

Book Reviews

Raoul Granqvist, ed. *Canonization and Teaching of African Literature*. *Matatu* 7, 1990. 190 pp.

Beginning with volume five, the publisher Rodopi (Amsterdam-Atlanta) has issued *Matatu*, a German journal devoted to the study of African literatures. American scholars will welcome the continued appearance of this journal because it will enrich our sources of information and widen the possibilities of intellectual exchange. The journal prints original poetry and reviews of books published primarily in Europe. It accepts articles in French or in English; the abstracts appear in these two languages as well as in German. *Matatu* is indexed in a number of bibliographies.

When one reads a text, there is a natural tendency to assess its significance, quality, and value within the context of works studied either formally in school or informally through independent reading based on what is generally available in a given marketplace of ideas. This corpus of references contains certain "canons," that is works of literature considered by a particular cultural tradition to be the best that it and other cultures have to offer, works that merit imitation because they represent a society's fundamental aspirations, sense of appropriate taste, and overarching values. Even occasional references to such works by definition reinforce the ties that connect those who share a similar cultural heritage. Considering the political, social, artistic and intellectual importance of these "designated" works, and bearing in mind the recent *mise en question* of Occidental canons in the universities throughout the United States, one understands why Raoul Granqvist devotes an entire issue of *Matatu* to the "canonization" of African texts.

Introducing the subject by underscoring the role played by teachers and critics in this process, he stresses that our desire, indeed our need, to refer to canons requires us to classify and discriminate. We accept some literary works while rejecting others, and this activity can never be accomplished in an objective fashion. Following Granqvist's meditation on the implications of the very act of selection, Richard K. Priebe's article ("The Canonization of Texts: The Childhood and Allegories of Salvage and Change") points to a number of thorny issues inherent in African literatures that interfere with any process of canonization. For example, African literatures (we are speaking here of written texts in European languages) began to appear only some thirty years ago. If this period has witnessed the publication of many works, it remains historically a very brief span, perhaps too brief for enduring creations to have risen above the others. Moreover, the most widely known writers have actually been published in Europe, and thus, to a certain extent, they have been "discovered" and their works placed in the canon by outsiders. After offering these general observations, Priebe considers two specific novels: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Camara Laye's *Dark Child*. He contends that these

books appeal to European taste because of their exoticism or nostalgia, qualities not particularly appreciated by Africans who generally do not dwell upon the past and who do not idealize their childhood. Priebe correctly observes that Occidental criticism "canonized the most intelligible texts [to European sensitivities], not always the most meaningful" (18). He thus pleads for a larger and more comprehensive understanding of the African experience on the part of the Western public.

According to Rhonda Gobham ("Problems of Gender and History in the Teaching of *Things Fall Apart*"), when teachers and critics assign Achebe's novel to the canon, they often fail to appreciate the historical circumstances that helped shape Achebe's choice of theme and development of plot and they appear to forget that a writer might have had motivations very different from their own. They thereby accept his novel as "some truly objective, unbiased version of traditional life" (27), whereas Achebe concentrated primarily on what masculinity meant for his character Okonkwo. Because Achebe's fictional re-creation of the past offers his own point of view, because "the values we discover in his texts will be most likely our own" (39), we must be attentive to the author's intentions.

Exploring another aspect of canonization, Bernth Lindfors ("The Teaching of African Literatures in Anglophone African Universities: An Instructive Canon") provides a quantitative dimension to the question of which books and authors are most frequently read by devising a "Better Ultimate Rating Plan" that takes into account a number of variables, including the "number of books assigned, [the] number of courses prescribing these books, [the] number of institutions offering these courses, and [the] number of nations housing institutions offering courses that prescribe these books" (46). In doing so, he acknowledges that problems exist in defining and interpreting these categories. For example: most of the universities surveyed are in Nigeria, most poetry read appears in anthologies, most available books are published in Europe by one publishing house, and so on. Despite these difficulties, his data do clearly indicate that Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are the most widely read authors in the anglophone African universities. As a result, budding young writers will most likely imitate or find inspiration in them, at least in the short run. But as Lindfors also notes, the content of canons is hardly immutable; as African literatures mature, surely future treasures will appear.

Anthony A. Appiah ("New Literatures, New Theory") insists that today's canons do not represent a truly "African" choice because the intellectual formation of most African teachers and critics reflects Western standards and influences. Those who attempt to be African in their literary taste have failed, be they "nativists" who claim that genuine African independence requires a literature that is truly unique, "universalists" who promote a literature accessible across cultures, or "particularists" who prefer a literature aimed at local populations. He bemoans the hegemony of

the European literary taste, perhaps forgetting that there is nothing intrinsically wrong in Westerners choosing their own canons of African literatures. After all, the French consider Edgar Allan Poe, John Steinbeck and John Dos Passos to be among the finest American writers, a view that many teachers and critics in this country do not currently share. Indeed, Appiah rejects all the above mentioned attempts at establishing canons because, for him, the study of African literatures should first and foremost combat racism in the United States, and, in Africa, challenge the assumptions about the superiority of Western culture.

Two articles explore the use of African literatures in American and English universities. Thomas A. Hale ("African Literature, Humanities, and Humans: Teaching to Two Audiences in the Era of Bennett and Bloom") discusses the pruning process by which the teacher decides which books should be assigned in humanities courses, an especially nettlesome problem in a century that has witnessed an explosion of literary works. Evidently seeing the need for an increased study of African literatures if we wish to "globalize the notion of humanities to include literatures by any people" (95), he poses two basic questions without answering them: 1) which regions, or which authors should be represented, and 2) how should we fairly and accurately introduce students to works from cultures very different from our own. Elizabeth Gunner ("African Literature and the Canons: the Case of the United Kingdom") reminds us that "canons are necessarily related to the cultural base of the country in which they are formed" (101), and that canons of African literatures developed in England may not be those preferred by other countries. She recognizes the importance of canons in English pedagogy, and she observes that once a canon "is created it feeds on itself" (104), becoming next to impossible to alter in a fundamental way. Ultimately, she makes us understand that Lindfors might be overly optimistic about the prospects for developing canons whose essential contents would be amenable to relatively swift revision.

All these articles concentrate primarily on anglophone African literatures, but their findings apply as well to francophone and lusophone literatures. In any case, this special issue encourages us to ponder once again the very nature of canons, the role that ideologies play in their formation, the impact of canons on the development of various literatures, and the ethical responsibilities of teachers and critics whose literary choices are never inconsequential.

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Margolis, Joseph. *Texts Without Referents: Reconciling Science and Narrative* Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 372 pp.

This is the third book of a trilogy about knowledge in the natural and human sciences. The author is a some-time analytic philosopher who has become vertiginously open to "continental" ideas, and who is at the same time trying to come home to American pragmatism. The first book, *Pragmatism without Foundations: Reconciling Realism and Relativism* (1986), defended the rather startling claim that we can have scientific realism only if we admit the relativity of scientific theories to cultures. It undercut the assumption that knowledge of the natural world is accessible only in proportion as culture is transcendable. The second book, *Science without Unity: Reconciling the Human and the Natural Sciences*, threw various monkey wrenches into the old project of unifying the natural and human sciences by "reducing" the former to the latter. The problems of the present work cluster around issues closer to the interests to humanistic scholars. How are the intentions purposes and intensions (meanings) that constitute the cultural world, and are expressed in texts, related to the physical and biological world in which they are, as Margolis puts it, necessarily "incarnated?"

Margolis' claims in *Texts without Referents* can scarcely be understood except on the basis of points made in *Pragmatism Without Foundations*. Margolis' pragmatism harks back to Charles Sanders Peirce, who insisted that the knowledge produced by scientific inquiry helps us understand more clearly what knowledge actually is. Evolutionary theory is an example. Any acceptable view of knowing, Margolis writes, "must now presuppose . . . that our cognitive powers and our theories of those powers must be judged to be sufficiently grounded in reality for our sustained adherence to them not . . . to entail the extinction of the species" (PWF 202).

