

Book Reviews

Benthien, Claudia and Inge Stephan, eds. *Meisterwerke: Deutschsprachige Autorinnen im 20. Jahrhundert*. Cologne: Böhlau, 2005. 413 pp.

The title *Meisterwerke*, masterpieces, coupled with the subtitle “Deutschsprachige Autorinnen im 20. Jahrhundert” [Twentieth-century German speaking women authors] serves both as descriptor and as provocation. The editors, Claudia Benthien and Inge Stephan, who have written extensively on women writers, selected this title to emphasize the tension historically inherent in the juxtaposition of women’s cultural production and the epithet masterwork. Women authors rarely have enjoyed this tribute, despite the many literary prizes they received. Notably, a number of authors discussed in the volume are the recipients of the Kleist Prize, one of the most prestigious literary awards in Germany. The simultaneous marginalization of and resistance to women’s writing throughout centuries and the blatant exclusion from the categories of great works even today is what the editors set out to correct.

To begin, Stephan and Benthien eloquently outline the genealogy of the term “Meisterwerk” or “Meisterhaft” (masterwork or masterful) beginning with its initial understanding in the 18th century as an exemplary piece of craftsmanship. The designation “masterpiece,” they insist, is loaded with cultural and gendered biases that the literary canon has been known to fortify and promote. Designed to produce what the editors refer to as a “group or collective identity,” canons are exclusionary by their very nature.

In response to the traditional understanding of masterpiece and its well-established usage, and in opposition to the category *Frauenliteratur*, a term coined in the early 1970s to classify women’s literature, the editors appropriate the term *mastery* (*Meisterschaft*) and *masterpiece* (*Meisterwerk*). Thus, the goal of the individual essays is to investigate single works “unter dem Aspekt der Meisterschaft” (from the point of view of masterpiece, 16), stressing the uniqueness of each work and its genius, and to explore the concept of *Meisterwerk* in regard to its possibilities and its limitations. In doing so, the essays collectively redraw the lines of criticism in their trenchant analyses of the works of twenty women authors, the “*Meisterin-*

nen,” thus defining a new criteria for the term. All of the essays offer finely nuanced, multi-dimensional interpretations that are compelling in their complexity. The essays draw from a variety of critical approaches with feminism serving as the guiding light. They situate both work and author historically and for the most part include the reception of the individual works. The authors discussed are: Ilse Aichinger, Ingeborg Bachmann, Veza Canetti, Anna Duden, Gisela Elsner, Marieluise Fleisser, Judith Hermann, Marlen Haushofer, Elfriede Jelinek, Marie Luise Kaschnitz, Ruth Klüger, Else Lasker-Schüler, Monika Maron, Irmtraud Morgener, Nelly Sachs, Rachel Sanzara, Anna Seghers, Christa Wolf, and Unica Zürn.

Prominent among the various essays is the discussion of the skillful use of language, and the many references to and deviations from literary traditions. For instance, Anne Fleig highlights the distinct atmosphere and language in Marieluise Fleisser's 1926 play *Fegefeuer in Ingolstadt* (*Purgatory in Ingolstadt*, 1924). Based on Walter Benjamin's reception of Fleisser's language, which “erscheint als ein Kleid, das nicht immer oder nur notdürftig passt” (“is like a dress that does not always fit or only fits poorly,” 124), Fleig reads the deliberately fragmented language of the adolescent characters as reflective of their attempts to understand their changing bodies and needs. Additionally, Fleisser's provocative revision of the bourgeois tragedy attests to the profound changes in the social landscape, especially for women who were torn between traditional notions of gender and the unprecedented opportunities afforded women in the 1920s. Annette Mingels impressively shows how linguistic innovation empowers Emine Sevgi Özdamar's debut novel *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei* (*Life is a Caravanserei*, 1992). By blending Turkish and German languages and translating Turkish idioms directly into German, Özdamar spotlights border crossings and migration, a common theme in her work.

