

Book Reviews

Paisley Livingston, *Models of Desire: René Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1992. 174 pp.

According to Karl Popper, “scientists have to be reductionist in the sense that nothing is as great a success in science as a successful reduction” (“Scientific Reduction and the Essential Incompleteness of All Science,” *Studies in the Philosophy of Biology*, ed. F. Ayala [London: Macmillan, 1974], 259). That perhaps explains the allure but also the hazards of René Girard’s mimetic hypothesis as it aims to explain the behavior of individuals and institutions across all of history and prehistory besides, for it extends to speculation on human origins, together with language origins. By embracing so much, it risks grasping too little of a precise and verifiable nature. In fact, a frequent reproach to Girard’s work, precisely drawn from Popper, is that in its vast theoretical reach it is unfalsifiable—notwithstanding the progress that our reasoning has made against that often cited and rarely consulted criterion (see Hilary Putnam’s argument, “Beyond Historicism” in *Realism and Reason* [New York: Cambridge, UP, 1983]).

It is an “absence of analytic rigor” in and around Girard’s work that motivates Paisley Livingston’s meticulous, though admittedly selective, study. *Models of Desire* undertakes a more “systematic reconstruction” of certain aspects of Girard’s thought, which Livingston alleges is “not a theory in the strict sense,” (the sense proffered in a text by Thomas Merton to which a footnote refers us without further elaboration). Livingston articulates Girard’s thought in the context of philosophies of psychology and action theory, relating their tenets to advanced research in behavioral sciences, animal and human. He subjects Girard’s opulent (and, to many, extravagant) claims to a series of analytical tests and soberly schematic formulations.

The author reminds us at the outset that Girard’s “fundamental concept” is mimesis: in short, “people desire ‘according to others,’ not in terms of their own intrinsic preferences” (xii). This is just the notion that is inimical to most of our prevailing psychologies, from the depth-dynamic theories of instincts or drives to intentionalist explanations requiring the implausible agency of a fully conscious, autonomous and deliberative subject, who remains the improbable agent of so much ethical disquisition. By insisting that our orientation to the other is primary, as Livingston states, Girard’s “interindividualist” psychology is radically interactional; it is even more so, as he shows, than the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura, for whom motivation precedes imitation.

This book rightly gives lengthy consideration to the structure and dynamics of “double mediation” (“any situation in which two agents serve

reciprocally as each other's models or mediators" [71]), and it handily elucidates the paradoxes of self-deception and self-deceit that beset any desire mediated by others. In the course of probing Girard's thought, Livingston is especially skilled in arbitrating the claims of rival psychologies, trait vs. situational, intentionalist vs. attitudinal, cognitive vs. motivational (or conative). This examination enables him to engage a more precise logical vocabulary and syntax concerning beliefs, desires, intentions, and motivations, whose complex interplay composes human behavior. He introduces the highly serviceable notion of "tutelary beliefs" ("beliefs that inform the believer that someone's desire is worth copying" [42] in order to clarify "the inferential processes, conscious or not, by which agents become models for other agents." He effectively argues against the privilege of any one "master term," such as Being, the Good, autonomy, self-sufficiency, or prestige, by which to define the model's appeal or motivational prerogative. This is a valuable gesture in shielding Girard's thinking from the harness of any particular philosophical or metaphysical idiom. If Eric Gans is right in arguing after Girard that metaphysics is but "the cultural expression of metaphysical desire" (*The Origin of Language: A Formal Theory of Representation* [Berkeley: U of California P, 1981], p. 272), then a theory of mediated desire is an empirical critique of metaphysics and in no wise subordinate to it.

One of the signal achievements of Livingston's investigation is to highlight distinctions, qualifications, and nuances in Girard's own writings that to date have gone largely unnoticed and that ultimately further the scientific potential of his ideas by refining their focus. The author carefully discriminates, as Girardians frequently do not, between cooperative and conflictual mimesis, as between imitative and emulative desire, which alone leads plausibly to violence.

Such distinctions are in line with a persistent motif of this book, which is to separate Girard's insights and intuitions from what Livingston styles as "second order claims" about anthropology, history, and religion. Accordingly the author states that Girard's genetic hypothesis concerning the foundation of human cultural order in the scapegoat mechanism is "logically distinct from the psychology of mimetic desire" (104). He goes on to stipulate conditions, via a series of five hypotheses, under which Girard's theory of hominization gains plausibility in his effort to immunize Girard's thought from dependence on "certain of his substantive claims about the overarching dynamics of History and Revelation" (138): "I do not think it methodologically prudent to link the model of mimetic desire to articles of faith or to vast generalizations about the course of human history. Even if these statements happened to be true, they are not justified in the sense that there is not today any reasonable warrant for believing them" (139).

