

BOOK REVIEWS

STEVEN L. MCKENZIE. *King David: A Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. 248. US\$ 15.95 paper.

New questions are currently posed in Old Testament studies about "historicity" of the reported traditions. Two generations ago scholarship was generally credulous about the historical claims of the tradition; now, however, the opposite is true. A heavy dose of skepticism pertains largely because of the work of minimalist scholars who have made a strong case against historical claims, in particular urging that so-called archeological claims do not extend very far. In place of historical intentionality, so the argument goes, what we have in the tradition are late ideological constructs designed by and for the faith and identity of a later community.

It is not surprising that the David tradition and its account of the rise of the monarchy would be one of the contested places in the tradition. In skeptical perspective, it is suggested that there is not any credible evidence for the existence of David, let alone the account given us in the biblical text. A key in the debate is the Tel Dan Stele that purports to mention the "House of David"; both the date as well as the intent of the Stele is disputed.

McKenzie's book readily enters the debate about the question of historicity:

The quest of this book is strictly historical. We will read the Bible not for its model of David as a religious hero nor for the artistry of its story about him, but for the historical information about him that it may provide. (McKenzie 5)

Mentored especially by William Dever, Kyle McCarter, and John Van Seters, McKenzie does not disappoint in his offer of a careful, judicious discussion of the evidence, conceding that the biblical material itself is our primary source, thus making little appeal to extra biblical material. McKenzie's discussion follows the contours of most mainline reflections, concluding that there was an historical David and that the narrative contains important historical material. At the same time, he is a cautious reader so that the final verdict he offers is restrained:

Critical scholars have simply explored what a human being of David's social rank in the Middle East three thousand years ago would have been like. The image that I have constructed in this biography is a composite of the results of those scholarly explorations. We can probably never know the *real* David. This image is at least a *realistic* likeness of David. (McKenzie 189)

McKenzie is aware that he has “constructed” an “image” of David, and he has done so on the basis of the “construction” offered him in the text itself. Thus he is fully aware that “history” is profoundly problematized, but that a case can be made which he proceeds to do for a specific “historical David period.”

Borrowing a theme from McCarter, McKenzie sees that the David narrative in Samuel and Kings is an intentional “apology” for David, that is, material particularly designed to salvage David’s reputation and protect his claim as the first king of Israel. Unlike the more intentional critiques of ideology, however, McKenzie does not take the tone of “apology” to show that this is a late distortion of what may have happened. Instead he takes it as evidence of an historical claim reflected in the narrative:

The strongest argument for the historical basis of the biblical account of David is its apologetic nature, which is widely acknowledged by scholars. The fact that the author felt the need to try to explain the motives behind David’s deeds indicates that those deeds were widely believed to have occurred. An author would not invent accusations against David — such as that he once served as a mercenary to the Philistines — just to try to explain them away. The key to historical reconstruction for the life of David, therefore, lies in understanding that the Bible’s story is apology. (McKenzie 186)

In an elaboration of this thesis of *apology* as ground for *historicity*, McKenzie nicely lines out several accent points that are important for understanding the David materials:

- He takes David as “shepherd” to be an effective metaphor for kingship; that is the aim of the narrative from the outset. Thus I Samuel 16:18 is a “job recommendation” for kingship, nicely locating the early David culturally and socially.

- In his rivalry with Saul and his leadership as a “holy terrorist,” the David of the tradition is shown to be fortunate, cunning, and ruthless as circumstance requires. In each case, McKenzie takes up particular issues that have preoccupied scholarship and makes cautious judgments but characteristically “pro-historical” in broad outline. His judgments are often informed by common sense such as (a) no one is likely to have made up such a matter or (b) the material protests too much. In most of his judgments McKenzie does not break new ground, but exercises good judgment and invites the reader to notice how a critical interpreter works.

- He allows, as has much scholarship, that David is deeply implicated in a series of “convenient deaths” (Nabal, Abner, Ishball) and that the apology, for all of its protection of David, invites the reader to suspicion.

- He outlines a familiar pattern of the administrative changes that David works as a transitional figure in the move from chief to king and allows, in credible fashion, that his regime was “smaller and more parochial” than the tradition suggests.

- His analysis of the narratives of Amnon, Absalom, and Solomon exhibit a father who is a ruthless king who will deal with any who block his way or purpose. Concerning commentary on Solomon, McKenzie picks up on the notion that Bathsheba is no innocent victim in the narrative, but herself a shrewd woman who knows how to operate

amid palace intrigue.

In sum, McKenzie offers a nice “middle way” between the skeptics and the fideists. I am in complete sympathy with his approach. I seriously doubt, however, if much is accomplished about questions of “historicity,” for McKenzie has begun with and stayed with the traditional text. Thus I think his claims deal with a constructed David that do not reach behind the literature to whatever might be behind it. I do not think he is able to cross the “ugly ditch” that separates rhetoric from history, but likely he has done as well as we can. This book will no doubt be compared with the recent study of Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King*. Halpern offers a much thicker contextualized consideration of 10th century history, whereas McKenzie stays with the biblical text so that “historicity” is hard to come by. In my opinion Halpern does context in a much stronger mode but except for random references he does not take up much about the David of the text. The two books together pose the dilemma that is inevitable among us, so that no judgment carries the day beyond those who grant the premise of a particular study. I very much like McKenzie's thought that apology hints at historicity but this will hardly persuade those who resist persuasion.

In any case the book is readable and accessible, supplied with suggestive archeological data alongside the textual discussion. With all the current notice of “the Jesus seminar” and related matters, this book is a pertinent offer to those who are nurtured in old-school “historicity” but who suspect otherwise, and to those for whom historical grounding must be more than fideism. McKenzie evokes a David in the real world without the protections of piety, defended but only ambiguously validated. McKenzie knows that the Chronicler and the Psalter will issue a “better David.” But he also knows that the Samuel narrative gives us a David “after our own hearts,” to some extent “constructed” but undoubtedly “realistic.” (WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY)

Works Cited

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KATHLEEN FORNI. *The Chaucerian Apocrypha: A Counterfeit Canon*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001. Pp. 240. US\$ 55.00 hardcover.

To relegate Kathleen Forni's *The Chaucerian Apocrypha: A Counterfeit Canon* to the dusty margins of academia is to pass over the lively questions it stimulates and to ignore some fundamental notions that inform contemporary understanding of Chaucer and his works.

This is a rigorous analysis of “the shifting and complex relationship between the canon and the apocrypha”

evidenced in sixteenth century folio editions of Chaucer's work (5). Forni elaborates the effect of this on Chaucer's personal, literary and critical reputation. Part one is devoted to the exploration of questions such as what constitutes an authorial text and how did folio editors select material for inclusion. She draws attention to the danger of attributing both authorial authenticity and textual authority to works that, collated for the first time and printed as a standard collection for public dissemination, only *appear* stable.

The construction of any canon is an historically and culturally contingent manoeuvre. Part two of Forni's investigation demonstrates how its formation and reception force us to revise our conception of all that is "Chauceria." Chapters devoted to the critical evaluation of two crucial spurious poems — Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* plus the *Flower and the Leaf* — raise important issues, not least the investment of the academy in a more general process of disattribution. Emanating from the nineteenth century, this eventually leads to what she terms a "critical diaspora" (6) where we appear to respond to "author," despite the problematic nature of the concept, rather than to text or language, and even less to text than to a text's received history. Her final chapter examines the construction of the "modern" Chaucer canon, started by Tyrwhitt and driven home by Skeat late in the nineteenth century.

But to misjudge this book as an attempt to separate out the spurious from the authentic is wilfully to deny the profound influence an apocryphal canon — "hidden" as well as "rejected" — might have upon our assumptions about literary and textual authority. In *Chaucer at Large: The Poet in the Modern Imagination*, Steve Ellis suggests that "If Chaucer flourishes anywhere today it is precisely as an academic subject ... within complex fields of gender, narratology, and postmodernist debate" (157). Here, theorists and "theory" comprise what Bourdieu calls "cultural capital" and it is with the occluded imperatives of this complex framework that Forni begins to engage. She notes that our contemporary Chaucer is an institutionalized one, no more a reflection of the "real" historical Chaucer than that of earlier folio or manuscript canons. When Benson's "canonical" *The Riverside Chaucer* makes only passing reference to works now dismissed as "demonstrably not written by Chaucer," an entire history of reception with its own cultural capital is lost. It is this which Forni admirably seeks to redress for the folio canon defines Chaucer's poetics even now.

Forni identifies many, often conflicting, faces of Chaucer all of which contribute to the multiplicity informing contemporary readings. Three sixteenth century folio editions offer three different flavors; thus folio formation and, hence, the Chaucer canon is identified as a manipulation of identities. So, Thynne (1532), the "founding" folio editor, preserves Chaucer as a princely advisor and female panegyrist, while Stow (1561) presents an antifeminist and satirical writer. For Speght (1598) Chaucer was reputed as a royal and aristocratic poet. Despite these differences, elaborated in some detail and later — disappointingly — subsumed into a more monolithic view of the "Tudor past," Forni offers Chaucer as a conservative yet "enlightened" Catholic. This image she bases largely upon

the spurious *Plowman's Tale* and the later addition to the apocrypha of *Jack Upland*. She contends that the *Plowman's Tale* — a polemic debate between a Lollard sympathiser and a doctrinal apologist — aggravated a conviction (recently resurrected) that Chaucer was a Wycliffite sympathiser, a notion embedded in Speght's collection through the inclusion of the apocryphal *Testament of Love*, now credited to Usk. This Boethian treatise, centered on an imprisoned activist confessing his part in a civic revolt, was reclaimed as autobiographical, a misconception lasting until the nineteenth century.

Forni notes that six of the seven “main” folio editions were produced under “Tudor imperialism” (10) as part of its quest for dynastic and social legitimacy. Even, she argues, the courtly love poems and lyrics provided models for imitation or were valued as pragmatic “handbooks” on social and political advancement. Additionally, Chaucer's use of the vernacular — an interesting assertion that she does not follow through — was an asset in the rise of a literary nationalism.

Though in these chapters Forni may overstate her case, her contention that the folio editors were less concerned for authenticity than with a cultural or political agenda is engaging. The conscious, critical choices of these editors reveals the extent to which “canonicity” is a contingent construction. Equally, although these decisions helped to preserve Chaucer's identity until the nineteenth century, the categories “Chaucer” and “Chaucerian” are identified as inherently unstable.

Forni's analysis of the sixteenth century folio editions adumbrates the vast inflation of the Chaucer canon to include material now attributed to the likes of Lydgate, Hoccleve, Gower and Scrogan. The motivation for this, she suggests, was professional. Editions contained authentic work with all the attendant problems of accurate attribution: lack of extant manuscripts, erroneous ascriptions in earlier manuscript miscellanies, few autographed pieces and little scribal attribution at all. Folio titles remained ambiguous: newly-printed works of Chaucer and “dyvers workes” never before in print. Foucault remarks how the name of an author classifies and confers status. “Chaucer” was thus a brand name guaranteeing sales.

