

Book Reviews

Carlos J. Alonso. *The Burden of Modernity: The Rhetoric of Cultural Discourse in Spanish America*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. x + 227 pp.

The problematic nature of modernity and the rhetorical crisis of cultural discourse in Spanish America are the overarching subjects of this intriguing and thought-provoking study by Carlos J. Alonso. Spanish American authors have approached the notion of modernity with ambivalence, simultaneously affirming and rejecting modernism in their writings. Alonso, struggling with the limitations of language, constructs a theoretical framework, and then in the series of close readings that follow sets out to explain the conflicted relationship between discourse and modernity and the cultural concepts embedded in the modernism/postmodernism controversy.

During the Colonial era two master plots or narratives concerning the relationship between Europe and the New World emerged: that of novelty (which was advanced rhetorically by means of the language of amazement and wonder) and that of futurity (whereby the exoticization of the New World signaled the postponement of its future). This latter master narrative, which led to an identification with the future and, by extension, modernism, rather than the autochthonous indigenous past, became the dominant discourse. Thus, according to Alonso, the term “postcolonial” in effect does not apply to post-Independence Spanish America because “the quintessential postcolonial gesture is one of recuperation of the indigenous group’s interrupted historical existence” (13), a condition that clearly did not come about following Independence.

In his re-reading of Sarmiento, Alonso offers a fascinating look at this complex representative of modernity, an author who was capable of heaping both criticism and praise on the individuals portrayed in his writings. Sarmiento, it appears, would usually commit

his ideas to paper before completing his thought processes on a given topic, thereby rendering his text little more than “a sketch of a still inchoate thought” (58). Since he wrote spontaneous unpremeditated prose filled with passion and contradictory desires, one must return to his works often in order to try to understand his inconsistencies.

Next, in a discussion of the Cuban anti-slavery novel, Alonso links these fictional works to non-literary texts and challenges the so-called “collective unanimity” of all those concerned with the anti-slavery project in Cuba. He concludes that the idea of a homogeneous abolitionist movement in Cuba is a myth. In many of the anti-slavery tracts writers remained strangely silent on the moral and humanitarian questions raised by the “peculiar institution.” Novelists usually avoided depictions of abject human misery, but they had no qualms about injecting the issue of incest into their texts. They condemned slavery, not on moral grounds, but because it was anachronistic and thus incompatible with the idea of modernity. It was this distinctive feature of the anti-slavery novel—incest and other issues of sexuality—that separated it from the traditional novel of the Romantic period. Spanish American writers welcomed the advent of Romanticism because they saw it, rightly or wrongly, as a manifestation of modernity. To them, the Romantic novel was an expression of the modern because of its newness, in spite of its conservative and backward-looking features.

Alonso’s reading of Lucio Mansilla’s *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* as a family narrative involving an oedipal complex provides some of the most fascinating pages in this study. Although Mansilla’s text, like Sarmiento’s *Facundo*, is characterized by its generic ambiguity, it is nonetheless a fine example of a respected form of writing of that era, the scientific travelogue. What was the real reason behind Mansilla’s journey into the *desierto*? In his search for the answer, Alonso reveals that the dandy Mansilla was a man torn between two father figures: the dictator Rosas (his uncle) and Sarmiento (the President of Argentina and the standard-bearer of modernity). In the end Mansilla resolved this conflict in favor of barbarism by identifying with the former.

The chapter on Horacio Quiroga, while less imaginative than some of the others, does offer solid commentary, especially on two major points: Quiroga’s poetics of the short story and his omnipresent preoccupation with death. The assertions that the Uruguayan *cuentista* repeatedly violated his own theoretical statements when putting them into practice and that his stories were based on a sur-

prise factor (a characteristic inherited from his foremost models, Poe and Maupassant) will not come as a shock to any reader familiar with these tales. It is obvious that death is ubiquitous in Quiroga's narratives, and it is just as clear that he engaged in writing them as an exercise in exorcism.

In his commentary on Vargas Llosa's *La tía Julia y el escribidor* Alonso examines the confluence of high culture and popular culture and how these two narrative levels converge upon the novel's central issue, the evolution of the writer. As Pedro Camacho gradually slips into madness, Varguitas comes into his own. The author's apprenticeship as a writer parallels his condition as a novice with regard to matters of love. His seduction of the mother figure and the elimination of his literary competitor signify, on a symbolic level, incest and murder. The two narratives, the fictitious one of the scriptwriter and the factual one of the author's affair with Aunt Julia, are two aspects of the real subject of the book: how Varguitas becomes Vargas Llosa. In pointing out the novelist's authoritative posture regarding the subject Alonso challenges the commonly held belief that this is a postmodern novel.

Chapter 7 raises the issue of the end of modernity through an examination of two so-called postmodern novels, García Márquez's *El general en su laberinto* and Fuentes's *La campaña*, both of which are set at the time of Spanish America's origins, the early nineteenth century. Ironically, *El general* locates the beginnings of Spanish America in the failure of Bolívar's dream of continental unification. Alonso suggests that today, given the facility and speed with which Spanish Americans cross national boundaries via communications networks, one can finally say that the Liberator's goal has, in one sense, been realized. In discussing the Fuentes novel he underscores the ambiguity of the title, which refers not only to the military campaign but also to a passionate quest for love. These and other contemporary novels call attention to the debate currently raging in cultural studies between those who deny postmodernism's relevance to the Spanish American condition (especially if one sees modernity in that region as being incomplete, weak or non-existent) and those of the opposite view, who consider Spanish America the embodiment of the postmodern.

Spanish American writers, from the outset, adopted the rhetoric of modernity but nowadays that very modernity is being called into question. The topic of identity, which for decades attempted to define the literature and culture of the region, is no longer of paramount

concern, primarily because the ideology of modernism is now viewed as an invalid mechanism for examining the relationship between the individual countries and the metropolis. Alonso identifies "[t]his awareness of the rhetorical crisis that has generated Spanish American cultural discourse" as "our particular version of postmodernity" (175).

Scholars of Sarmiento, Quiroga, and Vargas Llosa will certainly find Alonso's close readings of texts enlightening and engaging. However, the ones who will most benefit from this study are those students and scholars engaged in discussions of literary theory, cultural discourse, and canon formation.

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Ross Chambers. *Facing It: AIDS Diaries and the Death of the Author*. Michigan UP, 1998. 141 pp.

