

Michael Issacharoff. *Discourse as Performance*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989. vii + 161 pp.

In *Discourse as Performance*, a revision and translation of his *Le Spectacle du discours* (1987), Michael Issacharoff studies the specificity of theatrical language (in the broad sense of signifying matter). Using mainly a corpus of over one hundred French, British, and American works from the nineteenth and twentieth century, focusing on the text of the play (the locus of inscription of its virtual performance) because of its status as the one constant element in what we call theater, combining theoretical speculation and synthesis with critical interpretation and analysis (eight of thirteen chapters are devoted to the discussion of individual plays), and adopting a semiotic point of view, Issacharoff examines dramatic speech ("dialogue" as well as didascalia or stage directions and notations identifying utterer and place of utterance), theatrical space and its interaction with onstage speeches (in particular, the constraints it imposes on them in non-comic drama), and theatrical language which undermines these constraints and frees itself from them.

More specifically, after defining dramatic language as the distinctive theatrical use of verbal utterances and nonverbal elements such as gesture, facial expression, costume and decor, Issacharoff dedicates the first part of his book to the exploration of the nature and context of onstage speech acts (an exploration enriched by a study of Ionesco's *Les Chaises*), the discussion of different classes of didascalia and their functions, and the investigation of theatrical intertextuality and its dynamics (with Eugène Labiche's *Traversin et Couverture* and Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* as prime examples). In the second part of the book, Issacharoff distinguishes between mimetic space, which is represented onstage and seen by the audience, and diegetic space, which is described through dialogue and has a merely verbal existence. He scrutinizes their mode of operation and gives his examination an empirical basis by analyzing the dialectic of the visible and the invisible in Satre's *Huis-Clos*, the role and functioning of sequestration and reference in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, the way in which spatial configuration governs and underlines the thematic dimensions of Jean Tardieu's *La Cité sans sommeil*. In the third and final part, Issacharoff pursues his characterization of theater's specificity by concentrating on those transgressions of spatial and referential conventions that occur in comic and experimental plays. He chooses Labiche's *Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie* to study the subversion of reference in a referentially unstable theatrical world; he shows how the hierarchical arrangement of codes governs the semiotic mechanisms of theater and isolates the distinctive semiotic features of comedy through an analysis of Jarry's *Ubu roi* and Ionesco's *Jacques ou la soumission*; he demonstrates the

fundamental role that *elimination* (of elements such as dialogue, movement, or character) and *juxtaposition* (of elements that are incompatible or incongruous) play in avant-garde drama; and he brings out the affinities of the latter with comic theater.

Discourse as Performance does much more than my summary can convey. It not only succeeds in capturing much of the essence of theatrical language; it also, for example, sheds light on some of the differences between the “oral,” vocal, and visual intertextuality peculiar to theater (one that has been studied very little) and the written (more purely “literary”) kind; it isolates the characteristics of farce; and it illuminates the functioning of the individual plays it examines (in particular, it shows that—with a play like *Les Séquestrés d’Altona*—Sartre, far from being indifferent to theatrical innovation, displays considerable originality).

Of course, one might disagree with a few of Issacharoff’s propositions or developments. For instance, I am not sure that, in order to be the addressee of a message, one must be allowed to respond to it through the channel it borrowed (9). I do not think that the dramatic script is essentially more “stereophonic” than other forms of literary discourse (17): if it is true that the dramatist’s voice is heard in the didascalia, it is also true that the latter are not necessary to a dramatic script (there are or can be plays with one character only and s/he—or the place of her/his utterance—does not need to be identified); besides, isn’t a novelist’s voice, say, heard at least in the title of the novel? I also do not believe that mimetic space is necessarily static (68). Finally, I would have wanted Issacharoff to discuss the possible role of smell (or touch, or taste!) in space onstage.

But this is carping. *Discourse as Performance* is both a splendidly enlightening text about modern drama and an outstanding contribution to the semiotics of theater.

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Thomas M. Kavanagh, ed. *The Limits of Theory* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989. 254 pp.

The idea for the collection of the eight essays published together here grew out of a series of lectures organized by Thomas M. Kavanagh (University of Michigan) at the University of Colorado at Boulder, during 1985 and 1986. According to the latter, the common idea shared by the authors of the essays is “that there is a limit beyond which the drive to theory becomes something quite different from what it presents itself as being.”

In his Introduction, Kavanagh outlines the background against which the theoretical project had developed, from the concerns of structuralism to the post-structuralist reactions. The plural spelling of "reactions" is not an accident but, instead, it is a reflection of one principal characteristic of post-structuralism: the explicit rejection of theories pretending to universality. From such a situation arises the fact that since each theoretical enterprise gains recognition owing to acquiescence to its discourse, this discourse is often pushed to its limits by those whose desire it is to find a resolutely different scheme. The essays gathered here, each written by renowned theoreticians, help understand the limits of theory by pointing at some of its characteristics.

Michel Serres' "Panoptical Theory" considers the sight of theory, how it works, what it does and to what needs it responds. The notion of sight is developed by making use of Greek mythology where Panoptes, the all-seeing god, is defeated by Hermes the messenger god who puts all his eyes to sleep by playing his flute. Hermes' victory marks the superiority of the message to that of what is to be seen, because when there is something to be seen there is a presence which is recognized. As is the case of the melodious air which forces the lucid viewer to sleep, our hearing encloses us, we cannot find the melody but we cannot avoid its presence, whether our eyes are closed or open. The abundance of sounds from the ones who insist on the extreme aspect of their theoretical musings and who, at the same time, base their theories on sites whose visibility remains fuzzy at best, thus defeats those who attempt to detect things behind the text.