Yet to name is also to limit meaning and to project signs of how we shape and control texts. It is here that Forni's recuperation of the apocrypha takes off to expose how the process of attribution and, later more tellingly, dissattribution, is an ongoing series of critical manoeuvres that take root in the academic Chaucer we recognise today.

She begins by tracing the history of the reception of the *Testament of Cresseid*, not finally attributed to Henryson until 1721. Believed to be the sixth book of the *Troilus*, scholars blamed it for the poor critical reception of both Chaucer's “authentic” version and Shakespeare's later *Troilus and Cressida*, a view that, as Forni indicates, assumes Chaucer's account as a corrective. Additionally, it separates three distinct authorial approaches, each further influencing the texts' interpretation. Yet, she argues, early editors may well have realised the text was spurious, while all distinctions may well be artificial. For contemporaneous readers, authorial and apocryphal were not binary oppositions. As such the story could circulate in a variety of forms without adverse effect upon its reception.

In her chapter on the apocryphal *Flower and the Leaf*, she continues her energetic exploration of a critical conspiracy that began by lauding a poem directly responsible for the Romantic vision of Chaucer as a nature poet and

ended with its precipitous fall from grace once Skeat disattributed it, a gesture she posits as “an unconscious retaliation for its past exalted status” (142).

Chaucer is unique in the number of spurious pieces — a staggering fifty one — attributed to him. Despite this, there is little sign of interest in a “counterfeit canon” that is — to cite Irigaray — a “necessary outside,” one integral to our understanding of the “official” listings. Forni seems to blame Skeat who by 1894 had suggested the apocrypha was “beneath discussion,” thus laying the ground for the generation of the canon we recognise today. She archives this process of disattribution in the final chapter and cleverly critiques the grounds of Skeat’s rejection, yet without fully engaging with the very critical occlusion she appears to recognise.

The construction and transmission of any canon is never a disinterested enterprise. Fittingly, then, Forni concludes with a reminder that what is ostensibly a static Chaucer canon is, in fact, a product of the academy’s own investment in a process begun centuries earlier. There exists a search for an authentic text in an authentic language — witness the continuing debate over the use of translations — that is at odds both with the commercial motivations of the original editors and their indifference concerning matters of attribution and authentication. Yet, at the same time, an increasing number of versions of Chaucer’s texts freely circulate in a variety of modes. Some, like the *Variorum* facsimiles, deliberately blur the lines between authorial and apocryphal to render a more accurate or “authentic” script.

This is not a perfect book — too much overlap for my taste — and many issues remain unexplored. Yet it raises questions that resonate. The repackaging of “Chaucer” continues apace: queer Chaucer ... eco-Chaucer, a far cry from the proto-Protestant reformer of yesteryear. Or is it? What I do know is that the apocrypha remains a crucial part of that web of commentary and exegesis that surrounds all of Chaucer’s works. We do not fully comprehend those source texts until we become aware of the shifting and competing interests circulating at the heart of all that is “Chaucerian,” until, with the aid of studies like Forni’s, we begin to confront those operations that shape and institutionalize all our responses. (GAIL ASHTON, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER)

Works Cited

Ellis, Steve. *Chaucer at Large: The Poet in the Modern Imagination*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000.

GEORGE EDGAR SLUSSER, PAUL ALKON, ROGER GAILLARD and DANIELE CHATELAIN, eds. *Transformations of Utopia : Changing Views of the Perfect Society*. Selected proceedings of the conference "L'Utopie et ses métamorphoses" held in Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland. New York: AMS Press, 1999. Pp. xxiv + 342. US\$ 64.50.

The varied contributions to this bilingual collective volume attest to the fact that Utopia, the good place and the non place, has undergone a dramatic metamorphosis since Thomas More's seminal text. Classical utopias (pre-1800), already amply studied in other fora, receive relatively little attention. Focussing primarily on a modern corpus, many of the essays seems to suggest that the transformation of Utopia referred to in the title is closely linked to the emergence of Science Fiction (more than half the essays deal at least in part with SF), almost to the point of leading the reader to question why a reference to SF was not integrated somehow into the title of the volume. Both Utopia and Science Fiction seek beyond present day reality in the quest for something better or at least more advanced. The essays by Gunn, James, Westfahl and Vonarburg in particular reflect on the links and the tension between Science Fiction and Utopia. A second major field of interest in the volume, often related to the first, are questions relating to sexuality and feminist utopias. Feminist considerations enter into the essays of Johns, Bozzetto, Harris, Barr and Vonarburg and gender and sexuality are also treated by Heller and Gunn.

The text is generally well organized and well presented. There are two good introductory essays, one in French by Gaillard presenting the context of the conference (700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation) and a more detailed one in English by Slusser highlighting the contribution of individual papers. An overall index of authors and titles at the end of the volume allows the tracing of themes. One notices for example that Ursula Le Guin's work receives almost as much attention as Thomas More's seminal text, a telling reflection on the overall orientation of the collective. There are some inconsistencies in the presentation of notes and works cited and many of the texts in French contain typographical errors. Unfortunately, the gap between the conference (1991) and publication (1999) means that the essays do not take into account recent scholarship on Utopia, Science Fiction and feminism, particularly vexing for a volume looking at changing views. The 27 papers comprising the volume (21 in English, 6 in French) are divided in three sections: History and Recontextualization; Repositioning Utopia; and Utopian Dialectics.

In the lead essay of the section History and Recontextualization, Jean-Pierre Barricelli provides useful context in examining not only Campanella's well-known *Città del sole* but also a number of other Renaissance texts. Barricelli discusses eugenics to show how sexuality is reduced to its most practical uses of continuation and improvement of the species. He argues that devoiding utopia of art is a hallucination and incompatible with the genre and goes on to demonstrate the fundamentally anti-democratic nature of utopia.

The other contributions to this section expand the corpus of utopian texts known to most anglophone

readers. Alessa Johns focuses on the innovations of utopias written by destitute gentlewomen in Eighteenth Century England. These texts encourage a rethinking of various contracts, first and foremost the marriage contract, to enable women to move toward greater financial and emotional independence. Johns points out differences between masculine and feminine utopias, particularly with reference to the representation of time and space. Ceri Crossley concentrates on the temporal dimension of Utopia for the French Romantics to affirm that utopia is seen not only as realizable but also as inevitable in a future time.

Ellis Shookman draws on a fascinating corpus of cross-cultural utopias (Swiss German/Swiss French, Norwegian, Russian/Cossack and English/Scottish), to study the links between patriotism, nationalism and utopia as well as the tension between cultural diversity and political union. Bud Foote examines attempts to consider travel to the past as fiction or even mythology in order to give coherence to the present. By labelling and categorizing the past, these texts practice what Feet calls “intellectual-temporal imperialism,” and thus ultimately seek to validate our perceptions of our own time. James Gunn deals with future utopias on Earth and in space, and surveys a range of variants such as eco-topias, feminist utopias and cyberpunk. The next two contributions, from Joseph Altairac and Leonid Heller’s are written in French but deal with texts set in Russia. Altairac proposes a close reading of Charles Rivet’s *Le Triomphe de Lénine* as an anti-communist counter-utopia. Questions of eugenics, free love and a utilitarian view of reproduction are at the forefront of Heller’s study. Jean-François Thomas, in wondering if the Swiss can be utopian, examines a series of short almost entirely unknown Swiss texts depicting the timid practical utopias of clockmakers.

The second section, *Topos: Repositioning Utopia*, is perhaps the most eclectic of the volume in terms of approach and corpus. If there is a common thread, it is perhaps the emphasis on individual utopia rather than a collective societal one. Arthur Evans’ lead article on vehicles in Jules Verne literally turns utopia “inside out” and insists on its dynamic aspect. The vehicle, be it a submarine or a spaceship, insulates the traveller from his exotic surroundings and creates a comfortable autonomous world in keeping with Nineteenth Century bourgeois values. George Slusser circumscribes utopia even further to the cryonics tank in studying life extension as a form of “bodily utopia.” Utopia moves to the subconscious for Roger Dadoun in his psychoanalysis what he terms the “old antithetical obscene couple Realism/ Utopia”. For Dadoun, the vocation of utopia is to say and not to do — the utopian construct is seen as an end in itself without the need to be realized and whose ultimate goal is temporary freedom from the suffocating weight of reality. In Pedro Gaillardia-Terrain’s fascinating analysis of Spanish television commercials, utopia is seen as ephemeral but feasible, if only at the limited level of the individual. Amy Boesky proposes a thought-provoking comparison of More’s founding text, an attempt by More’s brother-in-law to establish a colony in America and the corporate philosophy of Club Med. David Porush’s reflections on the Talmud and Cyberspace also bring into contact widely disparate texts. Cyberspace is the ultimate utopia as a non-place (everywhere and nowhere) and a place of unlimited possibilities.

The last section, *Utopian Dialectics*, is the most unified of the volume and deals primarily with SF and/or feminist texts, often to show the limitations of utopia as a genre. Carol McGuirk studies the importance of setting to the degree of development of character and proposes a sliding scale between “hard” and “soft” Science Fiction where the more developed the place, the less developed the character. A middle ground, which she calls “visionary” SF, emerges as the most interesting through its postmodern ironic distance. Paul Alkon, in a wide-ranging article, looks at the regimented and cyclical nature of activity in utopia and the frictions involved in various ways of measuring time. The utopian Revolutionary Calendar in France, which sought to reject history and begin anew finds echoes in the dystopian work of Orwell and Le Guin where the absence of past creates a totalitarian time used to control the masses. K.V. Bailey explores the underside of Arcadian utopias to argue that the treatment of those who perform menial tasks is a key element to understanding the richness of the Arcadian metaphor in Science Fiction and utopia.

Of the essays pointing out the shortcomings of utopia, Edward James, has perhaps the best title of the collection, “‘Even Worse, It Could Be Perfect’: Aspects of the Undesirable Utopia in Modern Science Fiction,” discusses the necessity of avoiding utopia. What he terms “undesirable utopia” is much more subtle than dystopia and refers to a superficially perfect utopia condemned because it rests on an objectionable premise. Apparent perfection leads to inertia and lack of purpose and inevitably leads characters to opt out in order to experience the possibility of progress. Laurence Davies comments perceptively on the nature of dystopia. While he sees both dystopias and utopias as exploring senses of possibilities, he finds dystopia less restrictive and ultimately more thought-provoking by its lack of closure and certainty.