In addition to the masterful linguistic constructions of many of the authors discussed in the volume, a work's ability to withstand time, while being anchored in its own timely historical context, emerges as a further characteristic of a masterpiece. In her keen analysis of Christa Wolf's *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (*No Place, Nowhere*, 1979), Inge Stephan insists on the centrality of this work for Wolf's oeuvre. Overshadowed often by later works, Stephan argues that *Kein Ort. Nirgends* represents a turning point in Wolf's work and in her relationship to her homeland, the German Democratic Republic, before the fall of the wall. By creating an imaginary, dream-like encounter between the early nineteenth-century Romantic writer Karoline Günderrode and her contemporary Heinrich von Kleist, Wolf develops her own distinct voice to grapple with the political turmoil she faced in the 1970s when dissidents like Wolf Biermann, East German musician and poet, were being expelled from their homeland. A last example of the range of topics presented in this volume is the essay on Ruth Klüger's novel

Weiter leben. Eine Jugend (Still Alive). Caroline Schaumann contends that Klüger “expands and changes” the canon of Holocaust literature in her bold recounting of her life experiences as a Holocaust survivor, and offers a perspective that is decidedly gendered.

For readers not familiar with all of the authors or works discussed in this volume, *Meisterwerke* offers a thought-provoking introduction. The collection of essays can be used for a course on twentieth-century German literature, as well as for a lesson on great works. Many of the works represented here are available in translation. My only regret is that the collection is not available in English.

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Finney, Gail, ed. *Visual Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany: Text as Spectacle*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006. 310 pp.

The field of visual culture studies examines the act of looking, the process of perception, and the production and consumption of the spectacle, defined in the broadest sense as visual representation offered up to sight. Emerging originally from the discipline of art history, the study of visual culture has broadened out over the past few decades to intersect with film studies, gender studies, and cultural studies in ways that have proved productive for the field. Beyond providing an interdisciplinary framework for the analysis of visual media, the study of visual culture as exemplified by the volume *Visual Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany* also presents new insights into the relationships among aesthetics and politics, identity and social change.

Bringing together essays by seventeen scholars, Gail Finney presents a collection that is not only a significant contribution to visual culture studies, but also a cross-section of the best interdisciplinary work in German Studies today. Individual essays address the full spectrum of visual phenomena: dance, film, photography, painting, architecture, fashion, television, advertising, cabaret, theater, and cartography. Along with formal analysis and attention to genre, the contributions emphasize intermedial and contextual readings that take into account not only the larger visual field but also the wider social and historical framework in which visual artifacts emerge. Thus these essays refuse the reductive “snapshot” method that has often characterized the approach of literary scholars to studies of visual media. Instead, they respond to Nora Alter’s call (in her introduction to methodological issues in visual studies at the outset of this volume) to

synthesize diachronic and synchronic methods and “to interpret both the genealogical and the iconographical aspects of the discipline” (18).

Exemplary of this approach is Kristin Kopp’s chapter on cartography, in which she reads German colonial maps of Poland as examples of territorial revisionism. Kopp develops a visual studies model for analyzing the map as text, which emphasizes the intermedial (linguistic and visual) iconography of maps as well as the emergence of cartography as a geopolitical and pedagogical discourse in the German context. As Kopp demonstrates, the map was uniquely suited to construct territorial expansionism and even forceful annexation of Eastern space as legitimate German enterprises in the aftermath of the Versailles Treaty.

Many contributions to the volume use a visual studies model to explore questions of adaptation, transformation, intertextuality, and reframing among media. Particularly noteworthy examples include Patrick Greaney’s essay, which traces a genealogical framework for analyzing queer identity in Fassbinder’s cinema back to German idealism via Brecht’s use of montage. Eric Kligerman’s insightful reading of Anselm Kiefer’s Margarethe-Sulamith paintings suggests new ways into both Kiefer’s iconography and the poetry of Celan that it adapts. These essays provide not only convincing intermedial analyses of specific visual texts, but contribute in significant ways to debates about the politics of representation, as well as gender identity and Holocaust memory respectively.