Vincent Descombes' "Quandries of the Referent" examines the claim that the referential function of language is an "illusion." The passage from the object to the referent as the focus of discussion may not have as significant a progress as its advocates indicated. The notion of referent, became muddled owing to the multiple meanings assigned to it by theoreticians. By using the apologue of the cloakroom, where one exchanges one's garment for a ticket, Descombes draws our attention to the fact that the ticket may become a sign for the garment but also a symbol, thus denying that certain items may serve as symbols while others may serve as signs. Distorted notions of the sign have been introduced by theoreticians who needed these in order to maintain their allegiance to theoretical models whose establishing lemmas lacked clarity.

The representations that theory attempts are, undoubtedly those of the real but, according to Clément Rosset's "Reality and the Untheorizable," the real resists its absorption within the representative systems elaborated to figure it. It is easy to imagine that no image of the real may give us more than the real itself, nor can it give us a more easily understandable image. Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* is used by Rosset to show that, after a while, there exists no difference between total indetermination and total determina-

tion; that the drunk Consul's aimless wandering may also be seen as a clearly focused advance towards a goal not seen through an untraced path. Absolute stochasticity of the real thus becomes as unlikely as its absolute universal design. Such a view of the real as forever singular and individual—called “idiotic” by Rosset—calls to a rejection of philosophy's plan to replace reality with verbal constructs and the resulting control of the real through our domination of these constructs.

François Roustang's essay “On Reading Again” establishes a series of principles he feels must govern every act of reading. The first principle is that one must reread until the text can be broken into its basic components. The second principle is that a text has been respected when we have taken its totality into account (even though this feat remains unattainable most of the time, it may nevertheless be seen as a regulating principle). The third can be expressed as follows: rereading involves a certain violence on the part of both the text and reader (owing primarily to the author's duty to misguide the reader). The fourth principle is that the reading must reach the “point of horror” before understanding the text's source (the reader must go through the anguish and sufferings in which the author found the strength to create). The final principle is that a text's construction appears most clearly when the reader has managed to pass from the point of horror to the point of laughter (going from the anguish of creation to the joy of seeing its end result). These principles, once followed, make reading and rereading a cathartic process miming in reverse that of creation.

Roy Roussel's essay “The Gesture of Criticism,” considers two texts, Paul de Man's *The Resistance to Theory*, and Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*. For de Man, the resistance that frustrates the critical project comes from the persistence of the desire that first drew the critic to the work. For Barthes, love makes us experience desire but does not allow us to know it or name it. The lover (for Barthes) wants to understand, but rejects any understanding that is resolved at the level of theory. These two poles are the ones that the critic attempts to reconcile when the latter claims to express both the absolute personal and the absolute transcendence of the personal.

Josué Harari's essay “Nostalgia and Critical Theory” uses the example of Lévi Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (and particularly the last part of the work) to examine how theory is unconsciously elaborated. Lévi Strauss's “The Apotheosis of Augustus,” which he claims to have written in a kind of trance (which lasted for six days), may be seen as a mapping of the process. Augustus, who represents order, is to be made a god, while Cinna, who has gone on to live in the wilderness, represents disorder. According to Harari, it is not the eagle who is the true messenger of the gods but, instead, Cinna. Lévi Strauss has constructed a model that is necessary to his own theoretical endeavor.

Kavanagh's own "Film Theory and the Two Imaginaries" examines the dual relation to the imaginary involved in any attempt at film theory. The semiology of film began as a theory of the text but evolved into a theory of the film not as text but as system. Film viewing is rooted in the unconscious imaginary of the viewer—as spectator. For the theorist, the pleasure of film theory is not rooted in a spectator's unconscious imaginary but, instead, in a kind of schizophrenia (a search for a master whose theory will sanction the theorist's own discourse; the model of Lacan's reading Freud is actively used). These two choices, the narcissistic surrender to spectatorial imaginary and the quest for identity with a Master, are equally dismal. The alternative resides in the critic's commitment to prolonging the scope and resonance of the question posed by the film itself.

René Girard's concluding essay, "Theory and Its Terrors," lashes ("with a grain of salt"—adds Girard) at some of the recent developments in the growing influence of literary theory in the teaching of literature. In his presentation of the growth and development of literary theory, Girard addresses topics ranging from the origins and groundings of theory to its effects among professors vying for tenure and from the parallels between the way deconstructionism functions to the incompatibilities between the demands of an academic career and those of a meaningful intellectual life.

These essays, each in its own perspective consider the current hegemony of theory within literary studies. The emergence of theory in the early 1970s was hailed as a new and more clearheaded way of approaching literary works. Instead of considering language as a reflection of something else, language was considered as self-sustaining. The promise of clarity and rectitude was seen as evident since theory could not (in the minds of its staunchest promoters) hide its own rhetorical underlyings. The development of theory during the 1970s led to the superseding of its opposition. But, to the surprise of those same defenders, theory came to occupy a situation very similar to that of the monoliths it had successfully overwhelmed. In addition, the animosities and oppositions which developed between practitioners of theory, as well as the entrenchment of members of certain subgroups within the general domain of theory, have led to comparisons between the present state of theory and the state of things before theory ascertained its own rights. There are excesses committed in the name of theory as there are flawed claims made based on less-than-straightforward reasoning. There are limits to what theory can achieve and these limits are not always clearly understood. As the essays in the collection underline, some concepts cannot simply be left aside by serious theorists and others must be kept in mind when serious theoretical investigations are launched.