Bertrand Méheust demonstrates the shortcomings of social utopia as seen through the work of French philosopher Raymond Ruyer and looks at the “involuntarily comic side of classical utopia.” For Ruyer, utopia reduces difference and unduly homogenizes and eliminates the richness of ambiguity, a positive concept he associates with femininity. Gary Westfahl provides a thoughtful study of the links between SF and utopia. For him, Science Fiction is a process moving forward without achieving either final perfection (utopia) or final imperfection (dystopia). The article is somewhat heavy on jargon but his distinctions of *anthropia* (utopia of perfection of the body), *pointopia* (pointillistic utopia — bright spots in the foreground suggesting bliss but imperfection and unrest in the background) and *mystopia* (mystic or religious solutions to human problems) seem convincing. Eric Rabkin reminds us of the fundamentally paradoxical nature of utopianism, the desire to make an ideal world real. The desire to achieve utopia, whether conceived as a mirror of society or as a blueprint for a better society, must be fuelled by idealism but tempered by pragmatism.

A final set of essays concentrates on gender and feminist issues. Roger Bozzetto discusses the “libertarian” utopia of the French writer Louise Michel. While Bozzetto regrets Michel did not develop further the gender issues raised by her text, he points out, in contrast to traditional utopias, equality (both between men and between men and women) is a given and the society is non hierarchical and non elitist. Jocelyn Harris draws a parallel between

totalitarian dystopian states in Orwell and Atwood, analysing linguistic and structural elements. However, class struggle is replaced by patriarchy as the fundamental source of inequality. Marlene Barr examines the attempts in 1980s feminist utopias to change patriarchal conceptions of love and to find a place for enlightened men. Elisabeth Vonarburg, a SF writer in her own right, also deals with the place of men in feminist utopias. Her reflections on the links between SF and utopia are informed by feminism, providing a useful complement to the essays of Gunn and James. She examines a variety of sexual roles in utopia, lesbianism, heterosexuality, sado-masochism, androgyny and hermaphroditism to show the range and extraordinary vitality of feminine utopias.

The volume will particularly interest critics examining the intersection of Science Fiction and Utopia as well as those interested in questions of gender, sexuality and feminism. In addition, it offers comparatists fascinating perspectives

on some little known texts and underscores the extraordinary vitality of Utopia as a dynamic evolving genre.
(DANIEL MAHER, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY)

E. S. BURT. *Poetry's Appeal: Nineteenth-Century Lyric and the Political Space*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999. Pp. 312. Index. 1 illustration. US\$ 21.95 paper, 55.00 hardcover.

For those who might have believed in the imminent demise or even death of deconstruction in American literary studies, this book makes clear that any such reports have been greatly exaggerated. In a series of five dazzling, often brilliant, close readings of mainly nineteenth-century texts, composed by Chénier, Hugo, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry, E. S. Burt demonstrates that deconstruction still has much to offer readers, especially to those anxious to get past certain rehashed literary chronologies and recycled clichés about major modern poetic movements, like Romanticism and Symbolism. Arguing that poetry, in general, and the lyric in particular, have much to say about the political sphere outside of the Ivory Tower (that place to which so much especially Parnassian-inspired verse owes its deliberately autotelic existence), Burt first explains and then illustrates how a poem's "textuality" differentiates its statements and utterances from "mere" literature. Textuality, in Burt's view, would be that wider field of significance put into motion not only by a work's more conventional meanings, but also by a new semantic (or, perhaps more accurately, *semic*) potentiality brought to light by this consciously New Historical avatar of earlier forms of deconstructive analysis.

But then, some might argue that deconstruction has always had this special way of teasing out the significance of a text, implying along the way that multiple historical, psychological, sociological and philosophic

elements are always already operational, for both writers and readers. So here we find a study that takes those earlier Derridean and de Manian insights and composes with them an even more contemporary mosaic of textuality, an even more liberated and oftentimes subverting “semiotic,” to use Julia Kristeva’s term. This ever wider web of textuality brings to the attention of modern readers still more senses that participate in something akin to what Kristeva has called a “polylogue” (not “just” a dialogue as Burt suggests) of *différance*; one that gives rise to any number of future readings inherent in the inscribed words of poetry. Thus, one can cull important political points from far more modern poems than many people assume “contained” them. But, as Burt wisely insists, these points come into focus only to the extent that the words themselves force us to consider such alternatives.

To underscore different significations, however, is necessarily to notice in the first place a recurrence of specific things, a set of particularly important formal and thematic repetitions. And Burt finds them galore. Indeed, the whole nineteenth-century notion of poetry as a relatively simple, unified product of the Ivory Tower slowly transforms itself in the course of the introductory essay into something manifold, a plurality, produced instead by Paul Valéry’s modern metaphor of the Radio Tower. Unlike the earlier tower, Valéry’s (which appears in a brief response by the poet in 1933 to a survey on the relation between literature and the political) is preferred by Burt because it is seen to produce new signals second by second; to emit pervasive waves of multiple meanings rather than neatly defined packets of pre-articulated ones. These waves, then, become the stuff of textual discovery. The latter includes: unexpected discoveries about the general mind-set and world views of readers, editors and lawyers at any given time and place; the political implications for writers and society at large of a choice of genre; and finally, various gender ramifications inherent both in the French language as a whole and, specifically, in verse such as that found in Chénier’s “La Jeune captive.” In Chapter one, for instance, Burt cleverly identifies in this poem a quasi-deliberate and shifting use of masculine and feminine pronouns that is not just reflective of “an old ideology,” but which is also itself “restorative of [it]” (79). Yet, while this reader appreciates and mostly agrees with the lengthy analysis presented of the telling gap created by this pronoun shift, it is perhaps also emblematic of the entire study that it ends with the statement: “At least, that’s one way to read the gap between the two parts of the poem” (91). An inevitable question, though, despite Burt’s undoubtedly justifiable, theoretical insistence on multiple future-oriented readings, is whether that is the best or the only or even the most appropriate way to read it. And there, of course, begins anew the whole debate that pits a certain brand of structuralism against various sorts of poststructuralism: For whom and for what purpose is X, Y or Z reading deemed best, exclusive or most useful?

Theoretical debates aside for the moment, Chapter two sets out to examine Mallarmé’s poetic project as a whole. Concentrating on a single example of the poet’s definition of human action so as “to see how, when, and to what effect the play of the letter emerges to affect the scene [of writing]” (106), Burt argues that for Mallarmé “the poet’s duty, ethically speaking, is to render the language of the other, or even to render the language as other” (95), especially at a time of rapid growth of the newspaper industry and separate book industry. The passage in question

derives from a journal piece titled “L’Action,” which first appeared in 1895 and is literally and figuratively redoubled two years later in *Divagations*, towards the end of his life, when it is rebaptized “L’Action restreinte.” Noting the irregularity — or “ungrammaticality,” to use Michael Riffaterre’s term — of six commas in the very short second sentence, Burt opines that the punctuation points do not “chop the sentence up all the better to bring its parts together into a cohesive theory [of action]. Rather these commas disrupt and disarticulate the thought [begun in the first sentence by the idea of relaxing one’s fists (‘Se détendre les poings’)]” (111). The argument advanced suggests that by choosing to stress the paradoxically active role played in these same sentences by the bend backwards of one’s knees (“les jarrets”) the text effectively ceases to be understandable in terms of a hermeneutics of the self: “As sentence redoubled (according to the rule that you never get one *jarret* without a possible pair) it says: *J’arrête à jarrets*” (122). This in turn implies that ending any action “is not a voluntary act by a subject who modestly tries to stop with a given representation. The I’s stopping is not owed only to its restraint as I, but also to the brusque interference of the poetic function.” That function then leads Burt to tease out, almost paroxysmally, variants of the word *jarret*, concluding that the French language ceases to be conceivable as a “closed system or container, and has instead to be construed as obeying the more cosmopolitan Order of the Garter (*jarretière*)” (124). While the sense of this Order is not made fully clear to my mind, it is usefully connected to the overlapping of English/French in Mallarmé’s own linguistic practice and allows Burt to demonstrate that one of this particular text’s potential or future readings involves a “political life not bounded by the limits of nationalism and the national language” (125). One may wonder, however, why Burt does not also consider gender issues here, especially when one recalls the famous old French ronde about the *fille de la meunière*, who lost her garter because, like “relaxed fists” at the center of the argument, it did not hold (“la jarretière qui ne tenait pas”). Or why the homonym *points* (“periods”) of the French word for “fists” is not also brought into the intriguing discussion of commas, with its *punctual* relation to (linguistic) starting and stopping.

In the second part of the book, Burt returns to Chénier, whose prominent socio-political and literary place would derive essentially from his being a bad political thinker, but a good poet, since he is in fact “at his most revolutionary in his poems” (159). The author shows this quite persuasively by rereading the infamous verse, “Sur des pensers nouveaux faisons des vers antiques,” against the more traditional topos in such a way that the line comes to mean this: poetry is not new thoughts expressed *in* the form of antique verse, but is instead antique verse *on* new thoughts; that is, “new thought lies buried under rubble [... thus] antique verse stands for a lost expressive voice, and keeps on standing past it. The task is to warn that the code is not subject to the same laws of progress, perfectibility, becoming, as human thought” (136). Tying this to a more general analysis of Egyptian columns depicted elsewhere in Chénier’s corpus, Burt advances that “monuments of religion are pushed over, and in their place rise the secular archives of the state” (143). It would be fascinating indeed to apply these same ideas to a text like Gautier’s “Nostalgies d’Obélisques” from his *Emaux et Camées* (1852) in order to bring out the ways in which similar notions of secularism

and idealism struggle with one another later in the nineteenth-century, under a different political regime.

The following chapter on Hugo's "La Révolution" continues to explore the various ramifications of a lyric poet's specific description of certain public monuments. It illustrates why, for Hugo, the "historicity of poems resides in inscription and is future-oriented" (186). Burt shows this by honing in on the fantastical descent of the statue of Henri IV from its pedestal and by making the whole process into an effective figure, after de Man, for the very collapse of "figure into denomination. Tropes, figures of speech, literature get out of their fictive frames and advance — dragging with them love, right, and justice — into the streets" (170). Thus, once again, what might appear at first glance to be a kind of aloof and/or phantasmatic idealism veiled in lyrical prosopopeia, one that is removed from the real world of politics and social change, turns out to be an immensely provocative allegory. This allegory says "that a statue off its pedestal is like a dethroned king" (171), just like a second allegory does in Hugo's *Choses vues*, also cited by our author. Moreover, the latter example takes place in a post-Enlightenment space where, according to Burt, "a reason dethroned is occupied with maintaining what semblance it can of its former glory." When understood in these terms, we see how it might then be possible to "glimpse an opening, within the text of 'La Révolution,' toward a definition of revolution as text, as 'poème inoui' ... , the unheard, the unheard of, the magnificent poem, the yea-saying (*oui*), future-oriented poem which broadcasts the wherewithal to undo its ideologies of progress as far as or farther still than the ideologies themselves" (187).