Three of the book’s best essays are devoted to rethinking the history of photography in the German context. David James Prickett offers a fascinating analysis of Magnus Hirschfeld’s use of photography to document sexual intermediaries (as both performers of gender and bearers of authentically contradictory or ambiguous sexual organs) and to argue for their natural rights. As Prickett writes, these photographs “mark an intersection of the political, gender, and aesthetic discourses that constitute early twentieth-century German visual culture” (103). At the other end of the spectrum, Lutz Koepnick examines Heinrich Hoffmann’s famous photos of Hitler in order to argue for a more complex understanding of political photography during the Weimar Republic and in particular the nascent national socialist movement’s use of photography to further its agenda. Blake Stimson offers a dynamic analysis of Bernd and Hilla Becher’s oeuvre, which rethinks the Bechers’ work in relation to the aesthetics and politics of modernist photography and postmodern art. Read synchronically, these essays suggest a new apprehension of the central role of photography in the unfolding of aesthetic discourses and political agendas across the twentieth century.

Indeed, taken as a whole, the volume presents a veritable cultural history of the twentieth century, which, as Finney points out in the introduction “can be characterized as the visual age—the era in which the image becomes paramount” (1). Thus *Visual Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany*

traces the permutations of the image through modernity and postmodernity, analyzing the role of the visual in the construction, consolidation, and contestation of political regimes and in the formation of national, ethnic, sexual, and gender identities. The vectors of a history of visibility presented here suggest new ways of thinking about European imperialism, the rise of national socialism, the representation of the Holocaust, and changing constructions of gender and Germanness, among others.

Given the emphasis on social and historical context in all of the essays here, it is somewhat surprising that Finney did not choose to organize the book chronologically, a choice that might have led to a more provocative political and intermedial dialogue among the different topics represented. Instead, the chapters are arranged into three thematic clusters, "Questions of Methodology and Aesthetics," "Gender and Sexuality," and "Political Dimensions." This synthetic categorization appears arbitrary, particularly since the collection's strength lies precisely in the authors' detailed attention to the connections among aesthetics, politics, and identity. Ultimately, however, this is a minor quibble with an otherwise impressive collection, which is very well edited and includes excellent illustrations. Virtually every essay in the book is well researched, readable and thought provoking. As such, the collection presents a groundbreaking model of what interdisciplinary, cultural studies scholarship should look like.

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Gigliotti, Simone and Berel Lang, eds. *The Holocaust: A Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. xxii + 462 pp.

For the instructor who wishes to teach part or all of a college-level course on the Holocaust and seeks appropriate texts to assign, the sheer amount of available materials can be intimidating. In addition to the massive scholarly output on the Holocaust in a variety of disciplines (which includes not only a vast body of historical research, but also myriad contributions from sociology, psychology, philosophy and cultural criticism), one is confronted with primary historical documents and archival sources from the period, survivors' testimonies, chronicles of postwar and contemporary debates about the Holocaust in Germany and other countries, and cultural meditations on the event such as autobiographical and fictional literature, film and art. Simone Gigliotti and Berel Lang's edited collection *The Holocaust: A Reader* endeavors to assist the instructor with the overwhelming process of sifting through these possibilities by providing a targeted selec-

tion of key texts that convey “a clear representation of the central features of the Holocaust and the issues that have emerged in the attempts to understand its origins and impact” (2). The goal of the volume, according to the editors, is to provide college students with an outline of the parameters of the event, an awareness of its historical and social context, and some insight into the ways in which it has been explained in recent scholarship. The collection is divided into six parts, each of which highlights a particular facet of the Holocaust and its historicization: the development of racial anti-Semitism; the Nazi policy of resettlement and ghetto formation early in the war; the transition to widespread genocide of the Jews in 1941; the debate between “intentionalist” and “functionalist” explanatory models of the Holocaust; the contemporary reactions of Jewish victims in the form of diaries and chronicles; and the Holocaust considered in the context of other genocides. The selected texts in each section reflect a balance between secondary research by historians and primary documents from the period. Alongside essays by some of the most respected scholars of the Holocaust, such as Raul Hilberg, Christopher R. Browning, Omer Bartov, Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, the editors have included excerpts from important primary documents, including Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, the Nuremberg Laws, the “Commissar Decree” of 1941, the minutes of the Wannsee Conference, Emmanuel Ringelblum’s observations on the Warsaw ghetto, and the text of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