Those of us who are familiar with the upheaval created by the axiomatization movement of the sixties in the field of mathematics (as illustrated by

the publications of N. Bourbaki—an alias used by mathematicians associated with the axiomatization movement) will undoubtedly be stricken by a sense of *déjà-vu* when they consider the upheaval of theory and the present situation in the humanities. It was not possible to completely reform the field of mathematics, but the axiomatization movement allowed for worthwhile endeavors. It is likely that the theoretical enterprise, once it is cleared of its least attractive appendages, will also allow for a renewal of its energies and a possible fulfillment of its own promises. But this state of things will not happen until the warnings mentioned in the essays found here are heeded.

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Wendy B. Faris. *Labyrinths of Language: Symbolic Landscape and Narrative Design in Modern Fiction*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1988. 242 pp.

In this insightful study, Wendy Faris is simultaneously Theseus, Daedalus and Ariadne. As Theseus, she makes her way through a complicated subject, with a long history and a developed scholarship. As Daedalus, she shapes her material with skill and perspective. And as Ariadne, she successfully guides readers through a complex topic. The project is a vast one: to trace the role of labyrinths in literature and culture from the Middle Ages forward, with particular emphasis on how and why the labyrinth has become so prevalent in twentieth-century literature. There are individual chapters on Joyce, Butor, Robbe-Grillet and Borges, but her exploration also includes Gide, Durrell, Nin, Camus, Cortázar, Donoso, and Eco, as well as Derrida, gender roles, detective novels and labyrinth cartoons (which constitute a genre of their own).

If the nineteenth-century novel saw itself as Stendhal's mirror carried along a roadside, modernism and post-modernism have found in the labyrinth their preferred image of writing, reading and thinking. Labyrinth symbolism has a long tradition. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, it represented human beings' fallen state, with God's grace as Ariadne's thread, leading us to salvation. In the Enlightenment the labyrinth continued to represent the human condition, with stress on the need to find direction in a world without grace. Indeed, the polyvalence of the labyrinth seems to have made it infinitely adaptable to different contexts. A nexus of contradictions, it unites order and confusion; reason and passion; reassuring boundaries and terrifying imprisonment. It may be experienced as Theseus does—in time, as he wends his way diachronically through it. Or it may be known as Daedalus does, from

above, as a whole pattern. It can be lived in time or in space, but the space-time distinction is often blurred, as in contemporary physics, and this may be one reason why the image of the labyrinth appeals to a post-Einsteinian world. The path through a labyrinth is akin to the trajectory through an unfamiliar city, as Joyce, Butor, Robbe-Grillet and Borges have all demonstrated in their protagonists' initiatory journeys through cityscapes. Above all, the labyrinth has come to be an image of the very process of writing and reading. In our century, the labyrinth has been transformed from a myth to a narrative structure: "in addition to encountering the labyrinths *in* the texts, we confront the labyrinths *of* the texts. . . . The labyrinths of the novels match the labyrinths in the novels" (10–11).

Faris sees Joyce's *Ulysses* as the pivotal work where the labyrinth changes from a symbolic motif to a structural component of fiction. The image of Dublin-as-labyrinth is accompanied and mirrored by a labyrinth of words. Readers of Joyce begin as Thesean explorers, trying to decipher the pattern of words; gradually, we become Daedalian co-creators, designing our own progress through the text. This transformation of the reader from Theseus to Daedalus is surely one of the most significant developments of twentieth-century fiction. We are obliged to thread our way through texts where many paths are possible and where there are also dead ends; reading requires constant choices, interpretations, and anxieties. The Minotaur to be slain is "the labyrinth's resistance to yield a meaning" (80).

In Borges' works, labyrinths represent the world, the passage of time, and works of art. They stand for cities, texts, thoughts, and the relations among all three. And they suggest the delicate balance between order and chaos. For Borges, the essential question—and fundamental mystery—is whether or not the labyrinth of the world has a center. If it does, we can be reassured (even with a Minotaur) that there is an order. But if the world does not have a center, it is chaos and, in Borges' words, "then yes we are lost" (98). Most of the writers examined in this study share Borges' fear that there may be no center, and that our labyrinthine world has not been mapped out in patterns by a Daedalian God. But they continue to use the labyrinth as a structure of quest or self-discovery, either inward or outward.

Faris sees the "labyrinthification" (167) of twentieth-century narrative discourse as mimetic as well as metafictional. While writers explore the labyrinth of the world, they create a mirroring labyrinth of language. The great danger, of course, is that such works become hopelessly unreadable. "The labyrinth of the text excludes not only hostile but dull beings" (168); many of the works cited in her study are hardly read outside of universities. Faris perceptively compares the convoluted prose in some of these novels to labyrinths on cathedral floors that served as substitute penitential pilgrimages for Christians who were unable to journey to Jerusalem: "In the case of these

textual itineraries, what sin are we expiating? Perhaps our assumption of easy access to the literary text fostered by the popularization of the novel in the nineteenth century" (168). But if such texts sometimes feel like forms of expiation, they are also forms of desire—ever postponing closure: "The labyrinthine space is the realm that is always beyond our reach and therefore the object of our desire, our curiosity, our investigation, and it is also, paradoxically, the trace of that very investigation" (194). With so much influence on our literature, our culture and our psychic lives, the labyrinth is a compelling subject of study, which Wendy Faris has the imagination and intelligence to confront in an admirable way.