In a final chapter on the censoring of history in Baudelaire's "Les Bijoux," we learn much about what was considered to be normal or normative state censorship of the time. Within a theoretical framework provided by Leo Strauss's "Persecution and the Art of Writing" Burt starts with the premise that "the only texts offensive to public morality, and thus excisable, are those that provide for knowledge and action that do not confirm the axiom [that "virtue is knowledge ... and thoughtful men as such are trustworthy and not cruel]" (195). It follows, therefore, that any *immoderate* taste for truth, i.e. for knowledge of any and all sorts, such as the one contemporary censors obviously attributed to Baudelaire, can only be the taste of someone "who has not stopped with the revelation of truth of method and of history as progress, but has developed an unhealthy appetite for revelation irrespective of whether it leads to positive knowledge" (196), an appetite for Dirt for Dirt's sake, so to speak. But in contemplating "la très chère" nude addressed by the poet in this text, Burt asks whether it is not possible to read that adjective instead as two homophonic nouns: either as "chair" (flesh), in which case the poet would be carnally obsessed, or as "chaire" (throne), in which case the nude would be seen as reigning like a muse in the azure, like Beauty in the eponymous poem. A similar semantic, or more precisely, phonemic confusion arises with the word "nue," which can mean either the nude or the high cloud, metonymically linking the woman again to empyrean heights, to Parnassus. So, Burt asks, is the reader really in a world of Dirt for Dirt's sake, or rather in one of Art for Art's sake? This final, and again telling, undecidability makes clear that the problem lies not in deciding which of the two is the correct reading, but in noting exactly how the poet presents the relationship between the two "in the gift that is the poem" (206).

Through a notable repetition of the conjunction “et” it happens that the poem does not suggest any linguistic inadequacy on the part of its maker, an inadequacy that might, for instance, be forcing him to repeat his utterances for lack of some inspiration. Instead, as Burt stresses, “the poem advances against itself through those utterances, pushing *Poetry* off her pedestal. The stilled figure gets mobility” (216), just like Hugo’s Henri IV. Thrusting herself forward in this way (*and* that *and* that, etc.) against any fixed, static Parnassian ideality, whether represented by the poet or his Muse, Poetry thus “posits the value of the work as that of ‘art against art,’ as *anti-work*” (216). The real value of this text, then, as well as of Burt’s impressive book in its entirety, is that, ultimately, they both render moot the kind of debate between structuralism and poststructuralism evoked earlier in this review. For, just as with the many undecidable stylistic traits of the other post-1789 works examined before, “the free agency of human subjects with respect to linguistic structures, their ability to determine whether these structures are referential or symbolic, is in doubt in this poem” (217). If we are not *in fact* free and able to know, once and for all, what is right and what is wrong when it comes to the meaning(s) of “literary” language, therefore, let us, with Burt, simply re-orient our individual and institutional critical gazes ever more towards that language’s mobile futures, not *just* towards its frozen pasts (which, I would stress in conclusion, will nevertheless always have indispensable philological and historical roles to play in the heuristic stage that precedes any bona fide hermeneutic act). (STAMOS METZIDAKIS, WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN SAINT LOUIS)

JULIO RAMOS. *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*. Trans. John D. Blanco. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999. Pp. 328. US\$ 19.95 paper, 59.95 hardcover.

Es ésta una excelente traducción del libro de Julio Ramos *Desencuentro de la modernidad en América Latina* (1989), uno de los estudios sobre la modernidad y la producción literaria latinoamericana más relevantes de las últimas décadas. En él, Julio Ramos empieza hablándonos del prólogo de José Martí al *Poema del Niágara* de Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde. En este texto, pieza poco conocida de la obra martiana, Ramos detecta una reflexión sobre la producción e interpretación literaria en una sociedad en la que la escritura ya no gozaba de la función reguladora que había tenido en el nacimiento de las repúblicas latinoamericanas. Para mejor ilustrar este punto, Ramos compara la labor de Martí con la del chileno Andrés Bello y con la del argentino Domingo F. Sarmiento y señala el cambio operado en la posición del intelectual latinoamericano a lo largo del siglo diecinueve. Según Ramos, mientras Bello y Sarmiento contribuyeron con sus escritos a organizar el estado nacional y por ende tuvieron una acción pública reconocida por el elemento en el poder, los escritores de fin de siglo, como Martí, fueron relegados al ámbito privado dependiendo su producción de otros discursos que limitaban su campo de acción.

A fin de ahondar en la dicotomía entre el letrado de la primera mitad del diecinueve y el escritor finisecular,

Ramos toma el texto clásico de la literatura decimonónica hispanoamericana *Facundo. Civilización y Barbarie. Vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga* y muestra cómo esta obra de Sarmiento es un intento de controlar la *barbarie* y de reorganizar el estado nacional mediante la escritura. Asimismo, analiza las ideas sobre la lengua expuestas por Bello y concluye que, para el escritor chileno, la lengua marcaba los límites y las jerarquías de la nación, con lo que la letra y los letrados adquirirían el carácter de reguladores sociales.

El tercer apartado de *Divergent Modernities* se centra en el proceso de fragmentación de la república constituida por las letras. Primero, señala cómo cambió la posición de las letras dentro del sistema educativo, a continuación, habla de la transformación operada en la relación entre política, literatura y escritor, del desprendimiento de la escritura de las instituciones que le conferían su autoridad social y, finalmente, de la emergencia del discurso moderno. Los dos apartados siguientes giran en torno a los elementos que caracterizarían ese nuevo discurso. Ramos analiza la relación periodismo-literatura estudiando para ello las crónicas publicadas para el periódico argentino *La Nación*, reflexiona sobre la verdadera intención del discurso literario en el periodismo y se plantea el uso de ciertos conceptos estéticos para presentar la ciudad. La conclusión a la que llega Ramos es que la crónica periodística, escindida entre el propósito del periódico de informar y el del escritor de decir, se transforma en un ejercicio de sobreescritura, en una especie de palimpsesto en el que, con frecuencia, se contradice veladamente el mensaje más aparente. Por último, Ramos muestra cómo el cronista se convierte en una especie de guía del nuevo mundo capitalista del que la ciudad moderna es su máximo exponente. Es el publicista de una modernidad capitalista, tecnológica y, a la vez, estética. Ramos habla de los autores que más se destacaron en este género, Rubén Darío, Enrique Gómez Carrillo y José Martí, pero advierte que este último supo ir más allá de la mera presentación de los lujos y placeres del capitalismo, llevando al lector a la otra ciudad, a las zonas marginadas y obreras por las que el escritor cubano sentía a la vez afinidad y temor.

Llegado a este punto, Ramos inicia la segunda parte de su estudio en el que va a ocuparse del análisis concreto y detallado de una serie de textos martianos, pero antes nos habla de la estancia de Martí en Estados Unidos e indica que éste, al igual que otros miembros de la intelectualidad liberal latinoamericana, buscó en el modelo social estadounidense la clave que pudiera llevar el orden y la disciplina a Latinoamérica, pero no tardó en desenganarse de la utopía de modernidad encarnada por los Estados Unidos. A fin de demostrar su tesis, Ramos nos propone leer las crónicas de Martí reunidas bajo el título *Escenas norteamericanas*, a la vez como el testimonio de una escritura que intentaba coexistir con la modernidad y como el contexto en el que se fraguó el pensamiento latinoamericanista de Martí. Así, el primer capítulo comenta el uso de la analogía en las crónicas que Martí escribió para informar sobre la tecnología y la mecanización en los Estados Unidos. Basándose especialmente en el texto “El puente de Brooklyn,” Ramos muestra cómo para Martí la literatura se convierte en un medio que, producto de una sociedad marcada por la fragmentación, es la expresión misma de esta fragmentación, pues se formula mediante un conglomerado de discursos ajenos, tales como el de la geometría, la estadística y la técnica. Ahora bien, el mensaje implícito en el texto

martiano no sugiere precisamente la confianza en la mecanización que se observaba en el discurso que la presentaba como el más alto signo de progreso social.

El siguiente capítulo estudia la representación de la ciudad en *Escenas norteamericanas*, específicamente en la crónica "Coney Island," texto que sirve a Ramos para comparar la escritura de Martí con su visión del proceso transformativo naturaleza ciudad. De acuerdo con Ramos, la ciudad moderna hace que la casa sea un espacio donde el discurso literario se defiende de la fragmentación que conlleva el espacio público. Esa casa, ese interior, se erige como un refugio del absurdo y la deshumanización de la ciudad, es desde la casa que el poeta puede ver el discordante mundo exterior en su totalidad y, por consiguiente, es en la casa donde se formula una voz, en el sentido estricto de la palabra, opuesta a la escritura de masas de la urbe. Esta voz permite al hombre expresar una reflexión sobre ese exterior urbano en el que la falsedad y la fragmentación se intentan presentar como una segunda naturaleza.

En "Culturalism and *Latinoamericanismo*," Ramos compara las reflexiones subyacentes en "Coney Island" con lo expresado por Martí en la crónica titulado "El poeta Walt Whitman." Tal contraposición permite a Ramos meditar sobre el efecto que causó en los escritores de fin de siglo el fenómeno de la cultura de masas. Ante todo, Ramos habla del concepto de cultura como experiencia de lo bello, como oposición al utilitarismo de la modernización y concluye que, para los intelectuales latinoamericanos de fin de siglo, la cultura se identificaba con "el nosotros" y se oponía a la modernidad preconizada por el imperialismo estadounidense. Asimismo, Ramos señala el proceso educativo que, en las últimas décadas del siglo diecinueve y primeras del veinte, identificó la cultura con los estudios de humanidades convirtiéndola en depositaria de la memoria de un mundo en constantes cambios y transformaciones.

El estudio de Ramos se cierra con un apartado dedicado a "Nuestra América." Es éste el capítulo más corto del texto, pero uno de los más iluminadores. Ramos menciona cómo Martí advierte las fuerzas divisoras que operan en el interior de Hispanoamérica y señala la necesidad de encontrar un gobierno acertado que pueda anularlas. Para Martí, Hispanoamérica es una identidad desenlazada que rechaza lo autóctono y asimila lo ajeno, una víctima de la falsa erudición y de un discurso colonializado que disminuye el valor de los elementos sociales y raciales que constituyen la esencia nacional. Con el análisis de "Nuestra América," Ramos muestra cómo Martí devuelve a la literatura su función política al mostrarla como poseedora del saber que puede dar la clave del gobierno adecuado a nuestra América sin restarle por ello su capacidad estética.