Unlike Peirce, however, who defines truth as what would be agreed to by inquirers at the hypothetical and eschatological end of inquiry, Margolis recognizes that what counts as knowledge is wholly embedded within the historical, ideological and cultural context in which it arises and in which its fate is worked out. This admission is prejudicial to scientific realism only if you assume that the cultural world is ontologically more fragile than the natural world, and that cultural discourse is epistemologically more vapid than natural scientific inquiry. Margolis insists, however, that there are no grounds for assuming that "the sheer proliferating reality of human life" and of its expressions—speech, history, consciousness, intentionality, culture, action, purpose, meaning, significance, practices, projects, communication, interpretation—are not actual or real, or that they obscure some reality behind them (TWR xiii). When we rid ourselves of this prejudice we see that it is inconceivable that we are *not* in contact with the real world, or that we are not learning and knowing about it *all the time*.

In *Texts Without Referents* Margolis uses ideas like these to unmask

eliminationism, according to which all this intentional stuff does not even exist (even if we still talk about it that way in "folk psychology"), and reductionism, the assertion that cultural phenomena are functions of processes picked up only by more basic sciences. Both of these trade on prejudice against the reality of the cultural. This is not, however, a failing reserved for scientific sorts alone. Margolis detects a "certain madcap tendency" in the humanities which leads to the same sort of wrong-headedness (25). He refers to ideas about the ineffability of subjectivity (Levinas) or the disseminative infinity of texts (Derrida). Margolis acknowledges that deconstructive techniques are useful ways of inducing reflection. To keep textualism from degenerating into idealism, however, he prescribes what he calls "naturalism." By this he means that culture is inscribed within the biological world rather than reducible to a bare-bones physical world. The intersubjective network of intentionality, textuality and symbolic interaction that permeate the cultural life-world is a form of natural life, a social ecology (TWR 350). A socially-constituted self subject to "incarnational" imperatives of this sort is "a technological self," whose peculiar biological aptitude is to make a niche suitable for itself by way of tools, including language (TWR 38). Since symbolic interaction, and so knowledge, is relative to the purposes of beings so-defined, the godlike "cognitive privilege" that philosophers have quested for is rendered impotent. It would do us no good even if we had it.

Margolis brings this perspective to bear on several philosophical issues of interest to literary scholars. One is the problem of reference to fictional entities. The "madcap tendency" has been to allow fictional and textual "worlds" to exist in their own "worlds." That violates Margolis' "incarnation" assumption. Although he allows us to refer to Holmes "in the story," the story does not, on that score, constitute a "world" of its own. For, given Margolis' "naturalism," as you interpret the story you are entitled to put your "realism" wherever it seems best. Sherlock Holmes "in the story," for example, might be placed in the context of nineteenth-century London. "Texts without referents" (finally, a sense of the title) ultimately connect with beings-in-the-world—through interpretation.

If on this view literature contains a good deal of truth, Margolis' analysis of another puzzle shows that history *cannot* be a pack of lies told about the dead. He says that the indefinite openness of interpretation allows the past itself, and not just our view of it, to change with reinterpretation. All that is required to acknowledge this without giddiness is to recognize that as redescription goes by, nothing can be subtracted from it. The record constitutes, in the most literal sense, a history—and a historical world.

The book presupposes acquaintance with the many philosophers on which it comments, is thickly written and very badly printed, but worth the effort.

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Keitel, Evelyne. *Reading Psychosis, Readers, Texts and Psychoanalysis*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989. 160 pp.

The wordplay in the title of Evelyne Keitel's new book *Reading Psychosis* already suggests the central question of her study: How can a reader read psychosis and how can reading become or imitate psychosis? If psychosis is characterized by a blurring of ego boundaries, an extreme form of identity crisis, how can this phenomenon be transmitted through a literary text? There is no intersubjective knowledge about psychosis, which is to say that the psychotic experience lies beyond verbal expression. Psychotic sensations, however, have been described as an alternation between pleasure and horror or as a state highly charged with anxiety.

To analyze the possibilities of reading psychosis is therefore to examine the reader's emotional response. In other words, how can we conceptualize why a reader puts down a book after fifteen pages because it becomes too overwhelming? What role do the subject matter, psychosis, and the narrative strategies employed in the text play?

Keitel ventures to establish the new genre of psychopathography, a genre that includes texts as different as Freud's case histories and popular literature, but that nevertheless produce similar aesthetic reader responses. Keitel searches for textual strategies that prestructure this response. Unlike pathography, a genre focusing on the impact of the author's psyche on his/her work, psychopathography is characterized by the interaction between text and reader. In order to establish psychopathography as a genre, Keitel, who worked with Wolfgang Iser, uses the framework of reader response theory (Rezeptionsästhetik) supplemented by various psychoanalytic theories. As opposed to Iser's interest in the reader's cognitive response to the text, Keitel insists on the importance of the emotional response.

Much of the transparency and clarity of Keitel's book derives from her systematic approach to the subject and her background chapter which allows the reader to locate her in the density of contemporary literary criticism. She finds for example that many psychoanalytic approaches to literature are unsatisfactory in their attempt to interpret. Such a criticism often speaks of the desire to enshroud the literary text in the context of a psychoanalytic case history, sometimes backed up with autobiographical notes from the author's life. This method not only ignores the reader or the reading process but also focuses mostly on the content of the text, not on its structure or the interplay between content and structure.

To describe psychopathography as a genre, the author delivers extensive textual analysis for the different types contained in the genre: Maria Erlenberger's *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn* (The Hunger for Madness) for the literary type, Sigmund Freud's case history *Wolf Man* for the theoretical type and Hannah Green's *I Never Promised You a Rosegarden* for the popular type. Additionally, Doris Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* is chosen to demonstrate an example of how a text can prestructure the reader's emotional response, a response imitating psychosis. Although

these texts are fundamentally different in their narrative strategies, they provoke similar emotional responses for the reader: an oscillation between pleasure and horror, a feeling of liberation and of being trapped in the text at the same time.

Unlike counter-cultural texts that also imitate traditional narrative structures, like feminist texts, psychopathographies do not produce a stabilizing effect on the reader, but are disruptive and disturbing however never *only* unpleasant.

Keitel uses Anton Ehrenzweig's notion of creativity (the rhythmic oscillation between de-differentiation and re-differentiation) to conceptualize the reader's response to psychopathography, as sensations of contraction and expansion. Ehrenzweig overcomes the nineteenth-century myth of equating genius with madness by suggesting that the creative artist is able to control the oscillation between conscious thought and unconscious polyphonous processes by means of his/her strong ego. The psychotic however, is unable to do this and experiences the shifting between conscious and unconscious as anxiety-laden and uncontrollable. In Keitel's theory psychopathography invites the reader to use his/her own perceptive creativity to simulate the arhythmic oscillation between pleasure and horror, between conscious thought and loss of control that characterizes psychosis. Thus, the reading of psychopathography allows for an experience through text that remains impossible to make in real life (except for the psychotic).

Unlike other reader response critics like Jonathan Culler (*The Competent Reader*) or Norman Holland (*5 Readers Reading*), Keitel does not aim to classify a certain reader but establishes criteria that influence the interaction between a genre of texts and the reader. She names three criteria that are crucial for the understanding of psychopathography: the virtual dimension of the text, in which the reader is invited to fantasize about psychosis since there is no established knowledge about it; secondly, the narrative strategies that steer these fantasies and emotional responses; and finally, the reader's literary competence.

Evelyne Keitel's book reintroduces the neglected reader back into literary criticism in its stimulating connection of a much developed reader response theory with different psychoanalytic approaches. It defines a new genre that includes theoretical writing and popular literature.