In some respects, the editors’ attempt to present the historical complexity of the Holocaust by concentrating on a few key themes and balancing secondary research with primary voices from the period is successful. Although this “top down” (3) strategy necessarily excludes other critical dimensions of the Holocaust (for example, the effect of genocidal policy on perpetrators, bystanders and victims or the implication of various sectors of German society, such as industry and the churches), it encourages students to develop a more nuanced view of particular aspects of the event and thus attempts to foreclose any superficial, scattershot understanding. However, in its endeavor to transmit a broad understanding of the Holocaust and as a purportedly representative example of research conducted in the field of Holocaust studies (importantly, the editors never state that the volume is intended solely for students of history, claiming rather that their approach is “interdisciplinary” [2]), the volume contains critical problems that, to my mind, minimize its effectiveness. To begin with, except for the section entitled “Response and Testimony: At the Center of the Whirlwind,” which includes contemporary eyewitness accounts in the form of letters, chronicles and diaries, the volume maintains an overwhelmingly perpetrator-centered approach, especially its almost obsessive attention to the Holocaust as a bureaucratic process. Given the important shift in Holocaust

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studies over the last two decades from focusing exclusively on the perpetrators to considering the perspective of the victims and survivors as well, this lopsided concentration seems outdated. Moreover, even though some of the most powerful and incisive analyses of the Holocaust are to be found in the accounts of survivors who reflected on their experience years and even decades after the Holocaust, the editors exclude any survivor writing, preferring to limit the postwar perspective to that of the historian. (Perhaps because most accounts of concentration camp life were written after the war, the volume includes no testimony and very little historical research on the organization and experience of concentration and death camps, a striking omission that gives the impression that the main features of the Holocaust were ghetto concentration and mobile killing units). Furthermore, the volume gives inordinate attention to the functionalist-intentionalist debate, which, as the editors admit, has largely been reconciled in recent years with the nuanced research of scholars such as Browning. By omitting some of the redundant material on the debate, the editors could have devoted space to other key areas of Holocaust research, such as recent work on trauma and testimony or on the impact of the Holocaust on contemporary Jewish and German self-understanding (topics that are ignored altogether by the volume). Finally, although the editors mention briefly "other means of Holocaust imagery like film, television, photography, internet materials, and the various forms of literary fiction" (2), they provide neither their student readers nor instructors with guidance about how to negotiate and analyze such a large and diverse body of media. By drawing on and including the research of astute scholars, such as Geoffrey Hartman, Marianne Hirsch and James Young, in the diverse fields of memory, literary, museum and media studies, the editors might have helped their readers learn how to critically examine not only representations of the Holocaust by historians, but also cultural mediations of the event, which often make a larger contribution to contemporary understanding of the event and have a stronger presence in students' lives. For this reason, although instructors of literature who teach courses on the Holocaust will find some useful historical material in *The Holocaust: A Reader*, they will find the volume unhelpfully mute about their larger concerns with cultural discourse on the Holocaust.

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2002. 306 pp.

First published by MIT in 1971 and in paperback by University of Michigan in 1978, this seminal work on Russian Formalism was reprinted by Dalkey Archive in 2002. Peter Steiner, University of Pennsylvania, spoke with the surviving editor of the volume, Ladislav Matejka, about the genesis of the book, major figures of the Russian formalist school, and Matejka's current project.

INTERVIEW WITH LADISLAV MATEJKA (conducted by phone and Internet between March 1 and March 11, 2007 by Peter Steiner).