It is just such claims, however, that constitute the appeal of Girard's work for many scholars in anthropology, Scripture, and history, as well as literature. It is all very well to want to be methodologically correct, but a certain dose of courage and speculative risk has a payoff as well in the

human sciences. In his concluding paragraph, Livingston states his agreement with Girard on the "cognitive value of literature" (175), but then we have to acknowledge that it is not a leap of faith but of imagination that places Shakespeare, and not Hobbes, Pascal, not Pellerin, Proust, not Paléologue, at the cutting edge of social science theory. Methodological prudence is preserved at the price of a sentence like this one, and there are many such in this book: "One of my conclusions is that the idea of 'desire according to the other' is not as simple and univocal as it may seem but I also conclude that once it has been unpacked a bit, the notion identifies some types of situations that seem plausible and important" (170). By the light of such capacious and at the same time cautious reasoning, with its "some" and its "seem," one can doubtless argue successfully that various cows are black, others grey, white, brown, or mottled.

Even where Livingston resolutely breaks new ground, which is the case where he reads Girardian themes across Icelandic saga, which is marked by cycles of violent retribution, he ultimately retreats into overqualification that is at times numbingly circumspect: "My conclusion is that mimetic concepts describe a pattern of pertinent and typical motivational factors that may play a role in such affairs but that they should not be mistaken for an explanatory device that literally generates a functional description of the types of actions and interactions that make up the cycle of revenge" (173).

In sum, this compact and perhaps too nicely reasoned volume represents an ambiguous achievement for the kind of real knowledge that many claim for Girard's mimetic hypothesis. The author's epistemological scruples have a curious way of resembling the old theologians' *via negativa*: "To say that the mimetic selection of a model or a scapegoat is often—perhaps most often—not the product of a reflective decision does not support the conclusion that perceptions, beliefs and motives having semantic content do not contribute to its orientation" (174). With "tant de si et de mais," Girard's ideas may never be wed to Dame Theory, but this only suggests that we question the engagement with certain primly Anglo-American models of (un)truth seeking.

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Andrew J. McKenna, *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1992. 238 pp.

After a gigantic effort of synthesis, McKenna reflects that peace is founded on violence and madness, as is exemplified by such treaties as MAD (Mutual Agreement of Destruction, 64), which assures the stability of national borders of difference (linguistic, cultural, economical). McKenna follows the Girardian scape-goat structure of the sacred, which he combines with the Derridean "supplement." He deciphers clues of philosophy as a detective or a journalist of a fantastic or science fiction reality that

constitutes our geopolitical and cultural world. McKenna does not seek the murderer but the victim, who turns out to be the god madness, hidden away in the Daedalean labyrinth at the foundations of human society.

McKenna proposes to translate Derrida through the Girardian ethnological and historical grid—without jargon. He is aware that this leveling of difference between Derrida and Girard, as between Hebrew and Christian scriptures, does some violence to both. But McKenna is engaged in a strategy of survival for philosophy, salvaged from nihilist temptations—Derridean or other.

McKenna's paradoxical enterprise produces a fascinating scenario, casting Derrida as the "hypocritical reader" (Lautréamont/Breton) of Foucault, via Descartes (46-47), and Girard as the "enemy brother" (Crébillon/Poe/Lacan) of Deconstruction. The prefatory *Bourgeois gentilhomme* had announced that the plot would end with a trial that involves Derrida's thesis defense ("The Time of a Thesis" 181), Hannah Arendt's *Crises of the Republic* (1972) and *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1965), and Paul de Man, although McKenna approaches the latter "gingerly" (183). The king and the philosopher vie for the government (ever since Dionysius excluded Plato and philosophy from politics) during this mistrial, or anti-trial of "Representation and Decidability." The case is more and more up to date, touching upon responsibility and guilt with Sartrean *Nausée* and Derridean "renvois" (195). The representation concerned is not purely aesthetic of course, it involves political leadership as well, and the people's strategies when electing representatives. The search for representation involves a new mode of interpretation and reading.

According to McKenna, the scientific capability to augment violence exponentially does not guarantee a satisfying peace. Instead, he opts for a "Biblical theory" to find a solution to world violence, somewhere between Solomon's Judgment and the Good Samaritan discussed in the appendix. McKenna would propose a radical change of policies in human society, as well as a redefinition of borders and nation. Possibly, McKenna envisions a new era of responsibility when ambivalence does not mean that a minister can declare herself responsible but not guilty. He may also be urging professional critics into assuming a more active political and social role.

McKenna structures his reflection on a survey of key moments in literature. *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* serves to introduce a modern discussion of Aristotle and Plato, which moves towards the enlightenment by way of Cartesian thought. Rousseau serves as "pretext" to the discussion of "Violence and the Origin of Language" whereby it appears that the language of truth is also steeped in sacrificial violence as the modern victim becomes "a signifier of truth." The problems of representation and decidability appear out of "the Victim Age" or post-modernism. Reference to the past allows some type of representation, but in terms of future developments the assessment of the present remains elusive. The Future

perfect or the “après-coup” has to represent a time “always already” there as in the scriptures. “Biblical Theory” concludes this audacious study.

The teachers as philosophers are left wondering about their share of responsibility for the occurrences and regulation of human violence.

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James F. Murphy, *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1991. 221 pp.