How does one begin to approach with a critical eye a text that was conceived in the process of dying? Or even more difficult, how can one reconcile whatever professional that may be accrued for having written a text published by a university press when that text was based upon diaries of death, thus transforming the academic critic into a literary vulture? These were just some of the ethical challenges that awaited Ross Chambers in writing this book, *Facing It: AIDS Diaries and the Death of the Author*.

While acknowledging these difficulties in reading and writing or filming AIDS diaries, the author, thankfully, continues with the task at hand, thus providing the reader with an intimate and detailed examination of two video diaries, *La pudeur ou l'impudeur* (1992) by Hervé guilbert and the award-winning *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (1993) by Tom Joslin, as well as a third textually based diary, *Unbecoming* (1990), written by Eric Michaels.

Chambers not only examines these video and text diaries, he also traces the connection between literary criticism and chronicles of dying, pondering the implications when the much used literary concept of Roland Barthes, the "death of the author," is transformed through literal versus theoretical usage. He also notes the irony that in these

count, can only be conferred through the authorial death. In a large part the study deals with what it means to "write the body," the phrase originally coined by Hélène Cixous and related to the concept of *écriture féminine*. Chambers also links his analysis to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of a "body without organs." The writer who is HIV positive will only begin to chronicle the disease once the symptoms of AIDS manifest themselves in his or her body. Thus Chambers specifically foregrounds the textual representations of the disintegration of the body in all of the diaries examined. This entails on the part of each author what the critic refers to as a type of "complicity" with the disease and its symptoms that serve as the inspiration for each one's writing or filming. The disintegration of the body also serves as a literary device, marking the narrative progression. The text, then, is one in which the critic seeks to document the authors' attempts to "create coherence and sense out of discontinuity, incoherence, and disintegration" (6). It is this disintegration that is presented jarringly in the one photograph in Chambers' text. In it, Eric Michaels, shirtless and covered with lesions on his face, torso, and arms, sticks out his lesion-covered tongue at the camera/viewer/reader in defiance, almost as if he is daring each one to stare back at him, to not avert eyes in an attempt to erase the disturbing image. This is also demonstrated in the videos through the disorder and messiness apparent in the living space of the AIDS sufferers as juxtaposed with the sterile order and starkness of the hospitals. It becomes apparent in the written texts when the fragmentation of thoughts and sentences is a manifestation of the literal fragmentation of the dying body of the author, most aptly presented in Michael's *Unbecoming*. As Chambers points out, the AIDS diaries are both a chronicle of death and a way to insure survival. Death is marked when the printed text drops off after an entry, or in the video image of emptiness where once the author had been. The ending is both expected and unexpected. There is no tidy conclusion to the narrative, just emptiness, a suspension. Chambers argues that with this end/not end comes an imperative for the reader to act, an obligation to finish the story. Readers are required by virtue of the text to examine their own complicity in the death of the author through homophobic indifference, as Chambers eloquently argues. He states, "if we are not guilty of homophobic indifference we are still guilty of homophobic indifference to the homophobic indifference that is commonplace in society" (23). Thus, the experience of reading becomes one fraught with "anxiety, inadequacy, and guilt" for the reader (23).

With the advent in recent years of drugs designed to prolong the lives of those suffering from AIDS, the topic has ceased to attract the attention it once did in newspapers and in the nightly news. In large part it has been removed from public consciousness. The prolonged life of AIDS sufferers has in many ways signaled the death to the fervent activism of the eighties and early nineties. *Facing it* was written in the mid 1990s. And yet, the epidemic has grown markedly around the world, affecting large percentages of the population in Africa and growing numbers in Latin America. These AIDS sufferers for the most part do not have the wealth or accessibility to the new AIDS treatments that would prolong their life. One can't help but contemplate the racist implications of ignoring an epidemic in the developing world in large part because its effects have been mitigated in economically privileged countries. Chambers's text deals with authors who have died in the United States, Australia, and France. To be able to film one's death, or for that matter write one's death, implies economic privilege and educational status not experienced by the majority of AIDS sufferers worldwide. While this does not undercut in any way the relevance and importance of Chambers's study, or the authors' work, the superficial treatment Chambers affords the topic is one notable flaw in his text. *Facing It* is intellectually rigorous and thought-provoking. It is also depressing. Thus it leaves the reviewer in an ambivalent position. How to write a positive review and recommend on the basis of critical approach a text that is so painful to read due to the content? It is impossible. Having thus outlined the parameters of the dilemma that faces the reader, I leave it to each to decide whether or not to "face up" to the task.

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David William Foster. *Buenos Aires: Perspectives on the City and Cultural Production*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1998. 232 pp.

This new book by David W. Foster has to be read as a celebration. Certainly, it is a condensed version of Foster's academic concerns, which he has been collecting in his more than thirty years visiting the city itself, and scrutinizing Argentine literature and culture, <https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl/vol25/iss2/10>
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their clues, subtexts, coded secrets, and intricate labyrinths. However, this book is neither a guide for a tourist interested in the hegemonic aspect of Argentina nor a manual that promotes Buenos Aires as a whole. In Foster's book, the city is a sign or, rather, a signifier, and, as the author points out when writing about Sara Facio's photography, "it is a principle of semiosis that no sign has a meaning in and of itself" (183).

From the Introduction, Foster informs the reader that his inquiry is "quite personal" (15) and also that this is "a personal testimonial" book (15), which focuses on Buenos Aires's urban geography and cultural production, especially by stressing their marginal and marginalized features. Therefore, Foster's Buenos Aires is a very particular city, given to the reader more as a map of the author's own desire than as an exhaustive description of the city itself. For this reason, this book has to be read (at least I read it that way) as if it were a love story with a city, or as if it were evoking one of the conceivable registers of an allegoric autobiography.