Divergent Modernities es uno de estos raros textos que satisfacen enteramente al interesado en la crítica literaria latinoamericana. Los análisis de los textos realizados por Ramos son agudos y detallados, y las conclusiones que se derivan de los mismos suponen una brillante contribución a la comprensión del desarrollo cultural en la América hispana. De hecho, la reflexión de Ramos sobre el ambiguo acercamiento a la modernidad en Latinoamérica, en ocasiones, supera las limitaciones del estudio literario y alcanza características propias de ensayo. La aparición en inglés de *Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina* es una valiosísima aportación a los estudios

latinoamericanos en los países de habla inglesa. La traducción de John D. Blanco es excelente y la incorporación de las traducciones de los textos de Martí: “Nuestra América,” “Prólogo al poema del Niágara” y “Coney Island,” en un apéndice final, permiten leer el estudio de Ramos con toda comodidad, sin tener que acudir al original en español o buscar traducciones en otras partes. En pocas palabras, *Desencuentros de la Modernidad en América Latina*, ha sido desde su primera publicación un libro de lectura indispensable para el estudioso de la literatura hispanoamericana, la aparición en inglés hará que *Divergent Modernities* sea un texto de consulta clave en los programas de *Latin American Studies* y para todo aquél interesado en el proceso cultural de Hispanoamérica. (JOAN TORRES-POU, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY)

NIKOLAI BUKHARIN. *How It All Began: The Prison Novel*. Trans. George Shriver. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Pp. xxxi + 345. US\$ 16.95 paper.

While Mikhail Bulgakov’s famous observation (in *The Master and Margarita*), that “manuscripts don’t burn” has not always been true in the Soviet/Russian context, occasionally a manuscript surfaces from the ashes of Stalin’s attempts to destroy not only his political opponents but also Russian culture and its creators. As the historian Stephen Cohen outlines in his introduction to Nikolai Bukharin’s autobiographical novel, *How It All Began*, the survival of this manuscript, and its subsequent discovery and publication, are indebted equally to academic tenacity, forensic inquisitiveness, and the secret police’s (and Stalin’s) frequent impulse, “to preserve forever” masses of their victims’ documents and papers. Until his arrest in February 1937, Bukharin had been the Soviet Communist Party’s leading theorist and its co-leader, the main proponent of a more humane alternative to Stalin’s terrorist state, and an articulate antifascist. The last of old Russia’s true intellectuals, in the thirteen months between his arrest and his trial with its predictable outcome (he was executed in March 1938), Bukharin managed to write four manuscripts, including a treatise on capitalism and socialism, a reinterpretation of Marxism, a body of nearly two hundred poems, and this unfinished novel. As Cohen relates in his fascinating introduction, after Bukharin’s death, his prison manuscripts were deposited in Stalin’s personal archive and remained there until they were “excavated,” at Cohen’s initiative, in 1992. By the time the novel was published in Russian in 1994 (under the title *Vremena*), Bukharin had become the most poignant icon of Stalin’s excesses, thanks in no small part to Cohen’s efforts, Gorbachev’s need for alternatives to the Stalinist model, and the publication in 1989 of *This I Cannot Forget (Nezabyvamo)*, the memoirs of Anna Larina, Bukharin’s widow.

Thus, like a number of other significant Russian literary works, *How It All Began* comes to the reader with considerable cultural and ideological baggage. Any attempt to disentangle this “novel’s” literary merits from its textual journey must take into account its different readerships and their intentions: Western academics and students

of Russian culture and history will read (and judge) *How It All Began* differently than have the Russians who read Bukharin's sole venture into prose fiction by this member of the pre-Revolutionary Russian intelligentsia — a group notable for being devoured by its own ideas. Questions of readership are also complicated by the fact that the publication of the original Russian text, came at a transitional time for Russian culture: the first wave of interest in the sins of the past had peaked, and efforts to understand the new cultural moment were in their nascency. The hyperbolized value of print culture, and specifically the primacy of the literary text, as defined by generations of Russian intelligentsia, was beginning to wane. Elsewhere (in the November 27, 1995 issue of *Nation*), Cohen commented that "... the Russian publishers of Bukharin's prison manuscripts, including his novel, could barely find sufficient funds for printing 1000 copies." As subsequent observers of the contemporary Russian cultural scene have noted, the publication of Bukharin's novel in Russia marked both an apogee in *glasnost'*, on a par perhaps with the publication of the most controversial of Solzhenitsyn's works, and its endpoint, as market and global factors pushed post-Soviet Russia into the world cultural arena, with its own very different set of legitimating criteria.

It is fair, then, to suggest that the significance of *How It All Began* is imbedded in a Russian cultural tradition dating back to the beginning of the 19th century and now unraveling, which professes the profoundest faith in the sacredness of the written word. Bukharin's novel stakes its claim to authenticity, sincerity and authority — the three mainstays of this tradition — on both textual and extra-textual grounds. As a manuscript that emerged in a single copy from the Stalinist tombs, Bukharin's writings carried with it for the Russian reader that quasi-theological "aura" that Walter Benjamin worried would disappear in an age of mechanical reproduction. Moreover, while Bukharin characterized his text as a "novel," in fact the fictional forms and devices of *How It All Began* barely disguise not only its origins but the very core of the narrative in the author's autobiography. The argument has often been made that all fiction is to a varied degree autobiographical, but here, plot and characterization clearly take a second seat to recollection of the past, and the novel is no more (or less) than the story of a boy's growth from childhood to adolescence, related in a strictly chronological sequence. Sincerity and authority are similarly served here: who could be more sincere than a writer facing certain death, attempting to leave a testament for posterity documenting one boy's life in the waning years of Tsarism, a boy who straddled the old and new regimes and who chose, in his final months, to speak as a conscience for his nation, to fight for truth by revealing his own childhood? Finally, who would question the moral authority of Stalin's most important martyr?

The text's interest for the non-Russian reader is likely to be somewhat different, however. Certainly, the general reader will enjoy this not unfamiliar tale of the *Bildungsroman* of an exceptional child, the many relatives, schoolmates and friends who cross his path, and the author's often vivid depiction of the varying social classes, ethnicities and political factions in Tsarist Russia's twilight years. Kolya Petrov (the author's alter-ego) comes from an educated but impoverished family, and the narrative abounds in Dickensian descriptions of privation, sacrifice, urban life and early death. Petrov's early sensitivity to the countryside and to nature, and his later talent for art and literature

fit all the *topoi* of the classic Russian *intelligent*. Late in the narrative, a few chapters focus on political discussions or historical incidents (which were not observed by the narrator and bring the narrative flow to a deadening halt), but generally this future activist's growing political awareness is traced as part of his overall trajectory towards maturity.

How It All Began also has its fair share of social satire and criticism (though there is little self-analysis or introspection), humor and word play, all ably and clearly translated into English by George Shriver, who has also ably annotated problematic sections and provided a glossary. Bukharin (like Leon Trotsky, another important Bolshevik cultural critic) had read assiduously as a child, written about contemporary literature, and was one of the few high-ranking Bolsheviks to attempt to help poets such as Boris Pasternak and Osip Mandelstam when their livelihoods (in the first case) and very lives (in the second), came under attack from the state. These literary sensibilities, a prodigious memory, and a considerable talent for dialogue and characterization, are apparent in what is, according to Cohen, an unedited draft written under the most demanding psychological and physical conditions. Ominously, abruptly, dramatically, the novel/memoir breaks off in mid-sentence at chapter twenty-two. Bukharin's grace period as author had come to an end, and the last weeks

of his life were taken up in preparation with what was to be the most spectacular of all of Stalin's show trials.

For the non-Russian literary scholar, Bukharin's "novel" is probably of most interest for two reasons. First, as Bukharin intertwines memory, biography and history, we see how diffuse and permeable the boundaries of the autobiographical genre can be. Second, it reveals the complex relationship of resistance and conformity, literature and state, and of the positions of insider and outsider, in Russian culture. As an autobiographical text, *How It All Began* simultaneously provides the reader both with a representative cultural history of its time, and a singular story, thus fulfilling Thomas Eakins' expectation, articulated in his *American Autobiography* (1991), that such writing "pursue the representative without compromising the integrity of the individual instance" (12). In the Russian tradition, beginning with Alexander Herzen, recognized by most as the father of the Russian intelligentsia, that expectation, as applied to both fiction and autobiography, has often stood in a complex relationship to the struggle for power between state and intellectual. It is telling that Bukharin, as the leading representative of his generation of the conflation of the two, at least until his arrest, turns to the most personal form of literature to write his own testament.

In spite of the dominant narrative of the post-revolutionary period — the building of the new collective Soviet man and its canonization in Nikolai Ostrovsky's autobiographical novel, *How the Steel was Tempered* (1932/1934) — the emphasis in this text, written only a few years later, is on the personal, familial and social processes that produced one particular individual — the narrator. Thus, in spite of the unique circumstances of its composition, *How It All Began* falls squarely in the tradition of autobiographical writings through which the author re-examines his past by re-tracing the trajectory that had brought him to the present.

Those looking for a well-structured novel in *How It All Began* will not find it here. However, reading

Bukharin's "novel" for a vivid and highly personal reconstruction of Russian life on the eve of Revolution by one of its creators — and subsequent martyrs — will underscore literature's, and specifically autobiographical literature's, continuing significance as an open-ended and enduring component of cultural life. (NATASHA KOLCHEVSKA, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO)

EVGENY DOBRENKO. *The Making of the State Writer: Social and Aesthetic Origins of Soviet Literary Culture*. Trans. Jesse M. Savage. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001. Pp. xxiv + 484. Notes. Bibliography. Index. US\$ 75.00 hardcover.

Although the focus of this book — mass literature and literary politics during the first decades of the Soviet era — is culturally and historically narrow, it deals with an issue of universal relevance: that of the relationship between the writer and political authority. At no other time in history did this relationship become a topic of such heated public debate; and no other regime has taken such an active interest, for better or worse, in the evolution of what Russians call the "literary process." (By itself the existence of the concept of the *litprotsess* — with its implications of organic unity and teleology — speaks volumes about the special situation of literature, not just in the USSR, but over the last two centuries of Russian history.) Admittedly, one has to dig deep to find specific points of comparison between the Soviet situation and that of, say, contemporary Canada, beyond the basic economic question of government funding (though in the end, perhaps this is the only thing that counts). But explicit government policy is just one element in a broader web of issues involving the production and reception of art. Among these are: individual versus collective creation, censorship and self-censorship, the didactic function of art, the influence of reception on production, and the institutionalization of artistic training. It is interesting to compare the Western experience in this last area (the relatively recent blossoming of university programmes in creative writing) with the Soviet approach, which included the 1933 founding of the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute. Not only was the *Litinstitut* the world's first educational establishment dedicated to training professional writers in various artistic genres; here entire national literatures were first given written form, as representatives of the newly-literate Soviet ethnic minorities came to Moscow to learn their craft.

Evgeny Dobrenko is an émigré scholar who has taught in the US and Great Britain. Besides the present book, his many publications on sociohistorical aspects of Soviet literary culture include a companion volume — *The Making of the State Reader* (Stanford, 1997). Both studies exemplify the application to literary scholarship of the

dominant revisionist tendency in Western studies of Soviet political history: the idea that government policy (including the 1932 invention of the official Marxist-Leninist artistic method of socialist realism) was not simply imposed from above by a totalitarian regime, but was the result of complex behind-the-scenes negotiations between top and bottom, centre and periphery. Dobrenko's basic thesis (which echoes that of other recent investigations in this area) is that the features of official Soviet literature were determined primarily by the writers themselves, with each of the artistic groupings in the post-1917 decade of ferment making its own contribution. Not that these were necessarily intended as such: the author repeatedly abuses the advantage of historical hindsight to wonder at the inability of the various groupings, all fiercely competing for the favour of the regime, to anticipate fully what it was that the latter would be demanding in 1932.