The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature is a testimony to James Murphy's dedication to rewriting the narrative of 1930s communist literary criticism—a narrative that he demonstrates was the product of myopic literary historians peering through the lens of McCarthyism and Cold War anti-communist rhetoric. The resulting “glaring misinterpretation” (195) that Murphy thoroughly documents and refutes at every turn was the view held by the circle around the new *Partisan Review* that claimed to represent the daring departure from a decade of homogeneous, dogmatic literary criticism dictated by communist party politics (i.e., “leftism”). Through a comprehensive rereading of primary sources, Murphy shows that this history consists largely of the self-serving memories of liberals disavowing their communist pasts. Murphy's research corrects these histories and reminds us that some of these figures themselves were among the dogmatic fringe in the early thirties (e.g., Philip Rahv [78-80]), that the very journals accused of leftism not only were criticizing it as early as the late-twenties (*New Masses*, *The Daily Worker*) but also were working in harmony with the original *Partisan Review*, and finally that the new *Partisan Review*'s movement from communism and Trotskyism to liberalism coincided with the rise of McCarthy and culminated in an anti-communist position and in an endorsement from the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom (4).

Although the breadth of this discussion spans two decades and three nations, Murphy never loses sight of his thesis and is able to demonstrate that the accusations of leftism not only homogenize the criticism in the United States, but also ignore and distort the developments in Russia and Germany, many of which became relevant to American debates through their publication in *International Literature*, a journal omitted by other histories of the period (17). While it is to his credit that the narrative never gets tangled in the complex web of places, people, and times, the thesis that serves as a guide is not so much a critical sieve that sorts out the subtleties of a sophisticated debate as it is something like a bulldozer that lists and counters the claims systematically, pushing each argument to one or the other side of the confrontation. For example, on the issues surrounding bourgeois writers and writers who are the “fellow travelers” of the communist ideology, Murphy clearly catalogues the two sides of the

issue—the rejection of these outsiders by a philosophy of ideological and class purity (leftist) versus their acceptance in an effort to encourage a wide range of supporters (anti-leftist)—and successfully refutes the claim that the new *Partisan Review* was the first proponent of the anti-leftist position. However, he rarely expands the horizon of his investigation to consider the influence that these marginal literary figures may have had on the debate itself. In this strategy, the literature and authors debated (ranging from Proust to Eliot to Dos Passos and Hemingway) become merely objects to prove that the communist critics included heterogeneity in their debates; they are never the subjects who helped to shape the literary milieu of the time.

Again and again, Murphy sacrifices fruitful topics of inquiry in order to prove his point, never straying from the short list of journals and organizations that have traditionally been included in the histories of this period. In accepting the terrain defined by the very narrative of the new *Partisan Review* that he is fighting against (a terrain on which the debate is about the position [leftist or anti-leftist] of a few journals [*New Masses*, *Partisan Review*, and *International Literature*] and Parties [communist and Trotskyist/Socialist]) I wonder whether Murphy hurts his attempt to provide American communism with a rich intellectual history more than helping it. Paul Buhle claims that it is exactly the switch to allegiances defined by parties and dogmas that severed the American communists' organic links to their cultural heritages—links, for example, to immigrant socialism or grassroots activism (Buhle, 155).

The tragic aspect of the constraints that Murphy puts on his investigation is that he has been forced into his position by the overwhelming anti-communist sentiment of the existing histories. Far from being free to explore issues such as the relation between culture and politics and to glean insights from the discussions of the past, Murphy can only labor to forge a framework in which the work of past communist intellectuals is not disfigured by accusations of reductiveness and economic determinism.

Despite his commitment to this task and his attempt at a complete revision of the literary history of the thirties, Murphy avoids romanticizing a period that is seductive to many in progressive politics today. Instead, he limits his work to the recovery of a significant debate that had been lost in subsequent erasures of communism's contribution to American culture. The narrative Murphy tells of the manipulation of this debate illustrates that once communism moderated its rhetoric to form the Popular Front against fascism in Europe, the message that gave it a unique power in the first third of the twentieth century was diluted and overrun by the New Deal version of the welfare state and by the unrelenting government propaganda that made a smooth transition from anti-communism. It is up to those like Murphy to redeem the heritage that has been suppressed; Murphy's book shows that this is necessarily a slow and meticulous project.

Reading of the ease with which the staff of the new *Partisan Review* singularly dictated a history made me wonder if the contributions of the

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academic and cultural left of this decade could be wiped away under the rubric of "PC," just as the debates of the twenties and thirties were mutilated by the label "leftist." Should the literary histories of the eighties and nineties be written by Dinesh D'Souza, Allen Bloom, John Searle, and Roger Kimball, I hope there will be the likes of James Murphy to rewrite them.

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Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siecle*. Stanford UP, 1991. 262 pp.

Over the last several years, the rhetoric of colonialism—the images with which Europeans represented their encounter with people beyond the confines of civilization—has captivated the attention of disciplines from literature to anthropology to law. In *Exotic Memories*, Chris Bongie undertakes the ambitious project of charting one central aspect of this rhetoric, the idea of the exotic, as it plays itself out in works of writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from Joseph Conrad to Victor Segalen to Pier Paolo Pasolini. The very richness and scope of Bongie's materials will render this book of interest to a wide range of readers interested in the cultural project of colonialism. Yet as with all projects of discovery, the charting of the territory does not in itself guarantee its mastery. One senses that Bongie and others will have more to say in the coming years about the rhetoric of exoticism during this crucial period of colonial history.