Foster's project goes beyond Angel Rama's "*la ciudad letrada*." In fact, there are very few references in Foster's book to the Argentine literary canon, namely, succinct comments on Borges and Cortázar, and short references to Arlt and Güiraldes, which constitute the minimal frame needed to explore Buenos Aires's contemporary *arrabales*. The city that Foster is interested in is, undeniably, the Buenos Aires developed in the last thirty years, the fin-de-siècle Buenos Aires. However, there is no echo here of Marshal Berman's *All that is solid melts into air* or Carl E. Schorske's *Fin-de-siècle Vienna*, as there is in Beatriz Sarlo's book on Buenos Aires. Foster is not interested in "peripheral modernity" or how the canonical authors of Argentina confronted the literary and cultural modes imposed by Europe. On the contrary, he focuses on subaltern or marginalized cultural production in Buenos Aires. Accordingly, chapters in his book have been organized in order to explore the cultural strategies working in the marginalized texts, whether by highlighting the way cultural producers deal with programmatic exclusions from the literary canon and its genres, or by negotiating gender and socio-economic marginalization with the imposed models.

This is a very important issue to be considered when reading Foster's book, because in it we can find *porteño* passions which are not Foster's (i.e. soccer, television, and even psychoanalysis). And, of course, there are Foster's passions which are seldom those of Buenos Aires (or, at least, they are not the Argentine intelligentsia's devotions,

such as Eva Perón, Gatica or Enrique Medina). In this sense, the statement on the last page that “[m]uch has been made of the independence and liberty of Argentine women, especially in Buenos Aires and especially following the role modeled by Eva Perón” (194), is, for instance, a very Fosterian provocative suggestion that, surely, would hardly find support among the Argentine writers and artists. Whatever the cultural producers’ political affiliation is, it is likely that they persevere in identifying themselves and their role as intellectuals in the tradition of Victoria Ocampo or Alicia Moreau de Justo.

The dilemma that confronts us in Foster’s appreciation about Eva Perón and Argentine women is the same as generally emerges when attention is given to cultural production. Eva Perón is a comprehensive sociological assertion that only involves women who, paradoxically, are not cultural producers. Nevertheless, Foster’s book is based on the central thesis that “any cultural production by a member of a subaltern group is necessarily involved with subaltern identity, whether or not it wants to be, and with the project to construct alternatives to subalternity” (170).

The book has eight chapters in which Foster examines how urban subjectivities are constructed (15), from Mafalda, the acclaimed comic strip by Quino, to Sara Facio’s photography. In between, he explores Buenos Aires’s theater, tango, and urban sexual mores, and also examines how homoeroticism and contested spaces are extensively discussed in recent films. He also studies the cultural impacts produced by neoliberalism and global order. Other chapters deal with feminine space, the Jewish experience, and the “dirty realism” in Enrique Medina’s novels. Undoubtedly, the dominant theme across the chapters seems to be the Argentine middle class, with its social, political, and cultural reaccommodation, whether it is its flirtation with fascism, patriarchy, and complicity in power, or its fascination with revolution and resistance.

However, Foster’s Buenos Aires is not the inventory of privileged images of the social text, whether they are emphasized by the intelligentsia or political leaders; for him the city is, to the contrary, a controversial space, like the protagonist’s apartment in Talesnik’s *La fiaca*, namely, “as much a microcosm of the spaces of the Argentine middle class as it is a free zone engaged in a subversion of the demands of that class” (42). Buenos Aires is represented here as the intimate map where interpretations of urban life are those proposed by the cultural production itself (55), that is, an archipelago of discourses which transform the city in a polyphonic, multilinguistic, painful, ironic,

machista, and disturbing space. Foster knows how to translate these urban secrets to those readers who are not familiar with *porteño* slang, not only because every Spanish quotation has been translated into English, but also because Foster is able to calibrate the exact English equivalent for terms like *compadrito* (71) or to measure the appropriate cultural resonance for *rosado* in the famous title of Borges's short story (76).

Finally, the book has a useful index and an updated bibliography which demonstrates once again the tireless curiosity of the author. Besides the selection of photos by Sara Facio, the book includes illustrative materials taken from Mafalda, Argentine movies, novels, and journalistic documents.

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Claire F. Fox. *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999. 188 pp.

The U.S.-Mexico border has been defined by a spectrum of terms—a wound that bleeds, a division between two sovereign nations, a bi-national borderland, a cultural laboratory, a site of illegal alien entry, the line separating the first and third worlds etc.—and these definitions of the border are shaped by the disciplines that frame them. Claire F. Fox's *The Fence and the River: Culture and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border* adds interdisciplinary perspective to the debate on border politics by contemplating the area's politics through the lens of art. This well-researched book expands the traditional notion of art by analyzing literature and popular culture, film, video, installations, photography, postcards, and performance art. Fox explains her contention concisely in the introduction: Focusing on "representations of the U.S.-Mexico border that have appeared in literature, art, and mass media" since the 1970s, her book is "intended as a critique of the current fashion in postnational, non-site-specific border imagery in contemporary cultural theory" (1). It is not so much a study of the border, then, but rather an analysis of the manner in which aesthetic images of the border are manipulated discursively and strategically by artists, activists, politicians, and the media. While

focusing on cultural representations of the border, this book (which began as the author's dissertation) grounds its interpretation of border art in the historical reality of NAFTA and the neoliberal economic policies that characterize contemporary U.S.-Mexico politics.

The Fence and the River is divided into five chapters, each focusing on different artistic "case-studies." Chapter 1, "Cultural Exemptions, Cultural Solutions," is an analysis of the debate on the issue of the exemption of culture industries from free trade agreements (NAFTA and the GATT). This chapter widens the discussion of free trade art by considering not only art on the U.S.-Mexico border but also Canadian anti-free trade art. In Chapter 2, "Establishing Shots of the Border," Fox contemplates the images of "the fence and the river [Rio Grande]" in contemporary film, art and videos. She argues that the usage of these stereotypical icons indicates "the persistence of nationalism in the contemporary era" (12). In Chapter 3, "U.S.-Mexico Border Conflict in U.S. Popular Culture: Recodifications of the Revolution and the Porfiriato," Fox reads picture postcards from the early 1900s as a source of border discourse in contemporary U.S. popular culture. These postcards provide striking visual images of historical events on the border and exemplify the manner in which Anglo spectators viewed themselves in the process of viewing Mexico. Fox's reading of these photographs underscores the manner in which the history of the Mexican Revolution and the U.S.-Mexico border is itself a series of manipulated representations. She also analyzes an episode from a recent U.S. television series (*The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*) and Brown Meggs's novel, *The War Train*, in order to underscore the trivialization of the Mexican Revolution in U.S. popular culture. Chapter 4, "Narratives of Cross-Border Migration during the Revolution's Developmentalist Phase," analyzes a novel, Luis Spota's *Murieron a mitad del río*, and a film, Alejandro Galindo's *Espaldas mojadas*. Fox examines the manner in which these two narratives foreground the injustices of the *bracero* program (the "pull factor") while at the same time protecting the notion of the Mexican "nation" by scarcely mentioning the significance of "push factors" from Mexico (117). Chapter 5, "Mass Media, Site Specificity, and Representations of the U.S.-Mexico Border," focuses on the controversial work of Mexican performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who began his career exploring the border as a site-specific "laboratory" and later moved on to critique the commodification of "border art." Despite his fame and notoriety, published analyses of Gómez-Peña's work remain few. Another principle of Fox's book is that she chooses throughout particu-

larly interesting case studies that for the most part have not been the object of much scholarly study. Her analysis of border art within the necessary context of U.S.-Mexico politics furthers our understanding of the relationship between politics and art and makes a significant contribution to the field of cultural criticism.