Keitel's own versatility in the terrain of literary criticism (reader response, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism and feminist theory) informs this very innovative and creative approach which will undoubtedly stimulate much discussion. Her approach represents a challenging blend of contemporary German and Anglo-American criticism.

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Shaviri, Steven. *Passion and Excess: Blanchot, Bataille, and Literary Theory*. Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1990. 193 pp.

This remarkable book not only marks an event. Because its ambitions are also performative, there is a distinct sense in which *Passion and Excess* aims to be an event. Taking inspiration from the Nietzschean project set forth by Michel Foucault in his 1970 inaugural lecture at the College de France, Shaviri describes his own approach to the writings of Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot as an attempt to question the will to truth at work in the languages of criticism. Significantly, Shaviri seeks to do this by restoring to discourse "its character as event; to abolish the sovereignty of the signifier" (9). The product of this ambition is tempered by what Jeffrey Mehlman refers to aptly in a quip on the book's dust jacket as the strange joy of Shaviri's ventriloquization. As a result, *Passion and Excess* should be read less as a conventional study of texts by Bataille and Blanchot than as an attempt to trace the implications for theorists of literature and writing of what these texts show or perform beyond whatever they say. Shaviri asserts this approach when he remarks that what is important is "not the totality of what [the writings] actually or potentially say but the new directions they open up, the places they help me get to, the things they can be made to say" (179-80).

As much an *auto-critique* as an attempt to engage two difficult bodies of writing, *Passion and Excess* inscribes extended passages of exposition within an overriding reflection on the inadequacy of language to account in full for the immediacy of events and, in particular, the event of writing. As Shaviri puts it near the start, "we can only speak *out of context*" (3). In this sense, it is evident that Shaviri wants not only to explore the various bindings between Bataille's writings and those of Nietzsche and the Foucault of the "Discourse on Language," but also to show the implications of these bindings on his own project. When, for example, Shaviri writes that a peculiar effect of Bataille's work is that it offers "no satisfying conclusions, no points of repose" (37), he implies that his remarks should likewise be understood as inconclusive and open to supplement. The critical line tread throughout *Passion and Excess*, narrow and demanding, imposes the imperative in the title of Shaviri's introductory chapter (echoing David Byrne and the Talking Heads) to "stop making sense." At the same time, the critic is left to transform this imperative into a meaningful event.

Self-consciousness concerning method does not keep Shaviri from providing numerous insights and syntheses. Three chapters on Bataille followed by two on Blanchot traverse writings by the two with an inquiry into the theoretical consequences of the interplay between limit and excess. In the case of Bataille, Shaviri argues that the mid-1930s journal, *Acéphale*, was an attempt to extend the limits of the political by means of a transgressive gesture responding to the breakdown of bourgeois property relations. Reading Bataille's interwar writings through or alongside those of Karl Marx and Étienne Balibar, Shaviri supplements (transgresses?) Bataille

when he describes the major problem of radical politics as that of liberating a potential for catastrophe that might transform crisis into a revolutionary situation (50). But having asserted this revolutionary ambition, Shaviri later concludes that it contains only the *potential* for catastrophe and that a pure acephalic condition of unlimited expenditure could be neither achieved nor sustained (104).

Elsewhere Shaviri invokes Nietzsche when he refers to the reactive forces whose synthesis occurs in interwar versions of fascism with which Marxist analysis could not contend in full. Shaviri's conclusion is on the mark: "It is on this psychological and 'superstructural' level that Bataille is able to explain what traditional Marxist theory could not: the appeal of fascism in advanced capitalist society, and the failure (increasingly evident in the 1930s) of the revolutionary alternative" (57). In sum, Shaviri's Bataille is essentially found in the interwar writings on politics and on expenditure. In the terms of the former, Bataille's vision is seen as anarchic and as equally at odds with decomposed forms of fascism, capitalism, and socialism. What this vision asserts is the perpetual revolution at work in a bi- or poly-cephalic society, a revolution that allows for an ongoing and explosive outlet for the fundamental antagonisms of life. In terms of the latter, expenditure is neither revolutionary nor reactionary. It only becomes so in capitalist social formations when it is appropriated in the name of a working class that threatens the existence of masters who purport to rule: "Class struggle, abolishing the privileges of class, is the form in which expenditure, or *acephalic existence*, becomes available to all" (60).

Is the ongoing and explosive outlet referred to above possible? Or is it instead what Jean-Michel Besnier has called a politics of the impossible [*une politique de l'impossible*] that can be sustained only intermittently and in short duration? Shaviri's exposition is convincing and provocative, but there are moments when his Bataille resembles the apocalyptic pronouncements in Antonin Artaud's *Le Théâtre et son double*. To put this another way, Shaviri's sets Bataille's interwar views on politics and expenditure alongside a vision that is close to metaphysical. For those who privilege the autonomy of politics, the transgressive nature of such proximity is fully in line with the impossible provocation Bataille sought to sustain throughout the 1929 to 1939 period from *Documents* to *Acéphale* and the Collège de Sociologie.

Where Bataille's writings explore the pure force of negation represented by an impossible acephalic existence that can be thought and not—not yet?—sustained, Blanchot's narratives are seen as presenting the impossibility of confronting the ambiguity and blindness of one's passions. The key narrative here must be *Death Sentence* (*L'Arrêt de mort*), aptly described by Shaviri as a "forced recollection of something that cannot be remembered" (111). Among Blanchot's essays and *réécits* (with the possible exception of *Thomas l'obscur*), *Death Sentence* is exemplary because it recounts the resistance to writing that projects it as an indefinite operation. In the postwar essays collected in *La Part du feu* and *The Space of Literature*

(*L'espace littéraire*), Blanchot set forth the scope and history of this resistance as a measure of literary modernity in the writings of Mallarmé, Kafka, and Rilke. In *Death Sentence*, this exploration is performed or staged in the narrator's recognition that writing cannot redeem or compensate for the irreversibility of the past. What Shaviri sees happening in *Death Sentence* asserts the affect and experience at work in a sense of writing as an imperative—compulsory rather than even compulsive—from which there is no release.

What motivates writing in place of redemption is a strangeness that equates the force of communication with something on the order of contamination. When Shaviri asserts that Blanchot's *révélés* focus on moments of unbearable contact, the contact in question connotes disease and mortality alongside an intimate proximity that inverts the conventions of Western (Cartesian) models of understanding in which conscious reason dominates. The death of the Other is overwhelming not only because "I" am unable to share it except as removed, but also because my experience of this inability makes it impossible for me to equate the advent of the Other with my thought of him or her. Borrowing a key used from Emmanuel Levinas, Shaviri writes that the intrusion of the Other marks the finitude of human understanding in a recognition that dying can never be an intentional object of consciousness.

The assorted conclusions in "Without an End" suggest strongly that any attempt to apply the readings in *Passion and Excess* be tempered by the openness and supplement invoked at the start via Nietzsche and Foucault. The strong implication here is that critical discourse—including Shaviri's—is not to be applied uncritically to texts whose heterogeneity (Bataille) and strangeness (Blanchot) it should only seek to assert. *Passion and Excess* can only conclude in multiple endings that resist reductive understanding as a myth of stable closure. That Shaviri succeeds in showing as well as stating this point authorizes his own position all the more. Among supplements yet to be examined in depth, it is unfortunate that Shaviri should not have mentioned the confessional dimensions of Blanchot's recent writing as they relate to his political journalism of the 1930s. Since Shaviri addresses this very issue in "Complicity and Forgetting," *MLN*, 105 (1990, pp. 819-32), one is left to wonder whether this displacement of the political is intentional or inadvertent.

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Kellner, Douglas. *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989. 246 pp.