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Eve Tavor Bannet. *Structuralism and the Logic of Dissent: Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989. 299 pp.

Do we need yet another publicist for Lacan, Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, whose terms and tactics, for good or ill, have become commonplace among us? They are exciting to read and to write about, but unless a critic engages their works intensely and rigorously, either as advocate or adversary, it is not very illuminating to read about them. Eva Tavor Bannet's review of these authors is unexciting in this way. In other ways it is grossly misleading.

We are in trouble as of the very first page. After providing a fervent disclaimer about the death of the self and of God, the absence of the author and the futility of language, Bannet states: "They use absence, death and carefully orchestrated silences as indicators of their form-giving presence and as affirmations of their desire for being, individuality and truth" (1). If that were Bannet's thesis about these authors, by way of recasting them in the mold of an existentialist humanism they archly repudiate, this book would indeed be a challenge to our habitual conception of them. But it only reflects habits of effusive formulation which are alien to these authors' radically negative capability. As critics we do not have to subscribe to the latter in order to balk at a description like this:

They not only sought to unmask and to displace the determinisms and the domination, the rational coherence and the control of structural systems and to subvert all attempts to impose the alienating stamp of invariable sameness. They also sought to replace such systematic

structures with structures of their own—structures which define new spaces of non-conformity and freedom. (5)

non solum . . . sed etiam: the mechanism of double inclusion is a classical trope which, like the mechanism of double exclusion excoriated by Barthes (cf. “La critique ni ni” in *Mythologies*), exhibits an addiction to *emphase* and redundancy (what would a variable sameness be?) which is as characteristic of the author’s style as it is foreign to the texts she discusses.

We never learn what these structures of their own might be, though this is a leitmotif of Bannet’s admiration for these writers:

They ruptured the constraints of language and genre to show that human subjects are not merely determined by language and by the conventions of writing; they are also free to create their own languages and to determine their own conventions of writing. (259)

Their rejection of the old Marxist ideal of unity of subject and object was counterbalanced by a new ideal of Otherness, and their rejections of semiology and structuralism by the creation of signs and structures of their own. (263).

And their refusal of authority was more than countered by their invention of structures to which all ‘other’ texts were ineluctably subjected. (263–64)

They could be so inventive, presumably, because of their “blanket view of the fictionality of all texts” (231), a formula which blandly elides their resistance to any blanket view of what is a text and of what is fiction.

Bannet’s redundant formulations constantly feed on their own abstractions, which are but meagerly nourished by a superficial equation between hastily concocted definitions of structuralism and of technocratic society. Alienation is the target of these writers’ dissent, whose summary logic appears to embody a deft marketing strategy: “If the blanket term, alienation, has come to seem rather old-fashioned to us today, it is in no small measure due to the efforts made by Lacan, Barthes, Foucault and Derrida to redefine it and deal with it in smaller and more manageable sections.” (3)

As we have already seen, Bannet’s prose superabounds with the words “new” and “creative,” often together—“And they use the different languages of the human sciences—structural anthropology, cybernetics, Freudian psychology, linguistics, Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology, semiology, traditional logic, traditional rhetoric and *explication de texte*—as a medium, a vehicle, for their critique of modern man’s condition and as elements for a new creation of their own.” (8)—as if in defiance of Barthes’s far more fecund observation, which Bannet does not fail to cite (72), that there

are “no creators, only combiners.” Her capable review of the motifs of the series, the fragment and plurality in Barthes, does not save him from being museumized in Alphonse Daudet’s *Moulin*, as we read in this Barnumesque conclusion: “Barthes’ academic writer is a man who thinks ‘of himself,’ a man of culture and counter-culture, a realist and a dreamer, an imaginative creator and innovator who speaks of the past to speak to the present and who speaks to the present to influence the future in the certain knowledge that his words can help to create realities. Barthes’ academic writer is a fictionalized version of himself” (93).

Lacan fares no better from this kind of enthusiasm. For all the talk of structures, we learn nothing of the notorious triad Imaginary, Symbolic, Real. Alienation is traced to a “virtually complete take-over of perception, desire, imagination, thought, experience and reality by the symbolic order” (20) in a way that inspires the author to interpolate a feasible alternative: “Lacan aimed to make his students and analysands aware that they were controlled to the *depths of their being* by the other—by an alien symbolic, culture and social order which failed to satisfy their *deepest needs and desires* and which condemned *real subjectivity* to oblivion” (43–44). I underline the terms which have no place in Lacanian theory, even by tacit (unconscious?) admission of the author, who quotes “‘The subject is no one,’ ” “‘The subject is nothing’ ” from the Seminars II and XI. And as if Lacan did not build his theory on the ruins of American ego psychology, we find in him an apologist for a Romantic nostalgia for the self:

And as Lacan saw it, the only remaining hope lay in reminding people that they were being turned into automata and in keeping alive the realisation that there was no longer any place in language and culture for individuality, intersubjectivity and the humanist conception of man. For if people realized what was missing, if they became aware of their own profound desire for an existence they lacked, there might yet be a chance for regaining what they had lost. (45)