The book provides a wealth of resource information including 37 illustrations, 378 endnotes, an extensive bibliography and an appendix listing 42 video titles about or related to the issue of Free Trade. It will prove useful and enjoyable for scholars and graduate students from the humanities conducting research on the U.S.-Mexico border politics and/or its art from any number of disciplines. This text would serve well in a graduate seminar or even for an advanced undergraduate class. *The Fence and the River* examines, and reiterates, the strategic manipulation of cultural representation for political purposes. This book will generate productive discussion and dialogue about the border as a place and an object of study, a barrier, and a source of ever flowing cultural development.

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Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou, eds. *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999. 632 pp.

The publication of this anthology coincides with a renewed interest in modernism as an artistic and cultural phenomenon. In keeping with recent scholarship on modernism (for a quick overview of the latest publications see for example the essay on modernism in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* [XLVI, 11, p. A21]), this volume challenges the traditional categorization of modernism, or rather, the concept of the period being a fixed and canonized entity. Intended by the editors to support this refashioned analysis of representations of modernism, the selected texts cover a vast field of modernist writing; most texts, though, are non-fictional prose. A first look at *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* will necessarily cause positive delight due to the sheer wealth of material included in the volume. The more than 170 texts date from the 1840s to the early 1940s. The approach of both situating modernism in its earliest ma-

terializations, and outlining its immediate as well as slightly delayed reception and critique, may strike some critics as a rather atypical temporal framework for a modernist perspective. However, this editorial decision serves well the purpose of providing and creating a network of modernist texts and thought in order to help students and teachers alike to reconstruct the momentum of what came to be known as modernism. While most of the established greats, such as Joyce, Woolf, Pound, and H.D., are represented in the collection, it is mostly with their theoretical and essayistic prose and not so much with their more canonical, literary works that these writers are featured. The student of literary aspects of modernism will therefore have to turn to additional readings and sources.

A side effect of the sizeable number of texts is that hardly any of the individual entries runs longer than six pages, while a substantial number of the entries are shorter than three pages. This might be an asset, though, in consideration of the average attention span of postmodernity. In defiance of the inclusion of such a variety of texts, this anthology, like any other, falls easy prey to criticism for what has been left out by the editors. Personal preferences always play a role in these decisions; notwithstanding this, the virtual absence of such prominent writers and influential modernist thinkers as Franz Kafka or Frank Lloyd Wright clashes with my personal preferences. But the decision not to include longer texts—or even complete literary prose works—does have the advantage that it leaves the individual instructor the option to choose his or her favorite text in addition to the volume and still profit from the breadth of the anthology.

The major market for this book will most likely be the use as a course book. Indeed, the editors in their introduction express their wish that “this anthology will help generate more research and encourage fresh and insightful pedagogical explorations of the field” (xviii). For such use the anthology’s comprehensive selection of critical writing and aesthetic manifestos is very apt. The decision to include works published in the wake of and prior to what is known as high modernism (Section I includes Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, and excerpts from texts on modernist aesthetics), as well as a number of texts written after the heyday of modernism (Section III features, amongst others, Brecht, F.R. Leavis, W.B. Yeats, Eisenstein, and Benjamin), may help situate the concept of modernism more broadly and critically in the classroom setting. In any case, the anthology offers the reader an enhanced sense of both the emergence and the lasting importance of modernism in art and thinking.

It is mostly Section II, The Avant-Garde, though, which brings together rare manifestos and declarations, thereby addressing issues at the center of the modernist "movement," however strange this may sound in the face of the editors' claim that "Modernism is not a movement" [xvii]. With these avant-garde texts, the editors emphasize their view of modernism as a network of literary, aesthetic, social, and philosophical texts, situated in the midst of an artistic and aesthetic development whose essence the editors do not want to see in "the spirit of formal experimentation" (xvii) as has been done in the past. On the contrary, they want to "unsettle and rethink" (xviii) such categorical simplification. The occasional representation of facsimile prints of experimental manifestos, though, highlights the formal creativity of those texts.

While the anthology as a whole must be described as a valuable contribution to the recent revitalization of the study of modernism, it should be mentioned that the very brief introduction bears similarities to a user's guide. It hardly provides an initiation to modernism, but rather states the editors' view of modernism in bland and programmatic terms. The introduction also briefly outlines the editorial structure of the anthology and the rationale behind the division into three sections. Individual entries in the anthology are prefaced by cursory biographical and bibliographical sketches of the respective authors. While the index is helpful in a book that keeps cross-references to the absolute minimum, it nevertheless disappoints by listing mostly proper names and artistic periodicals. More general entries (such as "architecture") are widely absent, as is any kind of bibliography or list of titles for further reading. Nevertheless, these features will most likely not keep the anthology from becoming a popular course book.

In short, the timing of the anthology's publication at a time of renewed interest in modernism is superb. The broad outline of this volume and the editors' contemporary view of modernism leave sufficient room for the inclusion of authors and texts which only a short while ago would not have been considered canonical, as, for example, texts associated with the Harlem Renaissance. Thus, the anthology is in the forefront of the recent re-evaluation of the modernist canon. All things considered, the collection does exactly what its subtitle claims: it indeed is a comprehensive collection of sources and documents.

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Danielle Marx-Scouras. *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel. Literature and the Left in the Wake of Engagement*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996. 254 pp.