Douglas Kellner's introduction to Baudrillard no doubt comes at the right moment: lionized by the artistic community in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Baudrillard seems to offer a way to conceptualize contemporary media culture. Further, he apparently offers a

culturally subversive position, reminiscent of the avant-garde's contestations of past years, that is particularly appealing to the visual arts community at a time when not only society as a whole, but continental philosophy in particular (Derrida, Lyotard, etc.) seems caught in a kind of post-historical quietude.

Kellner will have none of it. For him, Baudrillard is an interesting test-case, but hardly a *maître-à-penser* to be embraced. His book, then, has two purposes: first, to acquaint the reader with the entire span of Baudrillard's thought, from the late 1960s to the present; second, to critique Baudrillard's various positions and avatars from an academic Marxist perspective. Kellner succeeds admirably, at least in carrying out the first part of his project; the reader will find in his book a decade-by-decade, book-by-book summation and analysis of Baudrillard's work. This is extremely useful, especially when Kellner cites little known articles in obscure journals. The result is that for the first time one can gain an overview of Baudrillard's entire *oeuvre*, one can see its undeniable limitations, and how those limitations have carried over from one "phase" to the next. The second aspect of the project is more contentious and, in my opinion at least, somewhat less successful. Kellner would like to prove to all the visual-arts trendy types and denizens of SoHo that their hero is neither subversive nor politically progressive—in fact, from Kellner's perspective, Baudrillard in his recent work is nihilistic and passive, an "aristocratically" minded pessimist who at times even lapses into racist and sexist blather.

Kellner's Marxist critique has its limitations. It is most effective when Kellner analyzes Baudrillard's early work—there he notes the weakness of the theoretical edifice, even in works dating from a period when their author considered himself a Marxist. Baudrillard would replace a critique of production with one of consumption—the consumer, in effect, is enthralled to, and reified by, the signs he must "purchase"; the consumption of signs to which all of one's life is devoted leads to nothing more than the establishment of oneself in a differential social hierarchy (preferably higher rather than lower). This all seems very Sartrean, of course (the Sartre who writes against "seriality" in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*), and it is fascinating to see here the early stages of "postmodernism" developing out of the declining phase of existentialism. Kellner quite rightly criticizes Baudrillard on two counts: first, that Baudrillard never properly defines and differentiates the tyrannical "code" to which and in which consumers are bound; second, that he ignores the possibility of revolt in consumption, the "détournement" of consumer goods to purposes different from, and subversive to, the aims envisaged by their creators. This latter point seems particularly important: Kellner stresses that Baudrillard analyzes consumption "solely from the standpoint of the capitalist class, by describing only how [it] serves to integrate individuals into the consumer society so that they may serve the interests of class domination." He thereby fails to recognize that consumption can be directed *against* "capital-valorization,"

and toward "self-valorization" (the terms come from Antonio Negri); one can, so to speak, consume subversively. Kellner writes: "Consumption—or any activity—can be directed toward self-valorization if the subject realizes his or her goals or receives self-gratification from the process and if the activity undermines capital realization rather than contributing to it" (29).

Kellner holds this up as a major criticism of Baudrillard; the latter cannot imagine how one could do anything other than consume passively, in a single way—one thinks of Baudrillard's consumers as being as tied to their mode of consumption as Red Guards were to their mode of reading the Little Red Book. Yet the irony here is that Kellner's alternative—consumption that is "self-valorization," that does not, in other words, lead outside itself—is virtually indistinguishable from Georges Bataille's notion of "expenditure without return." This is ironic because Kellner delights in using Bataille as a whipping boy, claiming that Bataille is nothing more than a "Nietzschean aristocrat," and that Baudrillard's championing of Bataille (in, for example, his theory of "seduction") is proof positive of the former's dangerous rightist slant (42-45, and just about everywhere else in the book). Kellner perhaps does not himself realize the extent to which his own attempts (via de Certeau and Negri) to soften up Marxism, by giving it a "human face," (perhaps inevitably) lead to a betrayal of it, through a flirtation with so-called Nietzschean aristocratism. But then again all this emphasis on "aristocracy" is Kellner's, not Bataille's or Baudrillard's, and it should not be accepted at face value—certainly Bataille himself did not see his work as "aristocratic." Rather he envisaged it primarily as a critique of fascism and aristocratism, one that would overcome the weaknesses of a dogmatic and productionist/utilitarian Marxism. In this way we might see Baudrillard's affirmation of Bataille as an attempt at revising his earlier version of consumption, by recognizing that there are indeed other ways of consuming than merely buying and consuming the signs of the capitalists—as they intend them to be appropriated. (But then again capitalists are perfectly happy when their products are used in subversive ways, against their "intended" purpose—after all, their goal is making money, making sales, and not dictating to the consumer how he or she should consume. Can we speak of a capitalist's or producer's "intention" any more coherently than we speak of an author's "intention"?)

The later Baudrillard, then—the author of *Forget Foucault* and *America*, among other works—is a hard nut to crack. Kellner still saw some value in the early Baudrillard—his theory, with appropriate modifications, could still be welded to a Kellnerian Marxism—but the later Baudrillard is not even a sociologist! Or a theorist! The seriousness of this charge, of course, depends on whether or not we agree that "sociology" and "revolutionary theory" (37) still have a heroic, major role to play. If we do, if we can agree that these genres somehow are privileged in their (re)presentation of the world, then we can see the later Baudrillard as little more than a charlatan. But if we conclude, along with Baudrillard, that they are more or less dead,

then other genres may still appear to retain some greater ability to communicate, if only as vehicles of dystopia: the "pamphlet" (a distinctly French genre which entails political vituperation; one often thinks of Céline's more regrettable and curmudgeonly writings when reading Baudrillard); the collection of aphorisms or fragments (Chamfort, F. Schlegel, Nietzsche); the political/social satire or parody (Orwell, 1984, perhaps Kafka, *The Trial*). Kellner holds it against Baudrillard that he no longer puts forward the possibility of Marxist liberation; that he values the inert object over the active and responsible subject; and that he wallows in an end of history that can allow no revolt against a world of media images and simulation. These are perhaps valid criticisms if one sees "revolutionary theory" and its promises as the end all and be all of the text; if, however, one envisages the definitive decline of the "divine left," with all its claims to scientific authority and intellectual-moral satisfaction, then Baudrillard's curious "strategies" can be understood as vehicles of investigation and polemic.

No doubt Kellner is right when he takes exception to the extravagance of some of Baudrillard's claims—that the "masses" no longer exist, that reality is an effect of television, etc. Baudrillard's polemics are not scholarly or well reasoned, but are thrown like stink bombs against the conventional wisdom embraced by other thinkers. But there are, I think, three important points on which Baudrillard should be taken seriously. If he is granted these points, much of his polemic will make more sense, even if its formulation remains objectionable. If however we refuse even to consider these basic points, we, like Kellner, will be forced to see the later Baudrillard as little more than a reactionary crank. The loss in that case will be ours.

First, there is the theme of the collapse of the left and right. Kellner as a Marxist necessarily refuses to go along with Baudrillard in his argument that the left no longer poses, or has ever posed, a serious threat to capitalism—that it is, instead, a kind of drug whose use occasionally creates a short-lived, artificial paradise of political enthusiasm. I think Baudrillard's remarks should be seen in the context of the French Communist and Socialist Parties. They are not directed primarily against the possibility of constructive social change (on the part of, say, reformist left-wing parties), but against the eschatological, teleological (and theological) discourse of "revolution" embraced by Communists and (French) Socialists (the latter at least immediately before and after 1980). His polemic, then, is directed largely against other French intellectuals, and against a current intellectual style—this, in fact, is the case with all of Baudrillard's later writing: it does not purport to represent "reality," but to counter the hegemony of one intellectual position by means of another (hence his abrasive polemics against Sartrean "subjectivity," against the centrality that Foucault attributes to "power," etc.). In this case, then, Baudrillard criticizes the belief, after all these years, that a "revolution" will somehow appear, which will constitute a definitive turn of history, and which will definitively

change social relations forever. On the contrary, he argues, the left for a long time has been an integral part of capitalism, and its pretensions otherwise are sheer nonsense. Baudrillard's position, to me at least, seems eminently reasonable. In question is not the possibility of "making things better," but instead the belief that a radical change can reveal a new, improved and definitive reality just beneath the surface of things, a reality in which contradictions can be resolved, meanings can be definitively established, desire can be recognized, and satisfaction can once and for all be found.