From our ongoing conversation that started in Ann Arbor some three decades ago, I know that your interest in literary theory goes far, far back.

Yes, it is inseparable from my youth in Prague. As a high school student I used to attend Jan Mukařovský's university lectures which, by the way, was quite *de rigueur* among my cohort. And I became acquainted with him personally in the spring of 1936 during the centenary jubilee of Karel Hynek Mácha at which he was the main speaker. I was sixteen then.

And Russian Formalism?

From among the Formalists it was Viktor Shklovsky who inspired me first. I purchased his *On the Theory of Prose* in the Bohumil Mathesius rendition from a Prague second hand book dealer rather cheaply, I recall. This was just after the German invasion of March 15, 1939 and this clever guy was dumping all Russian translations from his stock. Another book important in this respect was the first reader of Russian Formalism, *Theory of Literature*, edited by Mikoláš Bakoš and published in Trnava in 1941. I acquired it after emigrating from Prague to Sweden in 1948, most likely from one of the Swedish or Icelandic students of the Slovak linguist Alexandr Isačenko. It is still somewhere in my library with the inscription "Lunt 1950." Last but not least, I should mention Victor Erlich's *Russian Formalism* (1955) which popularized Formalism in the USA where I had moved by then.

The first version of your anthology, Readings in Russian Poetics, appeared in 1962. What was its impact?

It was definitely noticed. Tzvetan Todorov utilized it in his *Théorie de la littérature* of 1965 which, as you know, was of signal value for the meteoric rise of French Structuralism. In his "Introduction" to the book Todorov
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thanks “le professeur Ladislav Majetka.” And other authors followed my example: Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism* in 1965 and Jurij Striedter’s bi-lingual *Texte der russischen Formalisten* (1969). The belated discovery of Formalist poetics revolutionized the Western literary studies across many fields: from metrics to narratology.

Looking back at the 1962 reader from a contemporary perspective, what stands out in it is the inclusion of Valentin Voloshinov and Mikhail Bakhtin. Erlich’s Russian Formalism does not mention these two seminal figures at all.

I do not see this as Erlich’s foible. Members of the Bakhtin circle, mind you, were critics of Formalism, not its followers.

How did you come across these scholars? True, Voloshinov was known in Prague. Jakobson speaks enthusiastically about his Marxism and Philosophy of Language in a letter to Trubetzkoy of November 7, 1931; both Bogatyrev and Mukařovský quote him on several occasions. But in the early sixties Bakhtin was a rather obscure figure even in the Soviet Union.

I learned about Bakhtin’s book on Dostoevsky from Dmitrij Tschizewskij whose seminar at Harvard I attended. In contrast to some other critics (e.g. René Wellek) I found Bakhtin a formidable thinker who definitely deserved to be included in my reader. Voloshinov’s *Marxism* came from Jakobson’s own library. He lent it to me when I started to work (under his guidance) on my doctoral dissertation, “Reported Speech in Russian.” Jakobson advised me to skip the book’s first part about the sign, but I did not listen to him and I was glad I did not. It initiated my life-long involvement with semiotics. Later when I relocated to Ann Arbor, my colleague the late I. R. Titunik and I translated the entire book into English. Since I am getting the royalty checks regularly it must still be selling. The brave Titunik, I should add, was the one who adamantly refused to yield to the shameful demand by Harvard University Press which when re-publishing *Marxism* in 1986 insisted that Voloshinov’s name be dropped from the title page because the real author is Bakhtin. But do not let me start on this.

The first version of your reader published in Russian through the Michigan University Slavic Department as a xero-graphed brochure was intended for experts. It was the second version that appeared in 1971 through MIT Press which gained a much wider audience and is still republished by Dalkey Archive Press. Why did you take this step?