Danielle Marx-Scouras sets out to correct the record on the controversial French journal *Tel Quel* (TQ) by offering a comprehensive examination of its history from inception to its phoenix-like rebirth as *L'Infini* that traces the intellectual and cultural climate in which it struggled, fought, and thrived. A journal that sought controversy, TQ has nevertheless drawn "virulent and relentless attacks" from academicians, journalists, and politicians, who have succeeded in belittling its importance and refusing to recognize its central project. Marx-Scouras defines this project as TQ's "coherent cultural program" for continual "cultural renewal" (8). The record Marx-Scouras wants to set straight is the commonly-held criticism against TQ for its "eclectic confusion" and political shifting—in short, its perceived opportunism in joining (or creating) the avant-garde theory or movement of the hour. Instead, she claims to demonstrate how a coherent cultural program of renewal was set in place in the review's inaugural issue and continued unabated until its end in 1982. Essentially, TQ liberated literature from its enslavement to a politics of engagement without, moreover, relegating it to a simple rehashing of aesthetic ideology ("art for art's sake"). Ideally, Marx-Scouras argues, TQ's cultural venture salvaged the very notion of avant-garde by giving back to literature its "subversive potential," TQ's constant shifting and theoretical reversals in effect representing the avant-garde at its very best, that is, taking charge of its own subversion as well as that of the reigning political or cultural ideology. Realistically, however, as Marx-Scouras discusses in her concluding remarks, certain criticisms must be leveled against TQ's claim to cultural renewal when it can be equally demonstrated that the journal's avant-gardism remained confined to the very parochial limits of France (or perhaps Western Europe) while it totally missed the advent of Eastern European, Third World, and minority dissident politics and aesthetics; in other words, TQ failed to acknowledge, let alone anticipate, the transnational avant-gardes of the eighties and nineties.

Marx-Scouras's study progresses chronologically. Chapter 1 (roughly 1958-1962) examines the stunning debut of TQ, whose program sought the radical disengagement of literature from politics in the wake of de-Stalinization and decolonization. Positioning itself on the Right, Marx-Scouras argues, was TQ's way of exposing the real

reactionaries: the communist Left and surrealists who would not break with the Soviet bloc for years to come. With its new interest in semiotics, psychoanalysis, and the New Novel, TQ claimed literature's renewal and empowerment, having once freed it from the shackles of a history and politics the new generation of writers refused to admit as their own. Chapter 2 covers the first half of TQ's "theoretico-formalist phase" (1960-1965)—perhaps its richest years, due in part to its public success, in particular, at the 1963 colloquium at Cerisy (that would culminate in the 1968 publication of *Théorie d'Ensemble*). Disengagement is pushed to an extreme—"to the articulation of literature as a practice of writing (*écriture*)" closer to the work of philosophy and psychoanalysis. This time, TQ targeted not only writers and their outdated politics of engagement, but the subject (writer) and his/her object (novel) themselves. The "interrogation of language" takes the place of the "work" that seeks metaphysical, political or aesthetic "truth." Marx-Scouras again underscores the radical and subversive nature of the TQ project since its turn to theory—which is simultaneously raised to the level of practice—in effect re-embraces the political since it critically examined, and reproached as such, all systems of discourse, language, and social codes.

Chapter 3 overlaps the preceding one by concentrating on the three years prior to May 1968. TQ has by now exploded onto the French intellectual scene with such contributors as Barthes, Derrida, Genette, Todorov, Foucault, and Kristeva. Furthermore, during this period, it crosses the Atlantic to find an enthusiastic audience at certain American universities (Barthes appeared at the 1966 Johns Hopkins University symposium). The 1963 Barthes-Picard debate furthers TQ's attack on academic or institutional criticism and the University. By the end of the sixties, TQ's "theoretical" practice, now squarely in the cultural limelight, has once again positioned itself to confront the world of politics.

Chapter 4 takes on the complex and controversial relationship between TQ and leftist politics from 1967-1971. Marx-Scouras stresses the radical nature of Telquelian politics which, by turning to the Maoists, claims to be more royalist than the king, its fellow travelers of the PCF. Whereas the PCF and Eurocommunists were stuck in a nineteenth-century notion of revolution as a political and economic "event," TQ, under its newly acquired Chinese mask, embraced the real, that is, cultural alternative to politics "which ultimately led TQ back to literature as a personal experience after the deviation resulting from theory" (172).

Chapter 5 deals with TQ's final and probably oddest turn: this time its voyage to a new continent, America. With the crisis of the French Left of the seventies and TQ's break with China in 1974, Marx-Scouras measures the journal's own shift as a crisis stemming from "a fear of the 'massification' of culture and society and the subordination of the individual to the collective" (180). This conveniently allows for TQ to read its ultimate swerve to the Right again as the fortunate, if not altogether prophetic, anticipation of the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism. Always ahead of the crowd, TQ "befriended the dissidents and *nouveaux philosophes*, relinquished Marxism, and declared the avant-garde dead" (21), thus exhausting its critics and rivals by declaring the exhaustion of culture, history, and politics *tout court*.

Marx-Scouras draws from a vast body of materials: from close reading of the complete series of TQ to those of rival journals (the *NRF*, *Les Temps Modernes*, *Les Lettres Francaises*), personal interviews with many of the TQ group past and present, memoirs, contemporaneous press articles, and recent scholarship on post-war French intellectuals. While her research is extensive and thorough, her analysis lacks the same rigor. What begins, and continues for four chapters, as a historical appraisal supporting the thesis of the TQ project of cultural renewal, turns into an indictment against the journal's political equivocations and blindness in Chapter 5. Furthermore, the conclusion suggests that TQ's final months, along with its rebirth as a different journal, should be understood as an almost selfish scramble on the part of its founding editor, Sollers, to settle himself and his "cohorts" into a sort of middle-aged complacency, continuing to publish themselves as *L'Infini* at the more prestigious Gallimard publishing house. That some of these embarrassing questions about equivocation and personal opportunism were not forcefully posed in earlier chapters weakens Marx-Scouras's analysis overall. Nevertheless, *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel* remains an important work on French intellectual history by providing its readers a wealth of materials and insights into one of the most eclectic and original cultural episodes of twentieth-century French thought.

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Judith M. Melton. *The Face of Exile: Autobiographical Journeys*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1998. 225 pp.