Along with this point goes a second, which Kellner treats as the most asinine phantasm ever proffered by a modish French intellectual: America is a realized utopia. After all, isn't there poverty in America? Racism? Reagan? Bush? To be sure, and Baudrillard never denies it. But that is not the point: the point is that "liberation," and its attendant eschatological culture, is an absurdity, a *non-sens*. The European guardians of "culture" strive toward liberation, revolution, and it always remains on the infinitely receding horizon. Eventually the light at the end of the tunnel of "revolution" will be turned off. The Americans on the other hand have been liberated (in a different way) from the start: realized utopia is precisely the death of that eschatology. Paradise is the ability to drive to the local mall and buy a pair of sunglasses. Nothing more and nothing less. Sound absurd? To a European (or Europeanized) intellectual, it most certainly does. But Baudrillard's point is that liberation (such as it is) now has become thinkable *only in these terms*. It is immanent, not transcendent. It is immediate and not theoretical. It entails repetition and the simulacrum, not the originary experience or the definitive event. Even the communists in the Soviet Union can think only of a liberation in terms of brand name consumer goods—Sony Trinitrons, Levis, and MacDonalds. Many may fight staunchly and valiantly against American capitalism, but their conception of liberation is still fully American: "prosperity," "consumer goods." No other "liberation" is now thinkable, except to Europeans caught in an anachronistic belief in a religious deliverance. No actual revolutionaries in any case still believe in this revolution, certainly not in Vietnam or Albania or Rumania. As Baudrillard puts it in *America*, the Vietnamese won the war on the ground for territory, but the Americans won the war in the media—even by depicting their own defeat (in *Apocalypse Now*). If Marxists object to this thesis by arguing that in it Baudrillard betrays a blatant lack of a theory of community or social cohesion, Baudrillard can respond with the obvious observation that, while Marxism may dream of a community (again, always a utopia on the horizon), the social situations that it has actually produced have been perfect models of violent disintegration (the purges, the liquidation of entire social classes, the cultural revolutions, etc.), not unification. Baudrillard confronts us with a perhaps uninspiring model of liberation—his own attitude toward contemporary America wavers between the caustic and the celebratory—and then, through this gesture, flings the question in our faces: "Can you come up with a better model of liberation, of utopia?" The implied answer is obviously "no."

The third point is that "seduction" is to be valorized over (eschatological) "revolution." Baudrillard's antidote to America is not some liberalized Marxism (an oxymoron?), but rather an affirmation of a Batailleian "dépense," expenditure. As I indicated earlier, Kellner himself agrees with Baudrillard on this, without realizing it. A truly contestatory consumption is of the moment, immanent, and is inseparable from a "self-valorization." It does not entail guarding, revealing, hoarding, anticipating, promising, or theorizing.

If we are willing to see some validity in these three points made by Baudrillard, we will come to recognize the pertinence of his recent work. We may not like the style of its invective—American academics prefer a more reasoned tone, even in the face of the evaporation of signs—but we must recognize the astuteness of its most fundamental theses (the collapse of left and right, the immanence of utopia, seduction rather than teleological liberation). Baudrillard certainly needs, and deserves, a more open-minded recounting than is provided here by Kellner, who relishes above all the persona of the censorious uncle recounting a dirty joke he does not quite understand.

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Pecora, Vincent P. *Self & Form in Modern Narrative*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989. 298 pp.

Speaking of Nietzsche's attempt at transcendence in his *Genealogy of Morals*, Vincent Pecora comments: "It is a self-conscious undoing of the independent, bourgeois self as conscious intentionality that reappears in various forms throughout modernist narrative and that is both its strength and its Achilles heel" (242). This is one of the formulations of the thesis embodied in *Self & Form in Modern Narrative*, a very remarkable and closely argued study of the paralysis of modernist fiction. Professor Pecora's study is grounded in an elaborate, complex (and often difficult) theoretical section comprising the first part of the book; and this argument is illustrated by three very different texts, all of them written around the turn of the century: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, James' *The Turn of the Screw*, and Joyce's "The Dead." Thus the work can be seen as an elaborate socio-literary critique of the dilemma and the contradictions inherent in three outstanding works of fiction originating from the final years of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth centuries.

The reader of *Self & Form* is tacitly expected to be interested in and familiar with ideological criticism, particularly with Lukács, Bakhtin and the Frankfurt School: the problem that Pecora is concerned with is the situation of the moment when the bourgeoisie suffers a loss of confidence. "What I would like to argue," writes Pecora, "is that modernist narrative, contrary to many claims that it has forsaken its mimetic function to withdraw into some world of pure fictionality or textuality, has in fact lost

the requisite confidence in its fictional powers, its ability to give ironic, narrative expression to the self that is its (necessarily fallen) locus and organizing principle. To put it simply, the modern novel has broken faith with the only home the novel has ever known, and it has paid a high price for its transgression" (17). The home of the novel is the discourse of the self in its rapport with society and with the interiority of the self. Consequently, Pecora traces a path from Lukács' theory and critique of the novel through Bakhtin's dialogical analysis; and he moves from there to Benjamin's analysis of the "storyteller" to various complex and occasionally baffling pronouncements of Adorno, and finally to Fredric Jameson's "political unconscious." The most difficult of these sections is the application of Marx's "surplus values" to the realm of literature. Here is an example of the intricacy of the argument:

By the end of the nineteenth century, the true surplus of value lay not only in the accumulated capital of the industrial trusts and imperial cartels; it also resided in the hollow, adaptable, yet assertively "genuine" subjectivity of bourgeois consciousness, a subjectivity for which its cherished integrity was both the sign of its social worth and the treachery of its reified identity. (77)

This argument leads necessarily to a lengthy chapter on the "failure of irony" in the novel at the end of the century (one assumes that the end of the century is the crucial moment, in Pecora's view, since Flaubert is only briefly discussed).

Having set up such a large and intricate theoretical framework for his study, Pecora then proceeds to examine *Heart of Darkness*, saying that "the interplay of self and form in Conrad's work is structured by [various] duplicities" (123): he is referring, on the one hand, to the duplicities of colonialism described by Conrad, as well as the narrative encapsulations and hesitations that the reader encounters in "listening" to Marlowe's yarn. In other words, we are asked to become conscious of the entire machinery of "voices" (an important term in Conrad's short novel): Marlowe's, Kurtz's, and Conrad's own. In James' *The Turn of the Screw*, Pecora sidesteps the age-old controversy between the supporters of the "neurosis" hypothesis concerning the governess and its opponents; nor does he (as we might expect) show a great deal of interest in the interpretations that are based on notions of Good and Evil (theoretical or otherwise); instead, he concentrates, once more, on the narrative convolutions: with a good deal of help from James' *Notebooks*—and emphasizes the "static, trapped quality of James' narrator" (212). Perhaps the richest of the three examples is the final story of *Dubliners*, in which the notion of paralysis, evident in the other stories in that volume, comes to a head, and is treated by Joyce with an irony that allows no sentimentality (in contrast to certain other readings of "The Dead," I find Pecora very convincing here). There are, by the way, a number of stimulating observations in this chapter concerning *Ulysses* and *Finnegans*

Wake, for example: "There may be many identifiable verbal styles in *Finnegans Wake*, but there are no voices that could be defined even in the Bakhtinian terms of dialogic intentionality and point of view—the 'text' has made 'voice' a concept that is somehow still depended upon, but one that is wholly insufficient to its descriptive task" (240).