In a framework self-consciously evocative of the colonial encounter itself, *Exotic Memories* sets out on a journey through the many manifestations of the exotic Other as it metamorphoses into early twentieth-century modernism. Bongie posits the exoticist problem as one of loss. In the late nineteenth century, he argues, Europeans experienced their world as slowly expanding to pre-empt the very possibility of cultural difference. The obsession with "the space of the Other, outside and beyond the confines of a 'civilization,'" (4-5) was a longing hope that "[w]hat modernity is in the process of obliterating 'here' might still prove a present possibility in this alternative geopolitical space" (5). This hope is possible only after the fact, once the moment of difference has passed irretrievably from the scene, Bongie notes. The only question that remains, then, for Bongie as well as for his colonial subject becomes, as he puts it, "[h]ow and when was the Other, as it were, reduced (in)to the One," and what are we to make of the world that results from this reduction—of a globe without geopolitical alternatives in which . . . "as far as continents or new worlds go, everything's been seen, recognized, and invented?" (3, quoting Jules Verne's *Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant*). Bongie then proceeds to trace this concern through a series of manifestations and points of view, from Joseph Conrad's ambiva-

lence toward the boundary of self and other to Pier Paolo Pasolini's search for a third world aesthetic self-consciously located within the Other itself.

One of the most interesting aspects of this study is the postmodern orientation that informs Bongie's perspective on the rhetoric of modernism. Bongie moves beyond worn incantations of incredulities toward metanarratives to attempt a narrative that takes into account the philosophical insights of the last twenty years. Central to his method is an ambivalent relationship to the traditions he describes. He writes,

Divested of their pretension to Truth, revealed as "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms" (Nietzsche), these "truths" remain the only ones we have and for that reason we cannot avoid making use of them—although this use will henceforth be shaped by our awareness of their purely rhetorical nature. (25)

One senses at moments in Bongie's text, however, that he does not do justice to the complex and contradictory nature of nineteenth-century exoticism. The longing for an irretrievable past, for example, is only part of the European conception of the exotic during this period. We might represent exoticism as a marker for the relationship of self to other in many other ways. A sexualized referent that replicates gender distinctions in the metropolis might be one example. More importantly, however, Bongie's premise that the late nineteenth-century European saw cultural diversity as rapidly disappearing into a paved sea of European sameness mischaracterizes the conception of the time. More accurate and more appealing as a metaphor for our own time, in my view, is a notion of the interconnection between cultures as an infinite interpenetration and intersection that nevertheless is not the equivalent of universal uniformity.

Luckily, therefore, there is still more to say about the literature of exoticism, which continues to play such a central role in the European understanding of the world beyond its borders. And this no doubt is how Bongie would want it, for unlike the colonial project he describes, his discovery is not meant to foreshadow an end to imagination.

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Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia UP, 1991. 190 pp.

Amante Marine (1980) is the fourth text in a long series of publications by the French feminist philosopher, psychoanalyst, linguist and writer Luce Irigaray.

In the title, Irigaray uses the term "Amante" in order to signify that woman is not just an object of love, not reducible to just an object of
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desire—"l'aimée," the beloved. Thus, she proposes a love that distinguishes itself from the male models discussed in this text. A different kind of love that would constitute a third term, beyond masculine as well as feminine self-love, whereby each can meet the other without assimilating or destroying the other, is an idea she develops further in *J'aime à toi* (1992).

The liquid element alluded to in the title—the "fluid depths" that engender human beings—seemed to have been the greatest fear of Nietzsche. Always "perched on any mountain peak," he never dwelled at lesser altitudes. "It is always hot, dry, and hard in your world. And to excel for you always requires a bridge" (13), Irigaray says to Nietzsche as she assumes the role of the "Marine Lover."

Engaging herself in a sympathetic yet deconstructive "dialogue" with subjects close to the heart of Nietzsche's philosophical reflections on the "Superman," Greek tragedy and the Christian doctrine, Irigaray pursues a reading linked to the body, unveiling certain configurations that were silenced in Nietzsche's thought. The multiple themes she touches on center, essentially, around the topic of sexual difference, irreducible to the other, which, according to Irigaray, is the radical "un-thought-of" in all of Western intellectual and historical traditions. In a partly reactive, partly creative manner, she outlines a new philosophy in which the difference between the sexes needs to acquire the status of a problematic to be dealt with, since in her mind all that is so-called "universal" is in fact "sexuated" (*sexué*)—including philosophical discourse, which sets forth the law for all other discourses (*Irigaray Reader* 122).

Irigaray's arguments—written in a highly lyrical, meandering style that defies any distinction between theory, fiction and philosophy—serve as a variation on topics alluded to in previous texts, as well as early versions of topics discussed in more depth in subsequent works. Examples include the theme of fluidity the theme of an ethics of sexual difference the theme of the "murder" of the mother, and the theme of contiguity as in the image of two lips touching that allows for the representation of woman's desire "for-itself" and the possibility of the divine on the side of woman.

