turn readers willing to take the risks of a language that makes our own comfortable ways of thinking the political, foreign. Nägele negotiates the precarious peaks and pitfalls of the political. He performs a stunning and remarkable act of translation in this essay with a political edge of such sheer intelligence and irony that it might be called exemplary for the relations among criticism, close reading, and political act. But then again, the particularity of such a performance can neither be repeated nor precisely imitated.

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Suzanne Nalbantian. *Æsthetic Autobiography: From Life to Art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Anaïs Nin*. New York: Saint Martin’s, 1994, 1997. 223 pp.

The unwarranted influence of Philippe Lejeune’s naively referential notion of the “autobiographical pact” has greatly impeded the study of autobiography. Lejeune bases his analyses on the claim that the word “autobiography” in a title, plus the first person singular in the text, promises the readers that the historical author is the same as the author-persona, who is in turn the same as the protagonist of the life story offered. He seems to think that autobiography is special because in it generic and mimetic reference coincide: but the same convergence appears in many other genres such as the historical tragedy or the elegiac *consolatio*. Moreover, the term “autobiography” can be used as a deliberate red herring, as in Gertrude Stein’s *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* or her *Everybody’s Autobiography*. Finally, in Lejeune’s terms, *The Confessions of Felix Krull*, *Confidence Man*, are formally indistinguishable from the *Confessions* of Rousseau, while both these works differ radically from the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine (see Porter in *Symposium* 30, 1976: 144-59). Any generic label proposes a “pact” insofar as it raises expectations.

Suzanne Nalbantian’s adjective “æsthetic” appropriately displaces the emphasis from biographical reference to literary form. She draws mainly on examples in French and English to offer a rich, alert, intelligent summary in her first three chapters: “Historical Paradigms,” “Theories of Autobiography,” and “A Theory of Æsthetic Autobiography.” She defines

traditional autobiography as a “retrospective prose narrative concentrating on the history of an individual personality” (1), and provocatively extends her definition beyond prose to works such as Wordsworth’s “The Prelude” and Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. Traditional autobiography, she observes, combines three elements: a truth claim; the illusion of mimesis; and individual development from childhood through a minor transgression (Augustine stealing pears) to a sudden sense of vocation (Rousseau stimulated by an announcement of the Dijon Academy’s essay prize contest to write his first discourse), and often arising from a conversion experience (Chateaubriand in America fortuitously learns that the French King has been overthrown by the Revolution, and flies to his defense—example added). She illuminates the issue by explaining that Rousseau innovates as an autobiographer in using chronology to chart a succession of feelings, not of events. History becomes psychodrama.

One would have liked to learn Nalbantian’s opinions concerning the fictional segmentation of a life: is the depiction of childhood necessary or sufficient to constitute autobiography; why does childhood occupy progressively more space in autobiographies as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries unfold; how do depictions of the self focused on adolescence (the Bildungsroman) or maturity (memoirs) fit into the generic scheme? A typology of relationships between the readership and the subject would also be pertinent: is the public supposed to forgive, emulate, or simply contemplate the subject? What is the rhetorical role of screen memories (Gide’s masturbating under a table at which his governess is sitting; Proust’s nameless hero waiting for his mother to come tuck him in bed) in constituting these relationships?

The chapter on the history of theories modulates neatly away from referentiality by invoking an uncertainty principle: you can’t write your own story because you change yourself by writing it. The concept of æsthetic autobiography resolves this problem by focusing primarily on the transformations effected by writing: “My primary interest in autobiography is . . . in the transformation of autobiographical data into literary *écriture*” (42). Through characterization, the central self proliferates into many selves, and from that multiplicity a composite æsthetic self emerges. This perspective in effect reverts to the familiar notion of the implied author, the personality that can be inferred from any text as a whole. But with one important nuance: references to art and artists in authors such as Proust and Joyce inscribe the implied author’s æsthetic distance from the characters by communicating “an explicit æsthetics” as a structural component that dominates the structure created by the formal portrait of the central subject (56-57).

Detailed analyses of the interrelationship of these two structures in specific works follows. “The Art of Misrepresentation in Marcel Proust” clarifies the much-discussed process of æsthetic transformation in Proust

through a skillful summary and synthesis of major issues. Long “noted for [its] portrayal of a vanishing aristocratic society,” Proust’s novel has become the focus “for explosive theories on textual maneuvering that go beyond the mimetic procedures of the social climate he was previously credited with delineating” (62). His “intricate art of misrepresentation” and deception becomes visible when one studies his progress between drafts (62-63). *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, where Proust planned to blend autobiography and criticism, was an avant-texte for *A la recherche* (72). In the latter, Proust conflates both sites and characters (73, 78-79, 86) to free himself from both his historical and from any prevailing central self. Nalbantian’s analysis demonstrates convincingly and in detail how Proust is not constrained to copy “reality,” to paint by the numbers. The *roman fleuve* itself provides a metaphor for Proust’s ever-expanding vision of his theme (99). Nevertheless, his insistence that there were no keys to his work leads one back to himself as the source of the drama (90).

Nalbantian’s chapter on Joyce plays off the contrast of possible, conventional alternate selves who unlike Joyce did not go into exile, with the privileged moments they nonetheless share with the author. The illuminating essay on Virginia Woolf, informed by a powerful synthetic vision, traces the genesis of *To the Lighthouse* and of *Mrs. Dalloway* to the motifs of rivalry with the symbolic father (Freud) and the symbolic mother respectively. Although these fixations produced Woolf’s two finest novels, she tried to transcend them in her project for “The New Biography” in 1927. It was to combine the granite of truth with the rainbow of personality, a union realized in *Orlando* (1928), where a twenty-year life span is spread over four hundred years of history. That the chapter on Anaïs Nin remains more nearly referential and biographical than the others suggests that Nin must be by far the least interesting writer of the four.

The brief envoi finds that what these authors have in common is their sustained commentary on their art, both within and outside their fictional texts. If one were to be perverse concerning the concept of “aesthetic autobiography,” one could invoke a *reductio ad absurdum*: doesn’t all art in a sense transform life experience? More simply, isn’t all art aesthetic? But Nalbantian’s felicitous combination of a thorough grounding in biographical fact with her supple, imaginative, convincing arguments accomplishes precisely what she wished. She rescues autobiography from legions of its ploddingly literal-minded critics, and offers us refreshing counterexamples of how to read three monumental authors.

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