The entire book, its conception as well as its accomplishment, is remarkable. It invites a reading alongside of Lukács, Bakhtin, Benjamin, Adorno, and Jameson for the intersection of ideology and narrative. Precisely because the book is so challenging, the reader is tempted to speculate whether the answers would have been significantly different if Pecora had chosen to use Gide or Lawrence or Mann (mentioned only in passing) or—more pertinently—Proust, to whom a not altogether accurate reference is made on p. 32, to articulate his notions about the exhaustion of self and form during the period that interests him. (And where might Musil be in that particular discussion?) In any event, it is sufficient to say that Pecora's major objective, "to refocus the question of modernist narrative, to formulate it along lines that would bring to light the relationship—too often obscured by its fascination with technique and its linguistic turn—between the internal breakdown of self as formal principle and the external rationalization of self as social mechanism" (260), has been masterfully achieved.

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Jordan, Barry. *Writers and Politics in Franco's Spain*. Routledge: London and New York, 1990. 213 pp.

This book examines the origins and development of what has come to be known as the "novela social" or social-realistic novel (also labeled "novela testimonial" and "novela objetivista"), a trend that reached its peak of critical and popular acclaim in Spain during the late 1950s. It is the best treatment so far of this topic: Jordan's views on the period's cultural and political climate are at once sensible and acute. In support of these views he brings to bear an impressive amount of information, garnered from a wide array of sources. His assessment of the theoretical background available to the young "social" novelists is cogent and clear-headed as well.

Like nature, literary historians abhor a vacuum. Thus historians of the twentieth-century Spanish novel have struggled to bridge the gap left by the Civil War in the development of contemporary Peninsular fiction, particularly insofar as Social Realism is concerned. Trying to locate novels of the 1950s along a nicely satisfying curve that would rise undisturbed since the 1930s, critics such as Nora, Gil Casado, Sanz Villanueva, Soldevila Durante, have sought in the pre-war years early models for the testimonial fiction of the 1950s. In this scenario, the revolutionary writers of the 1930s (Arconada, Sender, Arderius, Díaz Fernández, and others) become a link that joins the socially concerned novelists of the Franco years to the hallowed tradition of Spanish "realism." Here, of course, we meet with another received notion

in need of revision: that is whether, in fact, realism is the characteristic mode of Peninsular fiction (or literature) in general.

In the first chapter of his book, Jordan questions the arguments that retroactively locate the ancestry of the testimonial of the 1950s' fiction in the pre-Civil War years. Leaving aside the fact that, as Jordan reminds us, such teleological reconstructions are methodologically unsound, all evidence shows that the writers of the 1950s had no knowledge of the earlier, committed fiction of Sender, Díaz Fernández, and others. Jordan also rejects the notion that "tremendismo"—with its frequently sardonic emphasis on the most unpleasant and brutal realities of existence—may have represented an earlier avatar of realistic fiction, noting that the context, style and intent of the "tremendista" novel were different from those of social realism. The bleak view of human nature predominantly offered by "tremendismo" is not the same as the dehumanizing social context that we find in *El Jarama*, for instance, or *Central eléctrica*. In fact, that negative view of human nature was part of official doctrine in the Franco years and is constitutive of right wing politics.

According to Jordan, a few earlier novels did feature the lower classes: *La noria* (Louis Romero), *Las últimas horas* (José Suárez Carreño), *La colmena* (Camilo José Cela). These works could be considered transitional with respect to social realism, were it not for the fact that younger writers did not acknowledge the first two and that the last, actually written in 1945, belongs properly to "tremendismo." Jordan sees no actual stimulus from *La colmena* in the early works of Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Jesús Fernández Santos, Juan Goytisolo, or any of the other socially committed writers of the 1950s and 60s. For Jordan, the fiction that formed the nucleus of what we consider today "Realismo Social" developed under the impact of Sartrean engagement, Italian neo-realism, and the political realities of the 1950s, these are phenomena that he sets out to elucidate.

One of the book's great strengths is its understanding of the "novela social" as a process with evolving centers of gravity. There were in fact various attempts to construct a committed novel according to political possibilities, the writer's perception of his relationship to his audience, the form of rebellion from bourgeois tradition that the individual writer chose to underline (the majority of the trend's practitioners were the disillusioned children of the bourgeoisie).

Once he has identified process as the developmental characteristic of the social novel, Jordan analyzes the oppositional movements or platforms that sustained its political commitments. The economic stagnation and repressive climate of the 1950s generated an opposition within the very classes that had supported Franco's rebellion. While many prominent "falangistas" (such as Sánchez Mazas, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio's father) were thoroughly disenchanted with the regime, officially sanctioned and falangist-supported organizations (Sindicato Español Universitario, for instance) and publications (for example, the Barcelona journal *Laye*) offered possible outlets for cautiously worded social criticism. A number

of committed writers belonged to S.E.U. (it was an obligatory organization for university students) and published in *Laye*. The traditional bourgeois family, with its strict, obscurantist catholic atmosphere, also provide fertile soil for youthful disaffection. Both *Laye* and *Revista española* (Madrid) offered early outlets for the socially oriented fiction of such writers as Ignacio Aldecoa, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Jesús López Pacheco, Jesús Fernández Santos, and others. Jordan's reading of these reviews shows the formation of compact groups of writers who would try to promote the development of committed fiction.

At the theoretical level the tendencies of the trend evolved according to the impetus of Sartrean *engagement*, mainly through José María Castellet, at the time Sartre's principal Spanish interpreter of the moment. Formally, the stylistic emphases and social vision of Italian neo-realism, and of the American novel (United States) exerted noticeable influence. In the latter instance, two phenomena are of particular interest: the first is that, although a number of American writers (Hemingway, Dos Passos) were seen as enemies of the state because of their professed or implicit sympathy with the Republican cause, their titles were translated and published in Spain in the 1940s, along with those of the realists Sinclair Lewis, Faulkner, and Steinbeck. The second is not the hard-boiled, impersonal genre favored by such writers as Dashiell Hammett, Erskine Caldwell, and Hemingway as well, was acquiring new impetus in France through Claude Edmonde Magny's widely read *L'Age du roman américain*. As Mme Magny analyzed them, among the most attractive features of these novels for Castellet and Juan Goytisolo—who introduced the book to the Spanish intellectual scene—were their attention to external detail and the objective technique that increased the reader's role. As for Italian neo-realism, its impact was exerted principally through film. The documentary-style presentation and grainy objectivism of Zavattini's, Rosellini's and De Sica's movies, their attention to quotidian events, suggested a direction for writers who wanted their prose to be transparent to reality as they saw it.

For Jordan the committed novel evolved in response to a series of attempts to incorporate variously perceived requirements or structures. Thus he finds it useful to address Goytisolo's and Aldecoa's early efforts: Goytisolo's *Juegos de manos* and *Duelo en el Paraiso* represent an early fictionalization of Sartrean *engagement*. Esthetically the effort fails because commitment remains an intellectual attitude assumed by unconvincing protagonists, rather than a necessary "prise de conscience." Only later, as he moves toward Marxism and adopts more objective modes of presentation, does his attack on bourgeois mores become truly effective. The inclusion of Aldecoa is somewhat more difficult to justify. For one thing Aldecoa disagreed with the movement since he did not think that literature should be used for political ends. Yet, as Jordan points out, Aldecoa was part of the *Revista española* group; he was interested in the lower classes and planned to do a trilogy on the Civil Guard, gypsies and bullfighters. Later, under the impact of Sánchez Ferlosio's *El Jarama*, he left the trilogy

incomplete—abandoning his project on bullfighters—and moved toward the more objective, testimonial realism of *Gran sol*. For Jordan Ignacio Aldecoa and Juan Goytisolo illustrate the dynamic, contradictory development of the “novela social.”