Judith M. Melton's study of exile autobiographies written by those fleeing Nazi Germany and its cancerous outgrowths in Europe fully succeeds in putting a face to exile. In fact, the author provides an impressive albeit almost overwhelming panorama of exile autobiography in this ordered and comprehensive view of the field. Moreover, Melton skilfully incorporates individual autobiographical stories into larger socio-political frameworks. However, amidst this deserved praise there is some room for criticism.

A discussion relating exile to autobiographical writing serves as an introduction to the study, which is then divided into two parts. While exile as a metaphor for life in this century receives attention, it is the often painful, life-altering side of exile as a real experience that is emphasized. Thus, exile autobiography is seen as that which—no matter the form or medium—is to be valued because “[t]he writing process itself creates a transformation for the exile, helping him or her to overcome the psychological trauma of the experience.”

The first part of the study addresses themes in early autobiographical exile texts of the period. The first chapter deals with “focused memoirs,” which both illuminate the history-autobiography relation and provide subjective portrayals of the crisis engendered by exile, as in Klaus and Erika Mann's *Escape to Life*. The second chapter relates narratives of flight (with a focus on Renée Fersen-Osten and Alfred Döblin's autobiographies); of internment (Arthur Koestler and Lion Feuchtwanger); and of rescue projects such as that of the New York-based Emergency Rescue Committee. The third chapter continues the work of Dorit Bader Whiteman, bringing to light the often neglected cases of Jews who escaped and survived persecution. Considered among the varied responses to persecution are the transports allowing some children to leave Germany without their parents; the assumption of “Aryan” identities in order to hide (Yehuda Nir and Jakov Lind); and adult depictions of flight from Nazi Germany as children (George Clare, Frederic Zeller, and Lilian Furst). The fourth chapter concentrates on exiles coming to terms with their fate after the war. Carl Zuckmayer's situation is used to highlight the often difficult acclimatization of writers and actors to American life and politics, while the autobiographical responses to exile of George Grosz and Oskar Kokoschka also receive attention.

The second part, entitled "Reconstructions," begins with another exploration of theoretical issues of exile autobiography. Here Melton presents a brief overview of autobiographical scholarship in relation to her subject, differentiating between the majority of modern critics dismissive of the notion of a unified and ahistorical self (deconstructionist, structuralist, and feminist critics), and autobiographers as individuals, who mostly operate with an intact vision of self. Her starting point is the view of autobiography as a process of self-creation and self-reconstruction (with a discussion of the autobiographical scholars Paul Jay and Paul John Eakin), which is then tied to Erik Erikson's identity formation psychology. Melton argues that if autobiography helps (re)create the self, then for the self seeking psychological continuity—illusory or not—"the act of writing becomes therapy." This is deemed to be particularly important for exile autobiographers, who have suffered "psychic rupture." This psychological emphasis becomes even more evident in Melton's discussion of Robert J. Lifton's "psychic numbing," that is, roughly speaking, the disintegration of self caused by the collapse of (inner) systems of representation.

The study then deals with various representations of childhood in autobiography, from nostalgic responses (Vladimir Nabokov and Eva Hoffman) to more painful childhood memories (Gregor V. Rezzori and Christa Wolf). In dealing with intellectual responses to exile, Czeslaw Milosz, Witold Gombrowicz, Stefan Zweig, and Thomas Mann are discussed. In another chapter the comparative religions scholar Mircea Eliade is considered as someone who surmounts exile through his autobiography (the creation of personal myth) and diary (a workshop for life patterns). The discussion of languages and exiles focuses on Elias Canetti's autobiography, in which the German language represents that writer's exilic home.

The final chapter discusses reconstructions of the self in texts suited to postmodern interpretation (those of Eva Hoffman, Saul Friedländer, Rezzori, and Lind). Melton's argument here is convincing, particularly the connections drawn between "psychic numbing" and alienation through language. Melton's inclusion of Charlotte Salomon's *Life? or Theater? An Operetta* is to be applauded here. A final mini-study of Christa Wolf's *Patterns of Childhood* rounds out this chapter.

My criticisms of this study relate to its scope and method. The overview of exile autobiography arising out of European fascism calls for a wide net, with the danger of including those cases less suitable

for a study firmly based in identity psychology, which weakens an otherwise strong argument. In this vein the strong invective against Zweig—apparently because he does not meet the criteria of psychological veracity—strikes a jarring note, while an objective study of his autobiographical text itself is lacking. In the case of Canetti the general conclusions make sense, though there are a number of minor yet telling errors: the date of Canetti's exile (1938 not 1937), the circumstances of his father's death, and Canetti's residence in England (*not* up until his death). These errors point to the fact that at times the theoretical basis of Melton's study deforms and reduces Canetti's life experience. Finally, the case of Wolf is illustrative of how disappointing the recourse to "psychic numbing" can be at times. The phenomenon is demonstrated in Wolf, but the text is much more than an illustration of the clinical term. These sorts of difficulties hinder a complete acceptance of Melton's argument, a position all the more torturous as this study—because or despite its strong psychological bent—succeeds in being more than just interesting, thanks to the narrator's engaging style and otherwise conscientious delineation of difference.

In the unwieldy field of autobiography Judith M. Melton offers up a wealth of autobiographical exile experiences. This is a cogent and forceful, and for the most part thoroughly convincing book, a solid foundation for the field of exile autobiography. It is well worth the journey.

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Warren Motte. *Small Worlds: Minimalism in Contemporary French Literature*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1999. 213 pp.

Small Worlds consists of an initial, theoretical chapter that discusses contemporary minimalism in music and the visual arts as well as literature, followed by ten chapters, each of which deals with a French author whose work embodies salient traits of minimalist aesthetics. The writers range from the very well-known, such as Edmond Jabès and Annie Ernaux, to the scarcely known, Olivier Targowla. Warren Motte is clearly much taken by the notion of brevity that is commonly associated with minimalism; each chapter is sharply fo-

cused and succinct, and, given the minimalist assumption that less can be more, it will perhaps be no surprise to learn that, taken together, these chapters add up to the most wide-ranging and illuminating analysis of contemporary French minimalist literature currently available.