Though we are never told why, Foucault receives as much attention as the three others combined. As a consequence perhaps, Bannet’s glossy interpolations are compensated for by some more accurate resume. This does not protect *Les Mots et les choses* from the nostalgia motif:

For in *Les Mots et les choses* Foucault reconstructs history to support an argument: the argument that the divided figure of man “invented” at the beginning of the nineteenth century is responsible for the antinomies and impasses of contemporary thought, and that these can be overcome by effacing the figure of man and by using a new *episteme* modelled on the Renaissance and Classical periods when man, in his present form, was not. (145)

While Foucault's reading of the human sciences does recall certain elements of Renaissance linguistics as our literature confronts us anew with "l'être brut du langage," his insistence on epochal discontinuity does not encourage any return to the past for a model. And what are we to make of this reflection on "l'impensé" in Foucault's writings? "Instead of trying to turn the Other into the Same, Foucault suggests we should allow the unthought to retain its Otherness and leave it where it is, outside thought." (155) Nothing, obviously.

Foucault's challenge to the human sciences is reduced to the jolly skepticism of an Anatole France: "In Foucault, the finiteness of man's thought is not a tragic fate, but a comic celebration of the ridiculousness of human pretensions to universal knowledge and universal truth" (164). (*Discipline and Punish*? yuk! yuk!) The choice he imposes on intellectuals is phrased as follows: "whether to act as passive agents of the powers that be or as independent destroyers and creators of knowledge and truth" (183). "Powers that be" is a stock formula granting power an ontological status that flies in the face of Foucault's analytic of power as a network of relations and intersections, which Bannet has ably summarized a few pages earlier. At any rate we are well rid of his prestige if his vast and complicated projects are reducible to a long familiar and futile sociology of knowledge:

The only way out, as far as Foucault is concerned, is to learn the lesson that the history of knowledge *can* teach: in showing that man's knowledge was empirically grounded in historical conditions, the history of knowledge also showed that its validity was limited to a particular historical episode. It thus undermined any knowledge's pretension to universality and made the relativity of knowledge its absolute. (159)

One constantly has the impression that Bannet's own text is driven by an unconscious desire to find a way out from these authors, whose pessimism eludes or alarms her.

As for Derrida, he is simply unrecognizable in these pages, which assimilate him to a position he has always combatted: "Difference can help to recuperate at least some of the irrecoverable origin if it is conceived in an additional way: not only as a separating interval, but also as a linking interval" (192); "Difference as the opening which lets all things appear is the One, the unique generator of the plurality of all that is" (194). It appears that a vaguely Lurianic cosmology informs difference or difference (we often cannot tell which the author means); it emerges as "a mysterious point of unity" (198), "a quasi-mystical *coincidentia oppositorum* (199; cf. Derrida to the contrary, resisting the "punctual simplicity" of this figure in "Plato's Pharmacy").

Compare what Bannet says about temporality and difference:

Everything that is present *now* is always a re-presentation, a repetition of past presence. Because separated by differentiating intervals, every past present is also always other than and different from any present present, and the difference “which makes possible the presentation of the being present, never presents itself as such. It is never given in the present.” (188)

with what Derrida writes in “Différance”:

It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called “present” element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. (“Différance,” *Margins* 13)

For Derrida there is no present present or any past present either. If Bannet suggests the contrary, it is because she has yoked Derrida to just the ontological project he persistently challenges. Small wonder then that deconstruction comes out sounding like a renewed license to practice ontotheology: “Deconstruction is a displacement of the human constructs that have displaced the originating unity. And it is an attempt to open out a metaphysic and a mind-set which have been closed to the wholly Other by carving out spaces or abysses in language and thought through which it can be glimpsed ‘through a glass darkly’” (184).

In and out of all this we get some fairly accurate paraphrase of Derridean texts, but they only render statements like the following all the more astonishing: “According to Derrida, traces cover the whole field of being and all of time. The problem is how to return from this multiplicity of signals and pathways to the God who has passed.” (193). This is a problem for the author, not Derrida, whom we have welcomed in part as an antidote to absurdist bathos about “the bottomless void, the abyss, the darkness on the face of the deep” (200).

The author’s conclusion follows the same pattern. Where she does not flatly contradict the utterances of her subjects, she prunes them back to banalities about “freedom of thought and freedom of discourse” (257), about their opposition to “the new de-personalised, de-individualised mass society” (236), as we find them “preaching a de-centralisation, a pluralism, a freedom to be different and to makes one’s differences felt, which are familiar to every

American" (232). That homely note is struck again with reference to our "university system . . . where the freedom to 'originalise' oneself already exists if one is willing and able to do so" (261). Never mind Foucault's analytic of "pouvoir," Lacan's of "vouloir": we are free to be you and me.

This is indeed a very American book. What makes it so is its compulsively upbeat tautologies and slapdash synthesis, its resolute inconsistency and nebulous optimism and a concomitant allergy to critical or speculative rigor. These are habits which Tocqueville first warned us about, which Sinclair Lewis (our Flaubert) made such delicious fun of, and which Barthes for one stigmatized as anti-intellectual (cf. "Racine est Racine" in *Mythologies*). At the very least we imbibe these heady French imports in order to chasten such practices if not, because of structural constraints they induce us to understand, to eradicate them. Failing such effort, we get a book like this, which reads like an unconscious paean to bourgeois liberalism, whose emancipatory individualism goes unquestioned. There may be nothing intrinsically reprehensible in that, but in a book about intellectuals it is undeniably all the more reprehensible for being unconscious.