At the same time as the veterans of the 20s were preparing the ground for *sotsrealizm*, they were helping to educate a new generation of authors drawn from the barely-literate ranks of the workers and peasants. The classical production novel of the Stalinist era was more than a propaganda vehicle; it directly reflected the tastes of the "shock-worker" writer, which were obviously very close to those of their mass readership. A highlight of Dobrenko's *State Reader* is his colourful record of this readership's response (much sought-after by the literary authorities) to the new poetry and prose; similarly, *State Writer* is enlivened by many examples of the first efforts of Soviet writers-in-training — the fruit of the author's explorations deep into literary territory that is well and truly forgotten by today's Russian reader. His citation of letters sent by these beginning writers to editors and state-sponsored "literary consultants" underlines the fact that writing was often seen as less a vocation than a means of escaping economic or other hardships. Some are poignant in their semi-literate ardour:

The key to my poems is that they manifest the inspiration I have from the poor devil's proletarian life that I am now given over to with my whole soul and the whole organ of life. I am ready to describe all the grief and all the truth in the whole world. Long live the first stage of my accomplishment, and for this I send you my ardent greeting, dear comrade poets and writers, for I also want to be your brother. (231)

Dobrenko asserts that "the history of Soviet literature in the strictest sense is a history of graphomania" (295). Although he provides striking illustrations of specific cases of this traditional Russian affliction, he can only justify his sweeping generalization by excluding from the category of "Soviet literature" those writers whose work is given the bulk of attention in most histories of this literature. Excluded are not only those with obvious anti-Bolshevik leanings (such as Solzhenitsyn), but also the more typical examples of respected writers such as, say, Leonid Leonov, who did most or all of their work within the framework of official literature, but fail to meet Dobrenko's requirements for adherence to its principles. In general, the author consciously avoids touching on the literary-historical role of individual writers (the unavoidable exception is the politically-privileged Gorky). He follows Roland Barthes in regarding literary history as possible "only at the level of literary functions ... and in no wise at the level of the

individuals who manage these functions" (xvi).

At the same time, his main source of data on the "functions" of literature are the written statements of these same individuals, whose positions are open to misinterpretation — which can pose a significant problem for a bottom-up model of literary-political history. For example, there is every reason to doubt the sincerity of the "enthusiastic responses" of those writers who were made to participate in the infamous collective reportage on Stalin's forced-labour construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal (374).

Still, Dobrenko has written an important book, full of insights on hitherto-neglected aspects of early Soviet literary culture. Unfortunately, it will be considerably more useful to those who can read it in its Russian original. To be precise, the publishers of the English version fail to mention that this is an abridged translation. The most significant omission is that of the entire first chapter — over one hundred pages. Readers who have not compared the two editions may not feel the loss; nevertheless, the omitted material on the political struggles and hidden motivations of the revolutionary-era literary groupings is certainly no less important than what has been left in. If Dobrenko's American publishers wanted to trim this book, they would have done him and us a far greater service by retaining this chapter and insisting on small cuts throughout (in the long lists of biographies of unknown writers, for example). They would have also done well to get a second opinion on the translation, which seems to have been done in a rush, to say the least. It is overly literal, both lexically and syntactically. Moreover, it is full of misunderstandings that often obscure what is already a complex argument. Right on page 1, in the second sentence, instead of Dobrenko's witty "Looking-Glass world" (*Zazerkal'e*) of Russian post-modernist versions of *sotsrealizm*, we get the indecipherable "postmodernist Foremirror." Similarly, the common Russian word for "honeymoon" achieves an uncalled-for poetic resonance as "honey-sweet month" — whereas the biblical "fleshpots of Egypt" are reduced to prosaic "Egyptian pots with meat" (113, 306). More mundane and even less forgivable imprecisions abound, such as the repeated use of the word "cleansings" to refer to Stalin's famous purges (*chistki*). (ROLF HELLEBUST, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY)

LOIS OPPENHEIM. *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. Pp. 237. US\$ 55.00 hardcover.

Samuel Beckett was known for forming friendships with painters and sculptors more often than with other writers. Painters such as Jack B. Yeats, Henry Hayden and the van de Velde brothers, along with the sculptor Alberto Giacometti, were all important to Beckett at different stages of his career. Many of Beckett's most frequently-quoted critical statements have been taken from his writing on painting; the most notable example is his "Three Dialogues"

with Georges Duthuit. Beckett's friend and publisher John Calder described the author's work as "more painterly than literary" (41). Despite the clearly important role of the visual arts in shaping Beckett's writing, there has been an ongoing need for more detailed studies of his lifelong involvement both with the visual arts and specific visual artists.

Even before publishing *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue with Art*, Lois Oppenheim had already contributed to this effort by editing the collection *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Arts and Non-Print Media* (1999). The contribution of *The Painted Word* to the study of Beckett and the arts at once refines the focus established by the previous collection, and raises the critical stakes. Oppenheim ambitiously declares that this study will "rethink Beckett's place on the twentieth century cultural horizon" (1). Such a rethinking is neither inconceivable nor undesirable. It has already happened at least once, when early interpretations of Beckett as the sardonic champion of humanism in the face of nothingness gave way to the recently dominant reading that makes Beckett the patron and precursor of all things postmodern and poststructuralist. As Iain Wright put it in 1983, Beckett's work has certainly seemed to offer an "ideal site for poststructuralist critical revelry" (13).

By placing "the figuration of seeing" (5) at the center of her reading of Beckett, Oppenheim offers a new critical focus and a major theoretical challenge. She takes issue with critics who see Beckett's career as a miniature and exemplary version of the move from modernism to postmodernism in literature, and she argues against the poststructuralist interpretation that casts Beckett as something of a deconstructionist *avant la lettre*. In Part One of her book, entitled "Neos and Posts: Situating Beckett," Oppenheim argues that it is simply unhelpful to ask whether Beckett is a modernist or a postmodernist. The pointlessness of doing so will become clear, she says, once readers recognize the importance to his work of perception and the visual: "the notion of a preoccupation with the visual as paradigm dismantles the either/or in displacing the question" (65).

While many critics, including Derrida himself (see, for example, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge) emphasize the proto-Derridean qualities of Beckett's work, Oppenheim proposes a profound affinity between Beckett and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and finds the resulting phenomenological reading more apt and persuasive than a deconstructionist one. Merleau-Ponty's account of art provides Oppenheim with a route through the Cartesian dualisms of subject/object and mind/body which provided Beckett with rich comic fodder in *Murphy*. In essays such as "*Le Visible et L'Invisible*" Merleau-Ponty reveals, in Oppenheim's words, how far "the visual work of art comes to be revealed not as object or thing, but *agent* of both artist and spectator's seeing." The affinity to Beckett's work lies in the fact that, according to Oppenheim, "it is a comparable resolution of the subject-object dichotomy in the play of perception and perceptibility that in Beckett becomes the paradigm of art" (100). By shifting her ground from the well-worked territory of semiosis or linguistic sense-making, and toward the phenomenology of perception, Oppenheim finds her way to readings of Beckett which are neither nihilistic nor heroically humanistic. This approach avoids the bracketing-off of referents (the fundamental operation in semiotic and deconstructive criticism). Instead,

Oppenheim portrays Beckett as a “phenomenologist of the written word” (165). According to this pheno-menological approach the perceiver and the perceived collaborate in making visibility possible. Both self and world exist once again, and what’s more, there is communication between them. We have moved from a criticism that seems to accept Murphy’s radical separation of mind (the “true self”) and world (including the body), and toward an embodied world (105) in which one can say, as Merleau-Ponty insists, “there’s something there.”

Beckett’s view of art, as Oppenheim describes it in Part Two of her book, stresses art’s interrogatory function more than its creation of illusions, pleasing or otherwise. Beckett’s theoretical thinking about art never settled into any schematic unity, and his theories can best be described as a “atheoretical,” while his aesthetic may be thought of as “anaesthetic” (68). Oppenheim chooses the term “dialogue,” with its appropriate sense of ongoing dynamism, to characterize the shifting relationships between Beckett’s thinking on visual art, and his practice in his own writing. This provides an appropriately accommodating focus for a study of this scope, while offering persuasive and illuminating connections: both between separate works by Beckett, and between his literary writing and his critical statements on art. Part Three of the volume goes on to offer specific studies of visual-art interpretations of Beckett’s writing. Art by George Baselitz, Jasper Johns, Avigdor Arikha, Louis le Brocqy and others receives careful explication in the light of Oppenheim’s phenomenological approach. This section is illustrated with black and white reproductions, without which its effect would have been greatly diminished.

Beckett has been one of a very few authors who has inspired responses from a wide range of artists in many fields, from sculpture to cinema (witness the recent project to film all of Beckett’s dramatic works, in a collaboration between England’s Channel four and Irish RTE). For this reason students of Beckett studies require a theoretical framework adequate to account for up the complex interactions between writing and the other arts. *The Painted Word* makes a pioneering and ambitious contribution toward constructing such a framework. (HARRY VANDERVLIST, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY)

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WILLARD BOHN. *Modern Visual Poetry*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001. Pp. 321. 47 illustrations. Bibliography. Index. US\$ 47.50 hardcover.

Visual poetry uniting literary and visual strategies is often defined as a poetry meant to be seen. Its rich history stretches from the Greek *technopaignia* (meaning "art or techniques of games") of the 6th century BC to the most recent experimentation in concrete poetry. It thrived in Europe during the Baroque period, and boomed through wild experimentation by early 20th century avant gardists. According to Dick Higgins, one of the pioneer researchers of the form, there seemed to be a universal tendency to synthesise visual and literary experience. Therefore, visual poetry has been produced within various cultures. In the last decades of the 20th century, it has flourished as never before, spreading literally throughout the globe, successfully developing new literary and communicative patterns for today's highly visual world.

An important landmark of contemporary culture, visual poetry nonetheless has received relatively little scholarly attention. The situation has begun to change only recently, and yet to date, many theoretical and practical implications of the form remain unaddressed or scarcely researched. Therefore, Willard Bohn's new book *Modern Visual Poetry* is a valuable contribution to the study of the genre. It continues his intensive research of visual poetry that began over the decade ago and resulted in publication of *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry: 1914-1928* (1986, 1993) with the following *Apollinaire, Visual Poetry and Art Criticism* (1993) and *Apollinaire and the International Avant-Garde* (1997).