In "Speaking of Immemorial Waters" (Part I), we listen to the voice of a woman attentive to the "limits" and "holes" in the other's discourse a voice that rediscovers her "own becoming": "I shall make a thread to find my way back. . . . This is fortune! That in your excrement I must read the sign of my greatness!" (25). Against the "man of resentment" and his eternal flight "over" life, she affirms the "hic et nunc" and compares herself to the rising and falling sea, enraptured in the "enchantment of living." She reminds Nietzsche that the foundation of everything he has built upon is "never just a solid plane" but rests on "subterranean and submarine life, on capped fires and winds which . . . stir ceaselessly beneath that shell" (20). In paying close attention to the unconscious at work in Nietzsche's philosophy, Irigaray uncovers in his "myth of the eternal return" the hidden resentment of having been born of a female other (26).

This "female other" corresponds to her interlocutor's fears of the liquid

elements, both external and internal to the body a body that can never "overcome" that which drives his "will"—unless one be annihilated or broken (43). One of the highlights of this chapter is undoubtedly a seven-page long allegory of the sea (the "female other"), which remains "incorruptible" and not to be "gathered up into a single thought" (47). Suggesting an end to the woman as "yes-sayer" who joins "his" game of mimicry and who constitutes the basis for "his" infinite reserves of sublimation and dissimulation (33) that cut her off from her/self, Irigaray proposes an opening of the "eternal return of the same" by giving it at least two poles, irreducibly other, which would un-do the "permanence of the identical" that creates the "abyss" in which both male and female are lost (70).

In "Veiled Lips" (Part II), Irigaray pursues her analysis of the trappings of "mimicry" played out by women, a game the/a woman never signs up for without losing herself (84)—as exemplified by the "neutralized femininity" of Athena and the double of the masculine image, Ariadne. Against this loss of self, the "distancing of women" (including from themselves) which, according to Nietzsche, is the "magic and most powerful effect of woman" (*The Gay Science* 60), Irigaray posits the image of the female sex, the endless sharing of its lips, of its borders and its content, an image of the feminine that goes beyond "phenomenology" because woman affects herself, internally, without the appearance of a perceptible sign (87). Thus, she subsists, beneath discourse and beyond mimicry, threatening the stability of all values, yet being, at the same time, the living foundation for the whole staging of the world (118).

In the final chapter, "When the Gods are born," Irigaray re-examines the birth of male-gods and sons both in Greek mythology and in the Christian doctrine. The birth that surreptitiously veils the "murder" of the mother (Dionysos), the "theft" of the woman's identity which is transformed into the mirror-image of the male (Apollo/Artemis), and the sacrifice of the virgin-mother, the "mediatrix between word and flesh" (Mary), cumulatively establish the patriarchal order, the "kingdom" of the word and of the idea. Buried beneath the "architectonic of patriarchal sovereignty," is the murdered "earth ancestress" who Irigaray points out, erupts "in the form of ambivalence that have constantly to be solved and hierarchized, in twinned pairs of more or less good doubles" (160). An alternate "divine" is still to be discovered, according to Irigaray, beyond the secular paradigm of a son obeying his father. This new "divine," in which the female other has to re-appear in her irreducibility, would then thwart the possibility of her being "overcome" (189).

Though *Marine Lover* is not easy reading, either in the original or in the translation, the English version of this early text by Luce Irigaray adds greatly to the dissemination of her work for the English speaking public. However, the translation, at times too literal or too close to the French original, often does not make the work as accessible as it might.

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Christie McDonald, *The Proustian Fabric: Associations of Memory*. Lincoln & London: U of Nebraska P, 1991. 247 pp.

The introduction to Christie McDonald's *The Proustian Fabric: Associations of Memory* enumerates in an articulate and provocative fashion the problems she proposes to discuss in Proust's text. She will trace a topology of association, association being the "unanalyzed domain of thought," "the premise upon which Proust's sense of literature is to be constructed" (2). In Part I of her book, "The Project," McDonald examines those sketches for *A la recherche du temps perdu* that Proust wrote between 1908 and 1909. In Part II, "The Text," she proposes to explore "those sections that exceed the project and ultimately question its unity" (14). McDonald's stated interest is in the destabilizing activity of associations, the "process of mental wandering" (5) that defies Proust's efforts to contain his text within its projected parameters. As McDonald writes, a deviation from the project inheres within it" (6).

McDonald's organizing distinction between Proust's project and his text is a promising one, of interest to readers of Proust from a variety of theoretical perspectives—e.g., psychoanalytic, genetic, semiotic—all of which McDonald adopts at various moments in her book. Yet, McDonald seems to be guilty of precisely the problem she rightly finds so fascinating in Proust's work: the failure of her own text to live up to the stated promise of her project. While in Proust such a failure accounts for much of the richness and complexity of the *Recherche*, in a critical source such a failure has less allure. Filled with some provocative insights and readings, McDonald's book is frustratingly uneven. Indeed, the strength of some of her individual readings makes one wish the book were less flawed, above all in its (lack of) conceptual clarity, but at times in its theoretical eclecticism (McDonald dabbles in theory but won't commit her readings to it) and its textual analysis (too often she uses Proust's text merely to illustrate her argument, and not as a point of departure for rigorous semiotic and rhetorical analysis).