It was actually Roman Jakobson’s idea. He approached me and suggested that together with his wife, Krystyna Pomorska, we edit and translate a

larger selection of Russian texts on poetics with the subtitle "Formalist and Structuralist Views." He also found the publisher. The choice of texts was primarily mine. Krystyna secured from Jakobson's archives two of his unpublished lectures from the mid-30s which we fused together under the title "The Dominant." Only Vinogradov was cut from the original list but many other theoreticians were added: Brik, Propp, Tomashevsky. The sample, I believe, is representative. The only regret I have is that we did not include Lev Yakubinsky and more of Viktor Shklovsky's writings. These lacunae were made to accommodate Jakobson's wishes. His relationship with Shklovsky was rather complex and I cannot go into it now. Suffice it to say that even Erlich's book, initially written as a dissertation under Jakobson's aegis and for this reason not hospitable to Shklovsky at all, was faulted by Jakobson for exaggerating Shklovsky's role in the history of Formalism. With Yakubinsky the bone of contention, I reckon, was his scholarly orientation. He was the leading linguist of the St. Petersburg OPOYAZ and the first to cast the binary opposition between practical and poetic languages in means-ends terms. Jakobson, the product of the Moscow school of historical linguistics, had very little sympathy for Yakubinsky's robust ahistoricism and always belittled his theories. While Shklovsky's reputation looms high today, if only thanks to his concept of "defamiliarization," Yakubinsky fell, so to speak, through the cracks. His vital contribution to the linguistic underpinnings of Formalist poetics is near-forgotten.

From what I am hearing it seems that Jakobson wanted to have it both ways, to be simultaneously a historical figure and a historian.

He always wanted to have it all ways! Jakobson was the father and the leader of a paradigm-setting critical movement which he perceived as entailing certain responsibilities. Maintaining the discipline was one of them. He was always very generous to those loyal to him but rather nasty toward those he regarded as foes. Controlling the past was another. But Jakobson's persuasive skills, all due respect notwithstanding, enabled him to gloss over the glaring contradictions with which his intellectual heritage is riddled. To mention just a few: He started his career promulgating Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* and wound up rejecting all Saussure's fundamental postulate. The same holds true about his concept of the phoneme, which he initially defined as the minimal linguistic unit and then, in a paradoxical turn, dissolved into yet smaller distinctive features. On a more personal note, when in 1963 I published Trubetzkoy's essays on literature, *Three Philological Studies*, Jakobson strenuously objected to the word "philology" in the title because he regarded this discipline obsolete. Do you remember his: "Linguista sum; linguistici nihil alienum puto"? How does this square with the inscription on his tombstone—RUSSKIJ FILOLOG—chosen by

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he himself. I wonder whether there will ever be a biographer who could bring together all the centrifugal forces contained in the thought of this undoubtedly brilliant scholar.

You are eighty-eighth years old but you are engaged in a yet another major editorial venture.

A few weeks ago the Czech publisher Akropolis brought out the first volume of the correspondence between the two intellectual comedians of inter-War Prague—Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich—that I edited. By the way, Jakobson was a great fan of this duo and his letter to them, “On the Noetics and Semantics of Fun” from 1937 captures his affection quite well. The second volume is planned for this fall and the third for next year. But this might indeed be my last project.

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Rigaud-Drayton, Margaret. *Henri Michaux: Poetry, Painting, and the Universal Sign*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. 183 pp.

Henri Michaux is certainly a complex figure of the 20th century: a multi-talented poet, painter and writer, he was born in Belgium in 1899 but was granted French citizenship in 1955. Often studied as a member of the Surrealist movement, Michaux has also been analyzed through the scopes of existentialism, structuralism and psychoanalysis. Though many critics have noted and pondered over his use of language and the texture of his writings and drawings, in *Henri Michaux: Poetry, Painting, and the Universal Sign*, Rigaud-Drayton argues that prior studies have often been too specialized and have marginalized what she deems the core of Michaux’s life and work: the search of a universal language. Calling in his young years for an “Esperanto,” Michaux spent his lifetime, according to her, trying to reconcile what he viewed as a hybridity of the self with the hybridity of language.