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Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, eds. *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989.

This collection consists of eight articles, an extended polemical introduction by the editors, and an appendix which includes Emerson's translations of Bakhtin's introductions to two volumes of the 1929 complete edition of Tolstoy's work. Six of the articles have already appeared elsewhere: Morson's "Parody, History and Metaparody" in *The Boundaries of Genre* (Austin, 1981); Linda Hutcheon's "Modern Parody and Bakhtin" in *A Theory of Parody* (London: Methuen, 1985); de Man's "Dialogue and Dialogism" in *Poetics Today* 4:1 (1983); Ann Shukman's "Bakhtin's Tolstoy Prefaces" excerpted from "Bakhtin and Tolstoy" in *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature* 9 (1984); Emerson's revised "The Tolstoy Connection in Bakhtin" which appeared in *PMLA* 100 (1985); and Aaron Fogel's "Coerced Speech and the Oedipus Dialogue Complex" in his *Coercion to Speak: Conrad's Poetics of Dialogue* (Cambridge, 1985).

The articles which appear for the first time include Morson's and Emerson's extensive introduction (it is the longest of any of the articles included in the volume), Mathew Roberts' "Poetics Hermeneutics Dialogics: Bakhtin and Paul de Man," Michael André Bernstein's "The Poetics of *Ressenti-*

ment,” and the Emerson translations. These materials make the greatest impression, and constitute more than half of the volume.

There is virtue in bringing together a wide variety of articles on Bakhtin, especially when the task, as the editors claim in their subtitle, is to “extend” and “challenge” Bakhtin’s theories of parody, dialogism, and utterance. But this is not the only task. Morson and Emerson “challenge” interpretations of Bakhtin they believe do not do him justice. Thus, the volume is highly polemical. It should be emphasized, however, that the polemic does not occur within a Bakhtinian design. Where Bakhtin renders judgments tentatively, with allowance for other perspectives, and with a consciousness of the openendedness and unfinalizability of dialogue, Morson and Emerson engage in what they themselves describe as the tendency of “defenders of the great proponent of dialogue” to “[monologize] a deeply dialogic relationship” (48). Their primary target is the Clark and Holquist biography of Bakhtin, particularly their contention that Bakhtin’s writing is all of a piece. Morson and Clark illustrate how much Bakhtin’s thinking evolved over time. Particularly useful is their treatment of Bakhtin’s “The Philosophy of the Act,” an early text which precedes his work on language, the word, dialogue and utterance.

Morson and Emerson advance their theory of the “disputed texts,” Voloshinov’s *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and Freudianism: *A Critical Sketch* as well as Medvedev’s *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. Their judgment is unequivocal—these are not Bakhtin’s. The thrust of the argument is against Clark’s and Holquist’s claim to the contrary, and the editors go to great lengths to expose the biographers’ position for its basis both in hearsay and the questionable recollections on the part of Bakhtin’s colleagues and their families. For their part, Morson and Emerson base their argument both on historical evidence (here the presentation is strongest) and on conjecture (e.g., “Moreover, if Bakhtin was himself influenced by Medvedev’s books, as we suspect, his wife may have copied extensive parts of it as notes,” 36).

The articles included in the volume appear under the two headings of the subtitle: extensions (Morson’s and Hutcheon’s work on parody as well as de Man’s note on dialogue and Roberts’ response to de Man); and challenges (Shukman’s and Emerson’s contributions on Bakhtin’s Tolstoy as well as Fogel’s and Bernstein’s essays on the dangers of dialogic theory). This is a rather artificial division in that challenges to Bakhtin’s theories and extensions of them appear in each of the eight articles.

The articles excerpted from longer studies suffer the most from a lack of editing. It is not uncommon to find comments of the type, “We have here an instance of a semiotic universal which I have often had occasion to describe in this study” (73). Unfortunately, the study to which Morson refers is his book,

not the excerpted chapter on parody he includes in this volume. There are a total of four such references in his article; another four appear in the Hutcheon article (see pages 68, 74, 77, 94, 95, 97 and 98). The essay most severely damaged in the transition from its original presentation to this volume is Ann Shukman's. It is only half the length of the original, a regrettable fact given the value of the original and the resulting truncation of the argument in this collection.

Morson's excerpt is at its best when interpreting parody and history. For those familiar with *The Boundaries of Genre*, pleasure is to be derived from rereading his incisive comments on Pushkin (80, 82) and Dostoevsky (83–84). Hutcheon's excerpt is valuable in its rendering an extended definition of Bakhtin's idea of parody: "complex forms of 'trans-contextualization' and inversion" (97). She opens up the definition of the genre by claiming that "any codified discourse is open to parody." Of particular value is her differentiation of parody from closely related discourse modes (satire, for example). But her discovery that parody contains an emphasis on a norm against which it reacts (foreground to background), is neither new nor an extension of Bakhtin's definition (100).