It is in the second chapter that problems surface in McDonald's method and argument. McDonald articulates well the paradoxical Proustian imperative of translating the ontological into the aesthetic—"first, translate 'me'; then, 'I' am untranslatable" (39). Yet when she moves into a discussion of the ostensible focus of her book—situating and defining "association" in Proust's work—her argument falters. To begin with, the references she makes to associations are often vague: the reader is left wondering throughout her book what McDonald means when she says "association." Are associations impressions? images? feelings? expressions of the unconscious? sub-conscious revelations? On several occasions, McDonald writes that associations confer meaning: e.g., the narrator's belief "that associations not only thicken and enrich objects; they bestow value" (40), and meaning "depends upon associations of memory" (56). The quotes that

McDonald uses to support such claims, however, imply something quite different: that associations *resist* meaning as often as they confer it.

The vagueness of McDonald's conceptual framework continues in the chapters to follow. She seems to want associations to elucidate the phenomenology and the epistemology of the Proustian subject, the aesthetics of the narrator, *and* the semiotics of Proust's language. These are huge critical aspirations and McDonald's text does meet them. What emerges for the reader is the sense that McDonald leaves the concept of association in general, undefined space—where it can mean anything, everything, or, ultimately, nothing—which Proust's text, in contrast, does not do. For throughout the *Recherche*, Proust *figures* the associations that McDonald deals with as specific tropes: as metaphors, metonymies, synecdoches and hosts of other figures, provocatively analyzed by other readers of Proust's text.

Implicitly at first, and then explicitly in her last chapter (see 144-45), McDonald posits "association" as prefigural, as the precursor to organized and ordered thought, in that hazy realm somewhere between the unconscious and conscious thought. It is, then, from the beginning an ontologically difficult topos to circumscribe. McDonald consistently juxtaposes the word "association" with other concepts, many of which are buzzwords for specific tropes according to rhetorical theorists like Jakobson and Genette. Her exploration of "paradigmatic organization of thought" (2), series of associative substitutions, and contiguous juxtapositions is reminiscent of Jakobson's bipolar organization of poetic thought along metaphorical and metonymical axes. She frequently asserts how association signifies through analogy (e.g., 96, 144), but other than a brief acknowledgement of rhetorical criticism over two pages in Chapter Two, she refuses a discussion of metaphor. Indeed, many of her textual examples of how association signifies through analogy seem to be instances—and good ones—of Genette's careful delineation in *Figures III* of the interpenetration of metaphor and metonymy as constitutive of Proustian discourse. To choose just one example, when McDonald writes of the association of "passion, as a subject to be suppressed, with red dresses or coats" (77), her example corresponds to the trope metonymy. Moreover, when in the next sentence she speaks figuratively of "such maneuvers of language," an expression she adopts because of its literal appearance in the Proustian passage she is analyzing (M. de Bréauté who "manoeuvr[e] sa langue"), what else is she talking about than the troping—the twists and turns—of language? It is not that every reader of Proust needs to talk about tropes. Rather, the nature of what McDonald is discussing implies at every turn the absence of what would make her entire text clearer. And in addition to the conceptual precision such rhetorical tools would lend her argument, tropes might also bridge the passage between the varied critical capacities (epistemological, psychoanalytical, semiotic) with which McDonald wants to endow the concept of association.

If one abandons the search for coherence in McDonald's (ostensibly) foundational narrative principle of association, her work yields many insights. Her third chapter on the Dreyfus affair is particularly strong, offering an at times moving argument for reading ethical consistency and commitment in Proust's aesthetic principles. In fact, her articulation of the ethical dilemma of both Proust and his narrator—"How can an ethical position be elaborated in the absence of absolutes?" (156)—admirably performs the transition from the discussion of politics to the emphasis in the last three chapters on Proust's narration of desire, jealousy, and love, from how the text calls into question "the truth of the subject and any corresponding unitary vision of the novel" (84), to "how love unsettles the pursuit of truth" (85). In Chapters Four and Five she suggestively explores jealousy as an endless, albeit unstable hermeneutic enterprise, one that inaugurates the discoveries of the incommensurability of otherness in love and the narrator's artistic vocation.

As the title of McDonald's last chapter, "The Proustian Fabric," seems to imply, this is to be the culmination of her argument as she explores the "associative network" leading to the displacement of the images by which Proust chose to represent his conception of the book: from cathedral, to the dress, to the stew (Françoise's "boeuf à la mode"). Here, McDonald seems to take into account some of the resistance offered by "association" as "[i]ts effect is to weaken the unitary vision of the novel, granting to it an open-ended construction in multiple images . . ." (141). Yet much of the territory McDonald covers here—on Fortuny, on the dress—is rather familiar, found in other critics' readings of the *Recherche*, most notably Mary Lydon's "Pli selon Pli: Proust and Fortuny" (*Romanic Review* 82.4 [November 1990]: 438-54). Moreover, McDonald replicates exactly the order and selection of the letters between Proust and Maria Madrazo excerpted by Lydon.