Rigaud-Drayton thus explores the tension between Henri Michaux’s quest for identity and his personal quest for a universal language. Indeed, Rigaud argues that Michaux was perpetually dissatisfied with being confined within the boundaries of a definite country or, most important of all, a definite language. A resisting and conflicted artist, Michaux ambioned to find a language that would not be subordinate to the rules of a particular linguistic system, but would transcend them and become both universal

and intimate. Moreover, whereas many critics considered that Michaux's visual work was merely an escape from writing, a possible parallel experiment, Rigaud-Drayton wants to demonstrate that visual arts are on the contrary deeply embedded in Michaux's artistic quest, and another way for him to explore both hybridity and universality.

To support her thesis, Rigaud-Drayton shows the development and maturation of Michaux's artistic and personal quest. She uses his biography to understand the tensions within his work, emphasizing how he was deeply marked as a child by what he perceived as a double culture—being Belgian and speaking French. Far from being an irreconcilable dichotomy, this fact actually preluded to the impression of chaos that marks Michaux's concepts about existence. Rigaud-Drayton goes beyond the impression of clear-cut differences between a French and a Belgian identity to show how Michaux progressively came to see the world and language as a blend. Traveling through Latin America and the Far East, and seeing gesture as a more essential means of communication than the mastering of a given language, Michaux became all the more aware of a possible universal language, transcending all categories. It was impossible for Michaux to determine a definite expression of the self, even more the authoritative writing self, using more willingly "he" instead of "I." He always viewed the self as a product of his family heritage, his artistic influences, and limited by the rules of a linguistic system that is unable to convey the chaos of human experience. Therefore, his dream of a universal language aims at deconditioning the artist from the burden of linguistic conventions.

This goal can seem actually anachronistic, as Rigaud-Drayton explains, in a time when Saussure and the Société linguistique de Paris state the arbitrary nature of the sign and linguistics. Though, we are reminded, linguists such as Jakobson, Benveniste, Chomsky, and poets like Claudel, Ponge, Laforgue, resisted this thesis. For Rigaud-Drayton, Michaux's approach is actually embedded in the theses of Enlightenment philosophers and more particularly Rousseau who in *Essai sur l'origine des langues* sees poetry as the primitive language, and shared the same interest as Michaux in musicality, study of foreign civilizations, and the criticism of the arbitrary sign.

Rigaud-Drayton thus shows Michaux's artistic attempts at this universal language, for instance through the use of invented words and the combining of various languages (FrenGLISH as an example) on the one hand. But on the other hand, she also emphasizes his desire of overlapping the seeming differences between writing and drawing, endowing the verbal signs with visual qualities and visual expression with discursive aspects. His writings bear the mark of visual expression, through an interest in calligrams, "the ideographical potential of alphabet letters" (146), and also

work, *Misérable miracle*. Although a text, the latter defies legibility and has definite graphic qualities. Painting, far from being a marginal expression and an activity in which Michaux would indulge to divert himself from painting, is really, in Rigaud-Drayton's view, part of the whole project. All forms proceed from his will of searching for an idealized language that could not be read but would be felt instead. Even if Rigaud-Drayton deems that Michaux failed in his venture for an Esperanto, she notes that he did achieve a break from conventions. Michaux created for himself, through the intertwining of visual and verbal signs, a new and truly intimate mode of expression, and a form of universality through his influence of such artists as Bacon, Borges, Paz, Le Clézio or Butor.

Rigaud-Drayton's book is a remarkable endeavour which aims at an exhaustive overview of Michaux's work. Her essay is remarkably documented and a definite contribution to the study of Michaux, though readers not familiar with the writer might at times feel overwhelmed by the detailed and specific allusions to his works. Nonetheless, Rigaud-Drayton manages to give us a grasp of the complex world of an artist that is often disconcerting. The richness of the study lends itself to the discovery or re-discovery of the artist in a truly remarkable and original light.

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Van Cauwelaert, Didier. *One Way: A Novel*. Trans. Mark Polizzotti. New York: Other, 2005. 152 pp.