Paul de Man's brief essay mounts a challenge to Bakhtin's dialogism: "The ideologies of otherness and of hermeneutic understanding are not compatible, and therefore their relationship is not a dialogical but simply a contradictory one. It is not a foregone conclusion whether Bakhtin's discourse is itself dialogical or simply contradictory" (112). This is an issue hotly contested by those who follow Bakhtin's writing (in this volume, Morson and Emerson). De Man cautions: "To imitate or to apply Bakhtin, to read him by engaging him in a dialogue, betrays what is most valid in his work" (114). What is one, then, to do with his "relationship" to Bakhtin? For de Man, the limitations are clear: "Dialogism is . . . still a descriptive and metalinguistic term that says something about language rather than about the world" (108), a distinction that separates de Man's discourse from Bakhtin's in absolute terms. This is the topic of Mathew Roberts' article, which neither extends nor challenges Bakhtin's theories. Rather, it attempts to set de Man's remarks in context. Roberts traces the differences in the two theoreticians' writing along several axes, the most fundamental of which is the idea of the "self" in its relationship to the world (and what is knowable in it). Roberts concludes that the force of de Man's deconstructionist critique of Bakhtin is to render up not the object (Bakhtin's epistemology), but to engage in a distinct type of discourse through which its own presuppositions are displayed. He concludes, "Such an objection [as mine] cannot . . . 'refute' de Man's critique of Bakhtin. It can only demonstrate . . . the mutual unintelligibility of their perspectives on meaning" (134).

The second half of the volume contains the four articles ostensibly chal-

lenging Bakhtin's theories. Shukman's, through no fault of her own, makes the least interesting reading. Its finest moments treat several points of contiguity between Tolstoy's and Bakhtin's thinking on the subject's relationship to evil. The points of contact between the two indicate that "Bakhtin was using Tolstoy's thesis [on sin and redemption] to present his own personal position" (146). Emerson's article on Bakhtin's Tolstoy, however, delivers some of the most engaging rereading of the collection. Emerson treats three central issues relative to Bakhtin's interpretation of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. First, she discusses the orientation toward monologism in the former and dialogism in the latter, focusing on the virtues each allows within the worlds created by these two literary giants. Favor is given to Dostoevsky's representation of multiple consciousnesses. Second, Emerson treats monologism and dialogism from the Bakhtinian perspective of relations between authors and their heroes. Particularly useful here are her evaluations of the Other in forming an adequate image of the self and of language as a medium of truth seeking (Tolstoy) rather than a problem of truth seeking (Dostoevsky). The third issue treated has to do with the amount of Otherness necessary for the formation of a self. The centrality of death in Tolstoy's work is emphasized here. Bakhtin rejects Tolstoy's idea that the self is completed in death by the subject him/herself. For Bakhtin, the finalizability of the self occurs through the agency of the Other's perspective on the subject's death: "No self, not even our own, can be controlled or created from within; we can only be completed from without" (163). Extracting herself from the force of Bakhtin's critique, Emerson concludes that Bakhtin was "not a particularly good reader of Tolstoy" (168) for the simple reason that the "Bakhtinian model . . . does not really allow for any investigation of the Tolstoyan sense of self" (169).

Fogel's discussion of coerced speech in Conrad's fiction represents an emphatic challenge to Bakhtin's presuppositions. He discloses the degree to which Bakhtin's discourse typologies and the dialogic relations which they describe leave out potentially harmful features: the "identification of all dialogic relations as disproportionate and imperial" (179). The infelicitous aspects of dialogue, which Bakhtin does not treat, are underscored in Conrad, thus challenging Bakhtin's original idea at the point where speech is forced from the interlocutor: "Bakhtin necessarily, in studying Dostoevsky, used [*anacrisis*] to mean the ingenious strategies of verbal pressure to speak, but the dictionaries remind us that in its origins it refers more often to examination by extreme physical torture" (188). Conrad's work thematizes this aspect of dialogue and moves away from Bakhtin's "dialogic of 'sympathy' " (193) toward the politics of a hierarchically organized, coercive dialogue of authority.

The dark potential of Bakhtin's discourse theories is subject to intense scrutiny and offers the most substantive challenge to his work. Bernstein's

deconstructionist critique of those theories appropriately concludes the essays. If there was ever any hope that Bakhtin's ideas might challenge deconstructionist technique, Bernstein dispels it roundly. Focusing on narratives of *ressentiment* ("reminiscence-as-suffering"), Bernstein exposes Bakhtin's discourse types to a harsh critical light. From the perspective of the Underground Man, Bernstein treats the problem of citation as central to *ressentiment* experienced by such diverse characters as Diderot's Rameau and Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet, and as presented by authors as distinct from each other as Céline and Schiller. Connecting memory with the problem of citation and an overall inability to deliver a unique word (or perspective), Bernstein emphasizes that dialogism represents "part of the solution to the crisis of reminiscence" and "part of the problem as well" (223).

In sum, this collection of essays and translations is both instructive and annoying. On the one hand, the volume could have used more extensive editing (especially of the many excerpted reprints) and the Shukman article should have been either omitted or printed in full. On the other hand, the Bernstein and Fogel articles command the greatest attention if only because they indeed represent a most thorough challenge to Bakhtin's theories of dialogue and discourse. These readings are insightful. Additionally, the Emerson translations of Bakhtin's introductions to Tolstoy are as finely crafted as any of her expert and sensitive renderings of Bakhtin's writing. Her annotations are instructive and precise.

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Fernando Moreno. *Carlos Fuentes. La mort d'Artemio Cruz: entre le mythe et l'histoire*. Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1989.