The most important event in the development of the “novela social” was undoubtedly the appearance of *El Jarama* (1956) with the Nadal publishing house. Its great success established the commercial viability of the trend. The novel offered formal guidelines and was a stylistic model for objective realism. It also legitimized class consciousness and proletarian concerns as topics for fiction. The novel produced a bandwagon effect, helping to generate institutional platforms such as prizes and colloquia. Jordan sees *Los bravos* (1954), by Jesús Fernández Santos, as the other paradigmatic novel, though one that was only included into the trend after the success of *El Jarama*.

With *El Jarama* and *Los Bravos*, the committed novel becomes a broadly definable socio-literary reality that exerts a discernible influence and produces a degree of literary hegemony. As the 1950s come to an end, and in the early 60s, the trend was reinflated toward an explicit critique of the bourgeoisie and politicized references. In retrospect the distanced, reportorial style of *Los bravos* and *El Jarama* seems more in line with Sartre’s notions of *engagement* and of the function of literature than do the later, openly critical works.

In sum, Barry Jordan’s *Writers and Politics in Franco’s Spain* is the best book to date on the Spanish committed novel of the 1950s. It examines the trend as a literary, social, political, and publishing phenomenon. It gives a suggestive analysis of the form’s theoretical and structural characteristics and provides, at the same time, a vivid picture of Spain’s intellectual climate during the first Franco decades. I do have some small quarrel with the book’s title which leads one to expect a wider ranging study than is offered. In particular one hoped to find some mention of parallel developments in poetry. What is needed now is precisely the same type of careful study of “poesia social,” an area where, in spite of the laudable efforts of García de la Concha and others, much serious work remains to be done. I would consider Jordan’s book a most useful model for such a study.

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Motard-Noar, Martine. *Les Fictions d'Hélène Cixous. Une autre langue de femme*. Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1991. 206 pp.

Les Fictions d'Hélène Cixous is the third critical monograph dedicated to the works of Hélène Cixous to appear in either French or English. Motard-Noar’s project is more comprehensive and ambitious than either Verena Andermatt Conley’s largely theoretical study, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) or Claudine Guénan Fisher’s deconstructive one, *La Cosmogonie d'Hélène Cixous* (Amsterdam:

Rodopi. 1988). Through a study of more than twenty of Cixous' novels and fictions from *Le Prénom de Dieu* (1967) through *Jours de l'an 1990*), the critic attempts to see the existential unity of Cixous' fictional work as well the evolution of Cixous' thought and style over more than two decades. The monograph is divided into six parts framed by an introduction and a conclusion. It contains a comprehensive bibliography and an Index of selected terms.

According to Motard-Noar, Cixous' work is based on an autonomous poetic imagination, which, while deeply influenced by the movements of her time, cannot be reduced to either a feminist or a deconstructionist ideology. Cixous belongs to a group of women writers, critics and theorists who were born before World War II and started to publish around 1968. Their common concern was the patriarchal structures of society, and Cixous' early fictions are largely attacks on the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan and their notion of female hysteria. In her later works Cixous will move away from the personal exploration of a narrative "I" towards a more global feminism. In an attempt to reach out to the Third World in general and Third World Women in particular she becomes a staunch attacker of exploitative Western ideologies.

In Chapter I, Motard-Noar discusses Cixous' critique of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and her attempt to develop a specifically feminine writing ("écriture féminine") as a response to the limitations imposed on the creative imagination by masculine psychoanalytic discourse. Since this new "feminine writing" is based on verbal excess and a regained confidence in the closeness between the self and the outside world, it finds itself in clear opposition to Robbe-Grillet's theory of a "new novel" based on detached distance and minute observation of objects.

Chapters II and III deal with feminine and masculine figures that appear in Cixous' fiction. The numerous goddess figures drawn from Greek, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Biblical, Germanic, and American mythologies are most frequently seen in relationship to the narrator and serve to deepen the image of women in Cixous' fiction, while the male figures are often authoritarian father symbols or symbols of male impotence.

Chapter IV is a study of textual deconstruction. According to Motard-Noar, Cixous' language breaks through the linguistic economy of traditional male writing and explodes into a multiplicity of meanings, which in turn may be read in many different ways.

In Chapter V, Motard-Noar discusses the problem of literary intertextuality and points out that Cixous' fictional works are not only constantly engaged in dialogue with other texts and other languages, but are self-reflexive as well, unrelentingly engaged in questioning the act of writing and its significance.

Finally, in Chapter VI the critic points out the value of transience in Cixous' thought and writing, and the novelists empathy with all life struggling to survive against the forces of death, from the Jewish and Cambodian victims of holocausts, to Clarice Lispector under the Brazilian

dictatorship, to the female voice in a patriarchal world. Motard-Noar shows that the quest for this female voice, the Mother Tongue, is central to Cixous' fiction and becomes the vehicle of the author's utopian vision. It alone ("Elle seule") has the capacity to bury the past under new constructions.

Les Fictions d'Hélène Cixous. Une autre langue de femme is a welcome addition to the critical books and articles already published on Cixous. While Motard-Noar discusses competently Cixous' already well-known relationship to Freud, Lacan, Derrida and Lispector, the most valuable part of her monograph is the study of the fictions themselves. Her discussion of goddess figures in Cixous' work is particularly interesting.

While *Les Fictions d'Hélène Cixous* undoubtedly contains valuable new insights, it is by no means a definitive study of Cixous' fictional works. On the contrary, it will most likely serve as a point of departure for further research, hopefully leading to new dissertations and monographs focusing on particular fictions or groups of fictions. Motard-Noar's own writing is for the most part clear, though not free of jargon. As a result her book will probably be of interest mainly to scholars who are already familiar with Cixous' complex texts. Whether a book will or can ever be written that will make this great French novelist more accessible to a larger readership remains an open question.

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Alexandrov, Vladimir E. *Nabokov's Otherworld*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 270 pp.

Attempts to commune with the spirit of the departed Nabokov have become especially strenuous now that he has entered the literary afterlife reserved for famous authors. There is, in fact, considerable disagreement at present over the nature of the legacy he left to those who proclaim familiarity with him. In an interesting and not unpredictable turn of events, it is largely his English-language readers who celebrate the playful intellectual ironies of the "metaliterary" Nabokov while his Russian-reading devotees are fascinated by the cryptic signs and symbols of a "metaphysical" Nabokov. Partly this dispute reflects the professional differences between Slavists, intent upon repatriating the "unRussian" Nabokov back into his native literature's traditional quest for a higher realism, and English critical theorists, determined to enroll the "literary gamesman" as a precocious deconstructionist and destabilizer of fixed signifiers. But the dispute also emanates from the double-dealing, unsettlingly ambiguous sentences and compositional patterns that Vladimir Nabokov literally left behind when he finished his writing.

Vladimir Alexandrov enters the current controversy as the articulate champion of Nabokov's "metaphysical aesthetics." His book, appropriately entitled *Nabokov's Otherworld*, offers a necessary corrective to readings of Nabokov that intentionally restrict his texts to a self-enclosed

world of artifices, a true zoo of words. Yet Professor Alexandrov is so avid in pursuit of his noble mission that he runs the risk of overcompensating for the errors of the "metaliterary" heretics. Inspired by the encouragement of Nabokov's widow, who flatly declared in 1979 that the "otherworld" *potustoronnost* was Nabokov's "main theme," Alexandrov does not hesitate to make a Dostoevskian leap of faith, detecting an "occult script" hidden within the consciously patterned fates inscribed in the autobiography and novels. Yet, given the clear evidence of Nabokov's exclusive phrasing and evasive plotting, it is no easy feat to give priority of place to the "metaphysical" Nabokov. Fully acknowledging the risks, Alexandrov nonetheless proceeds to make Nabokov into a visionary artist after all, a latter-day neo-Platonist in the afterglow of Russian Symbolism. It is an interesting (and not wholly arbitrary) attempt to lay to rest the mischievous ghost of Nabokov.