Bohn's new publication is a solid piece of research, supported by sufficient illustrative material, in which the phenomenon of visual poetry is studied with remarkable insight. However, it should be mentioned that the title of the book is somewhat misleading. Bohn's study is comparative and multilingual, but it does not encompass the diverse experiences within the tradition of the visual poetry and focuses on selections from chosen cultures. The study deals primarily with the visual poetry of French and Spanish speaking European and North American practitioners from the first part of the 20th century, with Ezra Pound being the sole English speaking pre-war avant gardist whose ideogrammic poems are discussed. Visual poems of English, Canadian, Russian, Ukrainian, Scandinavian, or Japanese visual poets, as well as those produced by representatives of other nationalities and many contemporary German, American and Latin American authors have not been integrated into the orbit of the research. Furthermore, most recent trends and experiments within the genre have not been included either with the exception of Eduardo Kac's holographic poetry briefly outlined in the concluding chapter. The analysis of concrete poetry and lettrism in the chapters "Isomorphic Operations" and "Hieroglyphics and Hypergraphics" respectively, as well as an attempt to develop the typology for both trends expands the geographical horizons and temporal constraints of the research. So do the short and yet important discussions of the creative practices of several post-war Swiss, German, Brazilian and Czech visualists, whose works have been earlier documented by Mary Ellen Salt's anthology *Concrete Poetry: A World View*. It is quite understandable that it is impossible to include the whole variety of numerous and diverse visual experiments (even produced within the time constraint of a century) and simultaneously provide an exhaustive analysis of the most representative pieces. Dick Higgins' pioneering book *Pattern Poetry: Guide to an Unknown*

Literature published in 1987, which documented various sub-genres of visual writing diachronically by language and literature, did not provide an analysis of individual works or visual trends in literature. As it obviously was not Bohn's intention to attempt a panoramic analysis of global visual poetry or even of European or North American visual practices, it would be relevant to attach a clarifying subtitle to the current very broad and suggestively all-encompassing title.

The book consists of twelve chapters and covers a wide range of specific issues pertaining to visual poetry practice and theory. It begins with a brief but well-argued debate on the several crises of the sign at the turn of the century, which resulted in the re-emergence of visual poetry as an avant-garde phenomenon which revolutionizes the relationship between the verbal and the pictorial aspects of the sign. As Bohn further points out, visual poetry is "a hybrid genre, a second-order semiological system in which linguistic structures support pictorial structures and vice versa" (100). Since visual poetry also "revolutionizes the relationship between the author and the text as well as that between the reader and the text" (23), the author in the first chapter also comments on methods of meaning decoding and encoding by the reader.

The core of the book comprises a thorough analysis of the works of visual practitioners, ranging from the internationally recognized Guillaume Apollinaire, Gino Severini, and Man Ray to less known authors including Mexican-American practitioner Marius de Zayas, French author Juliette Roche, Catalan visualists Santiago Rusiñol, J.V. Foix, Carles Sindreu i Pons and others. The analyzed works are thematically arranged and interpreted in lieu of various avant-garde trends. Among the most important issues explored in the study are the impact of the Chinese ideogram on the genre's evolution and thus ideogrammic attributes of the visual poetry (in particular, works of Ezra Pound, Apollinaire and Severini), modes of Futurist visual analogy (exemplified by works of Francesco Canguillo and Carlo Carrà) and principles of visual abstraction (in view of composition by de Zayas, Roche, and Ray). Individual practices of authors who have considerably contributed to the development of the form, such as Mexican poet José Juan Tablada, whose compositions encountered Apollinaire's calligrams, received sufficient treatment from various perspectives as well. Visual experiments of less notable practitioners (Vicenç Solé de Sojo, Sindreu i Pons, etc.) which nonetheless elucidates the important characteristics of the genre, are also discussed in a painstaking manner. This in-depth analysis of many individual works within the framework of the national and global cultural tradition makes Bohn's study significant and interesting. Additionally, in the course of his interpretation Bohn links various aspects of visual poetry to the aesthetics and praxis of Futurism (predominantly Italian), Dada, and Cubism. He discusses the phenomenon in a considerably broader cultural context than it is usually presented. Such an approach allows the researcher to investigate visual poetry as a phenomenon well-rooted in European and American cultures despite the marginal status of the genre in national literatures.

Due to the fact that several issues included in Bohn's new book were previously touched upon in his *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry: 1914-1928*, the author did not avoid some repetition of the previously outlined ideas,

suggested formulations and used citations (42, 56, 100, 127). However, it is obvious that Bohn consciously tried not to repeat himself and in many cases succeeded, even when dealing with the previously discussed works. Some of Bohn's interpretations offer a new reading of the text, as in case with Apollinaires' poem "Paysage" in the chapter "Landscaping the Visual Sign."

Focused predominantly on French and Spanish language practices of the genre poetry, Bohn's study nonetheless presents valuable material for further investigations of visual poetry irrespective of its provenance. His careful observations and insightful conclusions can be effectively used for comparative purposes in the analysis of visual poetry created in other cultural setting. Many of his suggestions are applicable to visual poetry in general, and especially to those produced in European languages. His book is another significant step in interpreting and theorizing contemporary visual poetry. (TATIANA NAZARENKO, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA)

BENJAMIN H. D. BUCHLOH, ed. *Neo-avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000. Pp. 592. US\$ 50.

Benjamin Buchloh's collection of essays is an important addition to the study of European (mostly German) and US neo-avantgarde artists active since the 1960s and 1970s. The text has two parts: a relatively brief introduction and an array of articles. The author's introduction clarifies his theoretical approach to the critical discourses around the neo-avantgarde and its reception, especially in the US. The introduction also orients the reader towards the author's changing theoretical perspectives in the course of the years when the essays were written (1977-2000). Buchloh's position in the essays in effect moves from an aesthetic approach in the vein of Peter Bürger to a more "indulgent" and synoptic view of the neo-avantgarde production since 1968. Indeed the more recent articles (since the mid-1980s) are less virulent in their criticism than, for instance, his early essay on Joseph Beuys. Buchloh points to his passionate attack on the artist and underscores the polemical and political fervour of the European pamphleteer tradition, while at the same time foreshadowing the crucial issues at stake in his later aesthetics. This aesthetics turns on notions of memory as mediated by historical experience. As Buchloh suggests in both the acknowledgements and the introduction, his European background — the cultural politics of the German New Left in particular — juxtaposed with his engagement with the US reception of the European discourse on the avant-garde are the context for his theoretical investigations into the national or postnational character of the neo-avantgarde. Yet Buchloh does not explain how the issue of the postnational/national emerges in the essays themselves and how it relates to the notion of memory. The reader's task is to find ways in which the various discourses mentioned in Buchloh's introduction merge coherently. I believe that if discursive and historical memory is placed at the centre of Buchloh's aesthetic approach, the relation of memory to neo-avantgarde artistic production is further qualified by the dialectic between the national

and postnational paradigms present in the neo-avantgarde's relation to the avant-garde. The change of location — from Europe to the US — as also in perspective marks a cultural and temporal translation that involved situating Buchloh's critique on a different axis: what originally appeared to him in Europe as the site and destination of neo-avantgarde positions (e.g., its postnational impulse) from a critical perspective in and of the US he now views as an engulfment of art by the international style typical of the culture industry. If European artists still resort to traditional national identity-formation processes as the only weapon against the culture industry, and yet a tradition of identity that cannot be rescued after Fascism, the international quality of US neo-avantgarde becomes problematic in itself. Accordingly, Buchloh's questions are: to what extent can a national or rather local framework still, today, help re-read the neo-avantgarde's history and its political valence? To what extent has the neo-avantgarde's postnational agenda "suspended" the homogenizing power of the culture industry? And what kept it from lapsing into pure mimetic affirmation?

The introduction — the critic's re-reading of his own work — aims to guide the reader to the common thread that runs through these questions and that informs one or the other articles. Here Buchloh specifically addresses three different kinds of issues underlying the articles. He deals first with the tension between the national background of modernist aesthetic production and the postnational impulses of the neo-avantgarde. He approaches this debate by looking at the different historical relations the US and Europe had, respectively, with the near past, namely the wounds of World War II, Fascism, and the Holocaust. Thus he not only analyses how art confronted the dominant paradigms of consumption in the US and Europe, but he does so from within the framework of each continent's unique historical experience of this past.

Second, he addresses the controversy about the relations between the historical avant-garde and the neo-avantgarde and the function of an avant-garde, more broadly, over time. Buchloh's introduction specifies the ways in which he deals with the appropriation of and changes in function of the classical avant-garde principles — for example, those of the grid and the readymade. His essay on Yves Klein's *Le Vide* and Arman's *Le Plein* reads easily from a comparative and dialectical perspective: a conventional appropriation of the historical avant-garde's motifs in the case of Klein that is superseded by the functional and qualitative transformation of the readymade in French neo-realist artist Arman's *Le Plein*. This article is crucial to understanding the fundamental aesthetic principle around which Buchloh's articles seem to pivot, namely the neo-avantgarde's confrontation with historical and discursive memory and its post-Holocaust origins in the disavowal of memory. The repression of memory also includes technical and superficial (i.e., affirmative because conventional) forms of appropriation and reinstantiation of the avant-garde. Thus Klein's work disavows his predecessors and refuses to reflect on the implications of modernist paradigms. On the contrary, Arman's accumulations start with Duchamp's readymade and the Surrealists' *objet-trouvé* only to disintegrate the hieratic/auratic status of "originality" that these works have acquired in history and the contemplative modes of reception they demand. Arman's accumulations are based on the principle of

multiplicity as applied to the objects of consumption after they have been consumed and have reached the status of the refuse of production. While Klein's paintings add "spectacularization" to abstraction and thereby erase memory, Arman's accumulations and *poubelles* (garbage) work both as memory images of the "first historical instances of industrialized death" (274) and as a glimpse of a future of unmanageable production of waste in consumerism. For Buchloh, Arman's work *Le Plein* envisions intricate temporalities that are captured in the allegorical image of deadly production and the production of death. In Buchloh's periodization and conceptualization of the neo-avantgarde, both Klein and Arman become the first instance of a new aesthetic in which the dialectic of anamnesia (reminiscence) and disavowal — or spectacularization — is played out. What they accomplish for the first time is to set the agenda of the neo-avantgarde in its abandonment of avant-garde culture (as based in critical negation) and in its immersion and dialectical relation with a "seemingly inescapable assimilation to the very apparatus the avant-garde had historically opposed (the spheres of consumption as organized through fashion, advertising, and product design)" (279).

Third and finally, Buchloh deals with a motif that cuts across all articles is the interdependence between artistic and ideological formations in the practices of the postwar period. Hence Buchloh focusses on the dialectic between art production and the global culture industry, a dialectic he sees as ongoing.

Although useful in fleshing out the main themes of the articles, the introduction — when read against the essays themselves — may sound over-determining, in particular with regard to Buchloh's elaborations of the national/postnational discourse, which in the articles is actually present less in these terms than as art's relation to the dialectic between historical and discursive memory on the one hand and its disavowal or repression on the other.