Although published as part of the Collection Tropismes, a series of critical studies prepared for students, teachers, and the general public, Moreno's book has much to offer the literary specialist as well.

The study consists of four integrated parts: "Textes et contextes"; "Histoire et récit" (narrative structure); "Revivre l'histoire, vivre dans l'histoire" (historical vision of Artemio Cruz); "Les signes, les symboles, les mythes." Moreno begins with a useful survey of Fuentes' other texts through *Cristóbal Nonato* (1987). He sets *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* in the literary contexts of the "new Latin American novel" and the "novel of the Mexican Revolution." He observes that Fuentes, like other writers who brought unprecedented international recognition to the Latin American novel in the early sixties, has kept on writing about Latin American identity, and that as a

Mexican writer he is especially concerned with the continuing impact the Revolution has had on his country and its people. In his consideration of intertextuality in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz*, Moreno not only reviews the creative connection with commonly mentioned works in literature and cinema by figures such as Joyce, Faulkner, Lowry, Buñuel, Welles, he also makes a good case for including Herman Broch's *La mort de Virgile* (*The Death of Virgil* 1945) and Salvador Novo's *El joven*, the novel of 1928 and the play of 1951.

At the end of the first section of the study, Moreno focuses on the topic of death: the Mexican preoccupation with death, the creative aspect of death, and death's privileged position in Fuentes' novel. He continues the exploration of death, now as a structural motif, in part two, his explanation of the structure of the novel, *histoire* transformed as *récit*. Even before the beginning of the story, he explicates the connection between Fuentes' text and the series of five epigraphs that introduce it. The epigraphs, taken from essay, play, novel, poem, and song, refer to attitudes toward death: "La série des épigraphes devient ainsi un résumé des différentes attitudes et opinions autour de la mort telles qu'elles ont pu se manifester à travers tous les 'genres' qui matérialisent la fonction poétique du langage . . ." (32-33).

As Moreno expands "death" into "deaths," real and symbolic deaths witnessed or caused by Artemio Cruz, he identifies the life/death opposition that evokes tension within the text: "l'on peut vérifier la présence d'une double orientation, de deux mouvements qui s'opposent et s'affrontent, l'un qui tend vers la mort, l'inactivité, la fin, l'autre qui pousse à la vie, l'action, le commencement. Contrastent donc la passivité et le dynamisme . . ." (37-38). In the fragmented total world of Artemio Cruz, life and death are interdependent; the projection grammatically and conceptually of past as future interrupts the closing of a cycle by offering the possibility of a different version of the past and therefore a different version of the present based on that past. The reader familiar with Fuentes' other works may recall his treatment of text and history in *Cambio de piel* (1967) and *Terra Nostra* (1975). Because many of the themes and strategies identified in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* are those that run through all of Fuentes' fiction, Moreno's review of the grammatical shifting that creates the complex movement of the narration and his discussions of strategies, such as Fuentes' use of patterns based on the numbers two and three or the repetition of gestures and phrases, often suggest aspects of Fuentes' later works.

In the second part Moreno also traces the symmetry in Fuentes' arrangement of the twelve dated fragments and shows that episodes offering an opportunity for authentic action are juxtaposed with episodes involving a choice leading to moral degradation (64). Then, in part three, "Revivre l'histoire, vivre dans l'histoire," he turns attention to Fuentes' complex treatment of

time. Again touching on elements that were to appear in Fuentes' later fiction, he explores the narrative functions of memory, dream, choice, love, and ambiguity and discusses the strategies of doubling and reflecting (as in mirrors).

Moreno's summary of the historical setting of the novel takes the reader through the history associated with Artemio Cruz from the mid-nineteenth century to 1959. Within the long series of usurpations of power by the *caciques* and *caudillos* filing and circling through Mexican history, Artemio is the *chingón*, emerged from Artemio the child, *el chingado*, son of *la chingada*. Here, Moreno, following other critics, explains Fuentes' ties to the ideas of Octavio Paz in the portrayal of Mexican identity.

Moreno looks at the relationship of chronological time to mythic time, or timelessness, in the novel. He points out Fuentes' incorporation of cosmic cycles of the Aztec calendar and his references to classical myths, and discusses Fuentes' further use of numerology and symbolism of names. He relates Artemio's struggle with the concept of *la chingada* to Fuentes' concerns about language and the need to find a meaning in words that will create a different way of expressing, thus experiencing, the universe. Referring to alternative realities contained in words, he quotes Fuentes from *Cervantes o la crítica de la lectura*: "chaque mot, sous son apparence de vacuité, contient tous les germes d'une rénovation, 'tous les échos d'une mémoire ancestrale, origénelle, fondatrice' " (137). In his final remarks he reviews the reflections, oppositions, and contradictions at work within the multi-faceted existence of Artemio Cruz, the forces creating the paradoxes that drive the dynamic movement of the novel and make it unique.

The book's cover reports that Moreno is a lecturer in Spanish at the University of Poitiers and *Secrétaire Général* of the Center for Latin American Research. He has written extensively about Latin American literature. The present study demonstrates that he is well-versed in Mexican culture and in the history and myths that have contributed to the development of a Mexican identity. His sound literary and historical background as well as his careful analysis make this volume one of the most valuable critical studies of Fuentes' work published to date. The numerous bibliographical items appearing in Moreno's notes at the ends of chapters and in a formal bibliography at the end of the study add to its usefulness for the classroom and scholarship.

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