The first chapter, "Small Worlds," places minimalism in its international context. Motte describes its American origins and its particular impact on sculpture, but more significantly he explains the philosophical bases for some contemporary artists' fascination with the small, with the seemingly simple, with repetition and symmetry. Minimalism reflects an awareness that, despite the plethora of information sources such as CNN and the Internet, human knowledge and power are radically restricted, and that this restriction can be a source of creativity (3). The minimalist is an essentialist rather than a nihilist, since the artist's aim is to exploit the myriad constraints placed on the individual and to distill from these constrictions on people and events their "crystallized abundance" (5). The danger in such a strategy is, of course, to make a fetish of the obvious and the banal. Motte's response to this criticism is that minimalism strives to locate profound experience in ordinary experience, a thesis he illustrates brilliantly in his chapter on Jacques Jouet's *107 Âmes*. As Motte clearly shows, the discomfort sometimes felt in the presence of a minimalist artifact stems from an inability or unwillingness to engage with new ways of formulating a sense of the present. Unlike other artistic practices, minimalism destabilizes the notion of genre, as well as received ideas about art, and values the object itself rather than some putative significance that things have traditionally been called upon to embody. The result is to create "a new space for art's maneuvers" (7).

This new space is clearly on the margins, which for Motte are the places where one searches for meaning where none was thought to exist. Jabès' *Récit* examines the impoverishment of the horizon of possibility in the post-Auschwitz era, while at the same time evoking the potential for ethical behavior in such a world. Jean-Philippe Toussaint's *La Salle de bain* centers on a man who finds no compelling reason to leave his bathroom, yet the novelist turns this unpromising premise into a meditation on time and its uses. Annie Ernaux's *La Place* explores the seeming paradox that an extreme poverty of expression can enhance aesthetic experience.

Each chapter in this book can be read as an excellent analysis of an author's novel or play in terms of the ways the various works

illustrate strategies of minimalism. However, if there is a dominant motif in each discussion, one that goes beyond a particular deployment of simplicity, repetition, etc., it is the challenge minimalism poses to traditional reading practices. Readers are constantly invited into the text, to identify, for example, with the guy in the bath tub, but, more importantly, readers are requested to evaluate their ways of reading contemporary literature. Marie Redonnet's drama, *Tir et Lir*, is, among other things, a sustained examination of reading. In *L'Occupation des sols*, the struggle of Jean Echenoz's characters to recuperate the memory of the woman they loved parallels the reader's efforts to rescue meaning from a world that has been destroyed. In Emmanuèle Bernheim's *Sa Femme*, the main character's desire for experience which is at once transgressive and ecstatic, and thus an escape from the quotidian, poses the question of what one looks for in a literary text. Yet, if all the works Motte discusses treat the role of the reader, none does so as thoroughly as does Patrick Roegier's *Beau Regard*.

Beau Regard centers on a dinner where everyone is eating lobster. The main character, Ange, is a young hitchhiker invited to join the other guests at the meal. Nothing really happens, except for the eating. Ange, out of boredom, starts to "read" the assembled guests, particularly the host, Ross, but in order to do so, he must develop new reading techniques. Once he has done so, what initially might have seemed boring now becomes quite fascinating. He learns to concentrate to such an extent that the familiar becomes strange, and the banal adventurous. His gaze tells him much about the objects before his eyes, but little concerning his companions' inner lives. Ange can recognize what people do, but he has no means of fathoming the "whys" that govern their conduct; he can register events, but not explain them. Nevertheless, he accepts the rules, contents himself with what can be garnered from his participation at the dinner, and leaves the meal with a degree of lingering intellectual satisfaction and pleasure.

Ange is the ideal reader for the minimalist text. If he is forced to develop a new set of protocols in order to learn from and enjoy his experience, it is because he accepts the social limitations his existential situation has imposed upon him, and does not seek after deeper meanings where perhaps there is none. He profits, as best he can, from the restricted control he can assert over his own life. Throughout *Beau Regard* Ange has steadily developed his readerly skills by learning to see the world anew.

Ange is, of course, a fictional character, a product of Patrick Roegier's imagination. It may well be that few ordinary readers have such natural ability, but thanks to Warren Motte's *Small Worlds*, anyone interested in the subject will be able to enter into the minimalist world, and discover that it is really not that small.

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Ardis L. Nelson, ed. *Guillermo Cabrera Infante: Essays, and Other Arts*. New York: Twayne Press, 1999. xxv + 242 pp.

The magic of words is also the magic of names: this is an attachment in meaning and sound that listeners and readers can scarcely escape from. To be awarded the Cervantes Prize and to write in Cuban, "the different dialects of Spanish spoken in Cuba," are circumstances that, among other things, trigger the interest of scholars and readers. The publication of this collection of papers in book form is timely and significant. The large number of newspaper articles, film reviews, essays, and books by Guillermo Cabrera Infante (GCI) need an updating and revision that may enhance the comprehension of the literary dimension of an author who is commonly associated with a punning fad. But that is merely a surface phenomenon; the actual interest of the author and of this book about his writings lies in the deep sense of freedom of speech, and thought, represented in his writings.

The complex and bright personality of GCI is examined in four separate sections: the writer as journalist, as cineaste, as critic, and as commentator. These sections run also parallel to the biographical development of the author. GCI's beginnings in *Bohemia* and *Carteles* are analysed by Raymond D. Souza. His friendship with Nestor Almendros and his endeavor to speak openly in *Lunes de Revolución* are emphasized in the paper by William Luis. "Icosaedros" is a collection of articles published by GCI in *El País* dealing with London and Cuba; the paper by Carlos Cuadra undoes the parallelism between historical characters and events that stifle freedom of expression: tyranny, intolerance. Raymond D. Souza notices the deep relation of GCI with films, his writing of a script of *Under the Volcano* for Joseph Losey, and his involvement with English, which makes him

akin to writers who moved “between different cultures and languages such as Jorge Luis Borges, Joseph Conrad, and Vladimir Nabokov” (64).

The book gains in “literary” insight in the paper by Kenneth Hall explaining GCI’s parody, which refers back to Juvenal and Lucian, Quevedo, and Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne. According to Hall, GCI makes a new contribution to the essay form by taking “the journalistic obituary into the territory of the neobaroque and connects it with the classical satiric tradition” (79). The analysis of *Cine o sardina*, also by Hall, reveals the intense love of GCI with the movies.

“No man is an island” John Donne scripsit. And that is the main reminder one can find in another paper by Carlos Cuadra on the influence of Jorge Luis Borges. GCI met Borges several times and wrote several essays on him. The conceptual anxiety of influence devised by Harold Bloom looms large in the horizon of GCI, or at least Cuadra writes so. The paper cathects on Borges and GCI, an unusual duo many a critic would not tolerate.