Notwithstanding these problems, McDonald concludes her book with a forceful reading of the excised passages on Venice in the 1988 Grasset edition of *Albertine disparue* and what they suggest about the *Recherche*'s aspirations towards totality. McDonald understates the case when she writes that for Proust as author, and his readers as critics, "a complete definitive work—even technically—is difficult to achieve" (153).

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Kathryn Hume, *Calvino's Fictions. Cogito and Cosmos*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. 212 pp.

Hume's study of Calvino's fictions is "emphatically non-chronological" because it focuses on "the fantastic structures underlying Calvino's imagination," and these "manifest themselves as a Cartesian cogito pitted against some form of cosmos in flux" (2)—no matter whether Calvino

describes a ragged group of anti-fascist partisans, a dinosaur's memories, or a Mexican *tortilla*. I wanted to start my review by quoting an early statement in which the author clarifies her intentions, her title, and her subtitle. A teacher of English who moved from medieval to modern and from English to Italian literature because of her interest in Calvino, Hume brings a refreshingly novel attitude to the field, an attitude free of accepted presuppositions and positions within established and almost canonical debates. For example, her emphatically non-chronological study contrasts markedly with existing books in Italian in which Calvino's writing career is interpreted along developmental lines, with fantasy fighting against the initial (neo)realism and finally overriding it, and with political engagement and disengagement considered as main topics for discussion.

Instead, by focusing on the Cartesian structures of Calvino's imagination, Hume is able to analyze Calvino's oeuvre from a highly intellectual viewpoint that can move freely back and forth along the chronological line of his fictions and into the meanders of his own intellectual explorations. In other words, Hume's criticism appears as an appropriate match for the intrinsic (but often implicit or understated) quality of Calvino's literary texts.

Hume's stated assumptions in writing *Calvino's Fictions* are that fantasy is a legitimate mode for exploring issues, that fantasy is an acceptable medium for moral discourse (hence for expressing political or social engagement and moral judgments), that fantasy coexists with realism without being necessarily opposed to it, and finally that Calvino is a philosophical writer interested more in ideas than in action and character, and always searching for patterns and models on which he can organize the data of experience (3).

Given these assumptions, Hume can treat Calvino's texts with a degree of abstraction that would be difficult in a less formalized approach. The picture she gives of Calvino's intellectual quest includes his explorations of human consciousness, morality, science, literature, knowledge, philosophy. Attentive to the major trends of contemporary thought, Calvino reformulates the discourses of structuralists as well as narratologists, scientists as well as semioticians, writers as well as statisticians in literary figures or characters, like the Qfwfq of *Cosmicomiche* or the Marco Polo of *Le città invisibili*, which are magnificent inventions as they are truly unforgettable embodiments of human ideas, feelings, or emotions.

Hume pursues Calvino's explorations through her own textual strategies that involve a sometimes circuitous itinerary. The first chapter contains a splendid analysis of "Under the Jaguar Sun"—one of Calvino's very last texts—conducted at various levels. Hume emphasizes the story's "clever, de-dramatized hero monomyth of the sub-type known as 'journey to the interior'—a singularly appropriate, felicitously over-determined rubric, given the story's concern with eating and being eaten," quoting Haggard's *She*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*, Carpentier's *Le grand Siro*, and a host of 'lost culture' and 'time warp'

stories" in the process (17-18). She interprets the story's fascination with cannibalism "as a variation on the theme of self dissolved in flux" (26)—a major concern of her critical endeavor, and one that at times, as when the Freudian analogies are brought into play (21), seems less convincing to me than the rest of her critical discourse. Probably, Freudian references are introduced to nuance a text that otherwise might seem too Cartesian overall.

In the following chapter, Hume establishes Calvino's cosmos, made up of metaphysical "dust" and "paste" even in texts that are not cosmic on their surface, and critically describes Calvino's ways of observing and interpreting the world through the gaze (the I becoming the eye—sight is indeed a primary *modus operandi* for Calvino, and not only in *Palomar*).

Another, crucial, chapter is devoted to a detailed examination of the cosmicomic tales, which, because they are the turning point of Calvino's writing career, constitute the metaphysical filter through which Hume is able to read and interpret his entire oeuvre, before and after *Cosmicomiche*. She successfully analyzes the impact of scientific discourse on Calvino's philosophical inquiry, the quantum leap that projected Calvino outside the national boundaries of Italian literature, in a literally universal setting that includes an understanding of human desire and the discovery of the plurality of meanings.

Next, Hume probes the texts in which Calvino "identifies the labyrinth" of experience and the world (from *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* to *Marcovaldo*) and builds literature as a web by using the combinatorial method in *Il castello dei destini incrociati* and *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*. At an even higher level of abstraction, *Le città invisibili* and *Palomar* explore the nature and limitations of language and bring about the parameters of a consciousness that is subtly but firmly anti-logocentric, what Hume calls Calvino's "interior cosmos," his "inward civilization" (156), toward a detailed definition of which he was moving when death arrested him.