In order to prosecute the case for an ontological stability undergirding Nabokov's many invented worlds, Alexandrov must allude frequently to the "macrotext" or total verbal universe created by the author. In practice, this requires a near fusion of similar consciousnesses and "thematic paradigms" found throughout the fiction and, even more crucially, a heavy reliance on "contextual proofs of intent" drawn from selected oracular pronouncements. With refreshing frankness we are told that "the only way out of the charmed circles of Nabokov's fictions is to recognize the virtual identity of the character's otherworldly intuitions with those in Nabokov's nonfictional writings, where they are not similarly undermined" (6). It thus follows that Alexandrov's quest for fundamental articles of belief gives special prominence to two rather confessional lectures—"Inspiration" (1972) and the posthumously published "The Art of Literature and Commonsense." In them, testimony is found that appears to justify a confidence in Nabokov's conviction that his own artistic awareness was mysteriously attuned to a perfectly designed "otherworld." Even so, what Alexandrov means by Nabokov's metaphysic—"faith in the apparent [sic] existence of a transcendent, non-material, timeless, and beneficent ordering and ordered realm of being that seems to provide for personal immortality"—is radically qualified by a collateral belief in "the irreducible alterity of this other realm from the vantage point of mortal experience" (5). In sum, Alexandrov's summary of Nabokov's creed reveals the paradoxical features of an agnostic Gnostic for whom the imagination's active perception of hidden designs and harmonies *may be* analogues for a veritable otherworld. Whereas Professor Alexandrov prefers to read Nabokov's elegantly patterned networks of linked motifs as "camouflage for, and a model of, the metaphysical" (18), it is more than likely that, within the empirical limits of human perception, artful linkages are all the metaphysics we shall ever know. The metaliterary level is finally no less "otherworldly" than the metaphysical. Both terms point to the thrilling sense of extradimensionality that Nabokov's art offers its open-eyed, imaginative readers.

Despite its occasional excesses, many advantages accrue from Alexandrov's pursuit of the "metaphysical aesthetic" in Nabokov's writings. For one thing, he is able to draw a persuasive analogy between Nabokov's autobiographical account of "timeless" experiences and the novelist's encoding of decipherable passages which permit the reader to intuit an atemporal pattern in the flux of phenomena. As narrated, the texture of Nabokov's recollected life and the texts of his characters' lives acquire the appearance of a "fatidic web." Alexandrov's study of the "macrotext" also makes possible a stimulating alignment of the idiosyncratic consciousnesses at the dramatic center of Nabokov's major novels. Like fellow travelers of the novelist himself, all the fictional selves are immersed in a material world that seems to be both patterned and insubstantial or transparent; in other words, nature and artifice appear to be synonyms in the phenomenology of experience. This sense of the world approximates the shadowy shape of Platonic Idealism, and it is apt that Alexandrov reads the chessmaster of *The Defense* and the absurdly caged hero of *Invitation to a Beheading* as modern instances of "Gnostic heroes." Both are, as it were, differently sighted in a mundane world that constricts them, self-divided between worldly attractions and otherworldly distractions. In a more dubious conflation of identities, Alexandrov reads the poet-hero of *The Gift* and the half-brother biographer of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* as "first cousins." Although both live in the "aura" of a departed precious soul, there is a vast difference between literal ghost-seeing and summoning the "knowledge-amplified love" to make a present moment "radiant" with traces of the past. To Alexandrov's way of seeing, all of Nabokov's hidden patterns and authorial intrusions stand in as allegorical devices to suggest that the occult hand of the "otherworld" is truly shaping the destinies of mortally imperceptive men. Yet those of Nabokov's characters who are most sure of the design fate has sent them are also his figures of folly. Nonetheless, Alexandrov's larger commitment to a "metaphysical" Nabokov requires him to decipher a stable transcendental ontology at work in the plotting of each narrative. To that end, *Nabokov's Otherworld* reduces a series of most uncommon subjectivities to one too-common denominator. Clearly, there must be room for some discriminations and doubts.

Nabokov's own consciousness, in *Speak, Memory*, knowingly transcends but does not escape time by constructing recalled images of "timeless" moments and repeated patterns. This poetic gift of "cosmic synchronization" makes good use of peripheral details and mnemonic associations to apprehend surprising connections among phenomena that are not contiguous in empirical space or time. The result of this mode of perception resembles religious or Romantic "epiphanies" in which an extrasensory universal harmony is revealed. But a resemblance is a semblance of absolute identity, a verisimilitude rather than a verity. Nabokov's autobiographical techniques for suspending time's flight and inferring hidden designs are, indeed, transferred to his fictional plots and procedures. Alexandrov's book shrewdly and rightly notes Nabokov's characteristic practice of filling his

fictions with epiphanic *structures*—with networks of concealed details, the connections among which emerge suddenly” (30). This narrative strategy may tempt some readers to rival Nabokov’s characters as they seek to intuit the thematic design that secretly shapes the intricate web of recorded experience. But those protagonists closest to the autobiographer understand that fixing one’s place in the world is a continuous act of orientation requiring visual acuity and “creative memory” in the conscious construction of coordinates that intimate some higher order of perception. The genuine “first cousins” of the biographical Nabokov (young Fyodor of *The Gift* and old Shade of *Pale Fire*) revel in the inspired *madness*, not the divine madness, of the “richly rhymed” private universe they can dimly descry and intermittently inhabit.

Nabokov’s *Otherworld* removes the pathos and potency from the artist’s world-attached yet time-denying imagination, giving it access to a secure metaphysic rather than to the uncertain but plausible designs by which art transports mortal minds above and beyond the literal moment. Yet the book ends with a concluding postscript that situates Nabokov in a new and complicating context. Making effective use of an intimate knowledge of the Russian “Silver Age” at the turn of the century, Professor Alexandrov skillfully locates Nabokov’s anti-Darwinian notion of a non-utilitarian, ornamental world of nature, exemplified in the mimicry and metamorphosis of butterflies, that was shared by the mystical cosmologist, P.D. Ouspensky, and the theorist of “theatricality,” Nikolai Evreinov. The “naturalism” of artifice was part of the Petersburg atmosphere. So, too, was the raging conflict between a “metaphysical” and a secular aesthetic of patterned perceptions. Professor Alexandrov, whose first book was on “symbolic cognition” in Andrei Bely, forcefully demonstrates the young Nabokov’s gravitation toward the themes and techniques of the Russian Symbolist writers. But, to his credit, he also indicates Nabokov’s frequent and specific allusions to Nikolai Gumilev, the gifted and outspoken leader of the “Acmeist” poets, who favored a clear-eyed focus on the world’s lovely, distracting realia that transcended mundane awareness without certainly signifying transcendent truths. There is much more to be said, one hopes, in defence of a central insight that is oddly obscured by the prevailing thesis of *Nabokov’s Otherworld*. Nabokov’s art, Alexandrov cogently suggests, constitutes “a unique fusion” of Symbolism’s belief in signs of a dual reality and Acmeism’s worldly celebration of sensual detail and accurate sight, giving the lie to “the superficial conception of them as simply and inevitably antithetical” (215). That description allows for the highly individual, problematic, and paradoxical vision of Vladimir Nabokov, the agnostic Gnostic. As the overvoice of the novel, *Transparent Things*, says when Nabokov’s characters and readers are about to slip into the illusion they have reliably seen *through* surfaces: “Easy does it, son.”

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