One of the most original papers is the one by the editor of the book, Ardis L. Nelson, who focuses upon Buñuel and Surrealism and GCI as “the angel exterminator of language” (175). The poetics of surrealism by Breton is used to account for Buñuel’s films and the admiration GCI felt for him as shown in interviews and essays, from the first interviews to “Un perro murciano.” The anxiety of influence rides again.

What is in a cigar? Is there life after ashes? These seem to be the questions prompting GCI to write *Holy Smoke*, a book written in English, since there is no Spanish version available as yet. Regina Janes writes on the problem of style and genre and risks metaphors which some critics might not judge politically correct: “In his cigar, his Havana has gone portable and gone into exile” (179). The paper gives way to the application of ideas by Bakhtin, the inclusion in the book by GCI of verse by Mallarmé and the intercultural level of English and French. Isn’t this *avant-garde*? Certainly, exile is not.

The final paper by Nedda G. de Anhalt is devoted to *Mea Cuba*, the *bête noire* of GCI’s committed nonreaders. A collection of papers that follows a thread of time and space *à la Proust* is analysed in “*Mea Cuba*: The “Proust-Valía” of History.” Drawing a parallel between Proust and GCI is an exercise in comparative literature that shows the satirical style of Anatole France, Jonathan Swift, and George Orwell (190). The book by GCI is a collection of portraits and impressions making up a good survey of the lack of freedom of expression in

Cuba. GCI's irony, parody, satire, and puns are tokens of a style based upon language as expression against prohibition—no resentment shown, only words. This final paper is also a deep reflection on the problem of language and exile.

The book ends with an accurate list of GCI's publications, that readers must appreciate as a unique attempt to put together the writing of an author well-known and respected in Spain and other countries, whose "holy smoke" is quite healthy, though some thought-police do not deem it so.

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Arthur Redding. *Raids on Human Consciousness: Writing, Anarchism, and Violence*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1998. 275 pp.

Provoked by his belief that violence is "probably the trendiest and least understood" of contemporary vogue words (27), Arthur Redding sets a challenging task for himself: to establish a thematics of violence by describing an evolving idea of violence comprised of two complementary theoretical positions, the one holding that social and political violence is in some way deviant, the other regarding violence as a necessary component of ideology and as integral to dynamic systems. He treats three main bodies of thought: leftist writing, both old and new; modern American, British, and European fiction; and contemporary American fiction.

In examining the textualization of violence, Redding scrutinizes above all the belief that violence is necessary for radical change and the relationship between human suffering and the institutional apparatuses that enmesh it. Included within the latter is the tension between violence and representation; while acknowledging Elaine Scarry's work on the impossibility of adequately conveying pain and suffering through language and, indeed, while characterizing violence as "that which by definition cannot be grasped" (34), Redding emphasizes the need to search for sufficient language to represent violent acts in order to diminish human suffering. As Redding's analyses show, the dynamic between the reality of violence in the modern world and the

difficulty of representing it has led to a wealth of linguistic experimentation.

Redding's intellectual formation looms large throughout the book, both explicitly and implicitly. He is a self-described literary critic (2), non-traditional Marxist (186), and poststructuralist (13-14). Yet he also transcends all three categories: he is dealing with an idea of violence "as it has been acknowledged in various generic texts drawn from sociology, philosophy, political theory, psychoanalysis, and literature" (4); his pivotal discussion of the Marxist thinker Georges Sorel regards Sorel's reading of Marx as "reductive" (55); and although his study invokes names such as Foucault, Derrida, de Man, Kristeva, Jameson, Deleuze, Guattari, Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Lyotard, Benhabib, and de Certeau, Redding's central question constitutes a "challenge to postmodernist thinking: can we imagine a world of difference which is not already a world of strife?" (17).

Insofar as anarchism is for Redding perhaps the best manifestation of the revelatory possibilities of violence, he casts new light on the subject by using the work of Sorel—an exemplar of the "anarcho-syndicalist tradition" (41)—as a touchstone for discussing the thought of other anarchist writers such as Michael Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, and Emma Goldman, as well as for assessing related ideas in Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin. He then goes on to examine novels by Émile Zola, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Frank Norris, and Jack London, pointing up the ambivalence of these modern writers toward the "anarchist threat of unrestrained and epidemic violence" (116) at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Redding's analyses of the thematization of anarchism contain some illuminating insights about modern fiction. For example, he discerns a pattern in which a certain type of fictional figure often functions as a scapegoat for anarchic activity, a character who cannot be easily explained and onto whom violence is projected. As he shows, this figure is frequently a woman, as in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, or a foreigner, as in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. Similarly, using Bakhtin's work on dialogism, Redding's reading of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* demonstrates the way in which the novel's polyphonic style reflects the chaos of the modern world, both the alienating effects of capitalism and the destructive potential of revolution. Further modern writers Redding treats are Ernest Hemingway, Herman Melville, and Zora Neale Hurston.

One principal aim of Redding's study is to demonstrate that "the formalized reworking of fantasies of violence . . . will be dogged by a formalization of violence itself" (141). The endpoint of this process is that real violence comes to be supplanted by the aesthetic simulacra and commodified, as in the celebration of violence in films. In the postmodern age, Redding argues, political violence has become a commodity, as has the whole image of "the sixties." As he succinctly puts it, "Revolution sells" (187). But the marketing of violence in the contemporary era manifests gender differences. Redding speculates that the fascination with violence on the part of some male members of the New Left caused the women's movement to distance itself. Analogously, in examining violence in the works of postwar male writers such as Don DeLillo, Norman Mailer, Bret Easton Ellis, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and William Burroughs, Redding tracks a thematic constellation in which raw ego is the only bulwark against a preoccupation with death. The fiction of Kathy Acker, by contrast, which for Redding embodies an "aesthetics of terror" (222), is obsessively masochistic, yet aimed at a radical transformation.

The move from the frequently egoistic and nihilistic fictions of many contemporary male writers to the ultimately productive thrust of Acker's work is typical of the positive spirit of Redding's study. Despite a few lapses into overly jargon-laden poststructuralist language, this dense, ambitious, sophisticated book achieves a rare feat: it creates in the reader's mind the image not only of an intelligent, erudite author but of a socially concerned human being.

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