Calvino's Fictions is an elegantly intelligent and useful book, a labor of love as well as a clear-sighted and systematic endeavor that covers the whole range of Calvino's narrative oeuvre. It includes an extensive and accurate bibliography, which is the result of Hume's constant attention to and detailed dialogue with other critics who have discussed and interpreted Calvino before her. Inevitably, not everyone will agree with all of Hume's ideas, but at the very least she is remarkably successful in conveying Calvino's peculiar mix of intelligence, humanness, and humor, and she has contributed in a decisive manner to the understanding of the "unmistakable accent" of his prose, the lightness with which he transforms philosophical ideas, scientific paradigms, and cognitive problems into splendid literary inventions, into texts and stories that delight and instruct.

By treating Calvino's intellectual and narrative concerns in a rigorously Cartesian manner, Hume has been able to interiorize and put to a good use Calvino's final message articulated in *Lezioni americane*, the "six memos for the next millennium" in which the basic values and qualities of

literature—literature intended as a cognitive mode—are illustrated, reaffirmed, vindicated. She asks about Calvino's oeuvre the same kind of questions Calvino has taught us to ask about literature in general, and by reading and interpreting Calvino in such a Calvinian fashion she has paid him the highest possible critical homage.

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Peter Baker, *Obdurate Brilliance: Exteriority and the Modern Long Poem*. (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1991), 224 pp.

Unlike many, this collection of essays—devoted mostly to poems by Saint-John Perse, Char, Pound, Olson, Stein, Zukovsky, Ashberry, Clark Coolidge and Bernadette Mayer—does have a central thesis. It is, moreover, an important one. According to Prof. Baker, the poems under consideration “explode the traditional Romantic subject, (thus) placing a radical exteriority at the center of the text” (22).

This ability of poetry to point outward to a public world allows Baker to define long poems deftly by the specific ways in which they open on to a realm that lies beyond their own role as representations. In its broad outlines this is certainly an appealing argument, since there are very few other yardsticks that tell us what modern long poems do. For a start, the lyrical speaker is foreign to many instances of the genre, since (as Poe pointed out) the expression of a dominant feeling makes sense only within short poems that can be read in one sitting. In addition, the multiplicity of speakers within single poems (Perse) and the ever-shifting positions of utterance within poetry (Olson and Pound) indicate that such texts are pointing outwards, in some yet-to-be-explained way, rather than inwards to a poet's putative private language.

After an opening chapter in which exteriority is described in the phenomenological terms of Merleau-Ponty and then in the ethical terms of Levinas, Baker goes on to examine specific types of exteriority in a wide variety of poems. Chapter Two gives examples of an active “body memory” in Saint-John Perse's earliest collection, *Eloges*. Edward Casey's phenomenological study of memory is frequently quoted as a justification for opposing this active memory of *place* to the largely passive and nostalgic memory of a lost childhood. This latter form of remembering, Baker argues, is not central to Perse's book but is instead more characteristic of Fargue and Larbaud, whom Perse greatly admired. In the third chapter, exteriority takes on the form of “nonassimilable sexual difference,” as represented by female speakers in Perse's most famous poem, *Anabase*. The next two chapters are devoted to *Exil* and *Vents* by the same poet (Chapter Five developing work that Baker published in an earlier book), while Chapter Six offers a bridge to the remaining comparative studies by examining the concept of community in key poems by Perse and René Char. The last six

chapters are devoted to American writers. A critique of the notion that Pound's language is a transparent reflection of its author is followed by an examination of the various masks of subjectivity in Olson's *Maximus Poems*. Chapter Nine rescues Gertrude Stein's experimental "Stanzas in Meditation" (1932) from critical neglect, and then discusses Louis Zukovsky's verbal experiments in his collection *A*. Baker then examines the "ironization of self," as Albert Cook put it, in one of Ashberry's texts from *The Double Dream of Spring* (exploring the poet's avowed inspiration in Maurice Scève). Some hermetically experimental poems of Clark Coolidge, Michael Palmer, and Bernadette Mayer are scanned in a penultimate chapter on the poetic value of marginality. The book closes with some quibbles about what Baker considers to be the "normative discourse of feminism," which, he claims, fails to recognize the verbal innovations wrought by many modern women poets.

The last two chapters are the weakest links in the demonstration, which is a pity since there are several well-reasoned and rich analyses in the book's early pages. Baker's comments on the figure of chiasmus in Zukovsky and the representation of a quincunx in the latter and in Perse are fascinating, and could have been the start of some very detailed textual readings. Unfortunately, on many occasions the author merely paraphrases the poems and does not explain the textual mechanisms that, for instance, allow the reader to become absorbed into Ashberry's narratorial I (122). Such technical matters are of vital importance to our understanding of how long poems place the reader within the field of exteriority. For it is precisely the richness of the latter term that disqualifies it as a theme, or a mark of "ethical expression" (123: emphasis added). The important poems that Baker discusses are indeed ethical, but probably because they are forms of action that escape both an esthetic description (in terms of postmodernism) and a thematic one that rests on mimesis, "the relation of language to experience" (114). Prof. Baker's fascinating subject demands more than what he offers here.

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