One Way, Mark Polizzotti's translation of Didier Van Cauwelaert's 1994 novel *Un aller simple*, playfully deconstructs "immigrant" identity in France at a crucial moment in the development of French national identity. Polizzotti's translation was released in the wake of the controversial secularization law (or so called "veil law") enacted in September 2004 and just months before rioting began in French minority communities in late 2005. The original novel was equally timely as it was published shortly after France's Pasqua laws (1993) which limited French nationality for children of immigrants and promoted a zero immigration policy. As France revisits the role of immigrant communities and their position in French national identity, this novel demonstrates the impossibility of fixing one identity to a complex and diverse population by underscoring the fictionality of racial and national identities.

Van Cauwelaert takes his readers on the pursuit of a legend that mixes Published by New Century Press a sad but hopeful Prix Goncourt winning novel. As an

infant Aziz Kamel, the protagonist, was stolen inadvertently by gypsies as the unsuspected cargo in his white French parents' car. Because of his gypsy-given name (derived from the car, an *Ami 6* from which he was stolen), Aziz is raised as the only "Arab" in his community based in the outskirts of Marseille. He is thus a member of an Arab majority (among minorities) in the midst of the Roma community. He is an inside-outsider, so to speak, with a multiplied and fractured background to his search for self. Arrested at his engagement party, Aziz is the only "foreigner" to come through the precinct with papers, even though they are false, and he is subsequently deported to Morocco as part of a new political plan to repatriate illegal immigrants.

Accompanied by a French humanitarian attaché Jean-Pierre Schneider (who incidentally is in an identity crisis of his own), Aziz "returns" to Morocco leading Jean-Pierre on a mythological path home. Having no ties to his actual origins, Aziz creates a legendary past in a remote village in the Atlas Mountains called Irghiz. As Aziz invents his past, he desires to inspire meaning in his attaché's misplaced identity. Jean-Pierre and Aziz trek through the High Atlas with their guide Valerie D'Armeray towards a location that is always slipping away before them. The goal is to never arrive at Irghiz (as it does not exist) but to give the impression of arriving in an attempt to dupe Jean-Pierre. As the trio wanders, the story shifts hands from Aziz to his French counterpart, allowing Jean-Pierre to make the story his own and to then relinquish it. While it seems Aziz has never so much lived his life as he has created a fiction for himself and others, his myth gives meaning to Jean-Pierre's life and simultaneously allows the attaché to find a path of his own through a tangle of displaced identities.

It is particularly appropriate that this work be translated, as the story is one of being translated from one voice to the next and back again. Aziz's story becomes Jean-Pierre's next great idea for a novel, which he documents in his journal, and is ultimately continued by Aziz himself when he returns to France. As the reader is never certain of who is narrating or writing, the story puts into question the problematic of being interpreted by others and recasting one's own position in a national context through that interpretation. Polizzotti makes a definite contribution to the literary world by providing this English translation, yet some of the clarity and feeling is lost in the vocabulary. The rhythms that are clearly defined in Aziz's voice in the French become syncopated in English. Precise translations sometimes come across as awkward, but the reader is always reminded that the awkwardness lies in the underlying tensions that Van Cauwelaert seeks to explore.

The genre tensions in the text further underscore the complexity of "immigrant" identity in France. The characters are not only culturally translated, but they traverse the genres of travelogue, diary, novel, DOI: 10.4148/2334-4415.1663

and legend. While the novel underscores these complexities along with the problematic of return, the English title is printed in brackets, “[One Way]: A novel,” which emphasizes the unidirectional nature of the journey. The subtitle “novel” further obfuscates the intentions of the text to play on genre. These textual ambiguities and seemed contradictions serve to further enrich the text. Van Cauwelaert skillfully deconstructs identity all while demonstrating the necessity and weaknesses of myth. *One Way* ultimately reveals identity to be a compiled fiction and the story one follows to ever slipping locations—a process that is not at all a unilateral move.

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