Buchloh places the work of the artists considered within the history of their production and the broader framework of the institutions of art. For example, Buchloh approaches Daniel Buren's work through a discussion of the role of the museum in the age of the culture industry. Likewise, his article on Sigmar Polke opens with a strong critique of the first neo-avantgarde's appropriation of the historical avant-garde's formal paradigms. He also critiques more contemporary forms of appropriation — the term meaning here the legitimation of the existing power structure. In contrast, Buchloh's articles on Polke's art and on Haacke's work show that the power of art lies in its illusory aesthetic ability to suspend power. For the author this involves an engagement with historical memory that leads to the suspension of repression and domination embodied by the prevailing aesthetic paradigms.

The articles on Buren and Warhol rescue second neo-avantgarde artistic production against more contemporary — corporate — art forms. The neo-avantgarde here comprehends and supersedes the historical avant-garde (and its appropriation by the first neo-avantgarde) by working through the kinds of post-war appropriations and the ideological functions that such acts of appropriation had in relation to the traumatic history of fascism and war in Europe. At the same time this neo-avantgarde production acknowledges that European history and its repression mediate the artists' relation to different forms of advanced consumer society. Thus Buchloh

rediscovers relatively unknown artists for an American audience (e.g., some *Nouveaux Realistes*), artists whom he dialectically juxtaposes to avant-garde artists from the 1920s and Pop artists in the US.

Furthermore, in the articles of the last 15 years or so, Buchloh suggests, what may at first appear to be affirmative mimesis proves on closer examination, through the works' engagement with historical and aesthetic memory, able to function as mediated yet qualitative transformation. Affirmative mimesis is the lens through which Buchloh reads the work of Andy Warhol. Yet his analysis elaborates on those aspects of Warhol's artistic endeavour that complicate his use of mimesis. Buchloh situates Warhol's work within the early appropriation, in the US, of the European avant-garde. He points in particular to the social and political milieu fundamental to this kind of US appropriation, as different from the European context. In the US the context was an expanding capitalist consumer society exporting its own cultural values. In this way, Buchloh shows the necessary historical ties and confrontations that Warhol had with the contemporary and local tradition of artists in the early 1960s who had pictorialized Dada and who had engaged critically with the New York School (Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg). By working through the "dominant" legacy of the avant-garde in place in the US, and seeking to distinguish himself from within this dominant paradigm, Warhol invented a form of painting that transformed painting. Paradoxically, the artist's adherence to the conventions of painting (i.e., of the medium, more generally) brought about radical change. Warhol's works entail a concealed yet present dialectic between affirmation and critical irony.

Buchloh's essays situate the last trace of art's resistance to recycled aesthetic patterns (that become clichéd and lose their aesthetic function and political valence) in a kind of memory — worked through a mnemonic *travail*. He prefers this notion of historical and discursive memory to the concept of negative critique as the criterion of judgement. He views the compulsion to critique as the last vestige both of the critic's claim to authority over the artist and of the artist's desire to be endowed with critical agency and political consciousness. Buchloh argues that his essays break through the "prohibitions" imposed on art by the New Left's aesthetic criticism. Although he does not state this, it appears that he views this aesthetics as being dogmatically indebted to Adorno's aesthetic theory. In contrast, the author believes in art's "surrealistic" and redemptive features, provided these are revised and reconsidered in their actual function.

He identifies art's resistance in its ability to work with the multiple mediations present in the dialectic between spectacle (i.e., reification and fetishism) and the use value of an already obsolete art object. In this dialectic lies the role of memory. In stressing the complex interactions and multiple mediations among the works of art, the institutions of art (from the museum to art criticism), and the culture industry he displaces resistance away from the subject of art and locates it in the Habermasian model of communicative action.

From within this framework, the dialectic between the eroded public sphere of art and, increasingly invading the sphere since World War II, the culture industry is central to Buchloh's investigation of each artist's work. His essays, then, engage with the neo-avantgarde from within the theoretical legacy of Critical Theory. In contrast to the

latter, however, he does not strive for totality or the total claims of theory, nor does he claim autonomy or negative critique as effective in this struggle. Yet he underscores the need for the critic's competence. Criticism could ideally be the last resort of an evanescent public sphere. Art thrives, for the author, if it has a public function. Publicity (*Öffentlichkeit*) can happen only if the corporate world does not overwhelm the public sphere. Yet considering that the culture industry increasingly threatens to conquer this sphere, Buchloh sees art's aesthetic ability to suspend power and resist the culture industry surviving if artistic production makes this dialogue its task — that is, if communicative action determines art's structures and functions as well as those of the critic. In order to preserve its public function, its *raison d'être*, art must rely on separate spheres of competence that will counteract the homogenization imposed by the global corporate world.

It would be interesting to read additional remarks about artists of the neo-avantgarde who remain active today — Buren, for example, who is presently on exhibition at the Centre Pompidou (2002). As Buchloh argues in his articles, neo-avantgarde artists engaged ingeniously and dialectically with both the preceding paradigms of the avant-garde and the new dimensions of art and aesthetic that advanced capitalist societies after the trauma of World War II. Had he considered their contemporary production within the new global economy, the distinction between his own approach to the neo-avantgarde and Bürger's critique of this art would have been even clearer. Moreover, if his articles on the neo-avantgarde had been juxtaposed dialectically with essays on recent artistic production — involving new media, for example — then perhaps this juxtaposition could have expanded the historical and aesthetic analysis of the neo-avantgarde's function to address its impact on contemporary art today, in the US, Europe, or elsewhere. The second volume of essays announced in the introduction might open some of these panoramas for the reader. (CECILIA NOVERO, PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY)

PETER HUNT, ed. *Understanding Children's Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. US\$ 28.75 paper.
 MARTHA WESTWATER. *Giant Despair Meets Hopeful: Kristevan Readings in Adolescent Fiction*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000. CAN\$ 29.95, US\$ 29.95.

The evocation of Julia Kristeva in one of the titles under review here indicates the intersection of literary, cultural, and psychoanalytic theory with the study of books for the young. Children's Literature, a generic term for the study of books for the very young, for children, and for adolescents, has come of age. Maria Nikolajeva, announced this coming of age as early as 1996 in her study, *Children's Literature Comes of Age*. Like Nikolajeva, the writers whose work appears in the two books under review employ formalist and semiotic approaches to the texts they scrutinize. Martha Westwater offers readings of six writers of Young Adult fiction: Patricia Wrightson, Kevin Major, Katherine Paterson, Aidan Chambers, Robert Cormier, and Jan Mark. Peter Hunt's volume contains studies of a variety of

approaches to children's literature, each authored by a different hand. The list of contributors to Hunt's book is impressive; many of the most important critics of children's literature appear here. The contributors to Hunt's book and the focus of Westwater's readings also illustrate something of the international scope of children's literature studies, representing as they do England, Canada, the United States, and Australia. Taken together, these two books offer a fine overview of the state of things in children's literature studies early in the twenty-first century. Of the two books, Hunt's is obviously the more comprehensive. But Westwater's focus on specific writers is salutary in its reminder that author and text studies are as important as theoretical studies. The theoretical study of children's literature serves the purpose of providing validation for the kind of readings Westwater performs and which we might look forward to receiving in more abundance in the future than we have in the past.

"Kristevan Readings" implies a psychoanalytic approach to textuality, and Westwater does provide some psychoanalytic material. Her chapters on the six writers take up separate but related topics from Kristeva's work. With Wrightson, we have a focus on Kristeva's notions of the semiotic and the symbolic (concepts developed out of the work of Jacques Lacan); with Major the focus is on the chora experience; abjection is the topic in relation to Paterson's fiction; Chambers provides Westwater an opportunity to consider melancholia; with Cormier the topic is monumental time; and the chimaera pops up in the chapter on Mark. Each of these topics receives explanation, yet each of these topics remains subservient to Westwater's real aim: the construction of a canon of writing for young adults. Something Leavisite whiffs through the pages of *Giant Despair Meets Hopeful*. The title, evoking John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is a clue to the evangelical fervour we encounter in this book. In her Introduction, Westwater asserts that she believes "we are in a state of cultural decay" and that books such as the ones she studies "may preserve for us values that are on the verge of decline" (xvii; original italics). Her chapters on individual writers most often end in encomium; for example, Westwater sums up her assessment of Patricia Wrightson by saying "probably no other Australian writer of children's and adolescents' literature ... demonstrates so much literary grace and human wisdom" (41), and she says of Robert Cormier that "he has initiated countless young people on their quest for a little more truth about the regenerative potential of a love empowered by forgiveness" (133). Such praise transcends rather than completes the Kristevan readings.

Westwater's concern for values and her desire to see hope in the midst of despair in the lives of young people obscure her own self-consciousness. This lack of self awareness is nowhere more evident than in the chapter on Patricia Wrightson. Westwater wants to see in Wrightson's work "a condemnation of racism" and "of the notion of the supremacy of European civilization" (40). No doubt Wrightson herself wishes to condemn racism and the hegemony of European civilization. The irony is that both Wrightson and Westwater perpetuate racist attitudes and assume that European values are universal. Speaking of Wrightson's Wirrun trilogy, Westwater remarks that for Wrightson the "Aborigine serves as a metaphor for the universal adolescent" (22). Effectively assimilating Aboriginal culture into Eurocentric ideas, Westwater simply assumes that the Dreamtime is an expression of what

Kristeva terms the “semiotic,” that pre-verbal, pre-Oedipal union with the mother’s body that represents something other than (sometimes prior to) the symbolic domain of language and rationality. Her reading of Wrightson’s novel, *The Nargun and the Stars* (1973), claims that “Wrightson makes a new Dreamtime possible for a young boy on the point of despair” (29). The young boy, Simon, is a white boy who has no knowledge of Aboriginal culture, and yet we are to believe that he experiences Dreamtime. The assimilation of Aboriginal culture into western ideology runs smooth in Westwater’s treatment of Wrightson, as well as in Wrightson’s treatment of Aboriginality.

Westwater is no doubt well-intentioned, but she remains unaware of the implications of her writing. In the generally useful chapter on Aidan Chambers and melancholia, Westwater discusses *Dance on My Grave* (1982) in the light of Kristeva’s analysis of Leonardo Da Vinci’s relationship with his mother. (I note that in transcribing a passage from Kristeva here, Westwater misspells “jouissance.”) The comparison Westwater makes is between Leonardo’s infant Jesus and the character Barry from Chambers’s novel. She writes: “And like his medieval counterpart, Barry never stops looking for a maternal phallus in the bodies of young men” (100). Now what she writes may be valid, but I suspect many readers will wince to read of a gay Jesus here. *Giant Despair Meets Hopeful* contains many such lapses. In the concluding chapter we learn that the writers Westwater discusses are unlikely to know the work of Kristeva, “yet every one of them shared with her a deep appreciation not only of the narrative power of fiction on life but also of life on fiction” (159). I am not sure that this is news. *Giant Despair Meets Hopeful* contains some interesting observations on six well known writers for young adults, but its implicit ideological stance is deeply traditionalist. Despite the overlay of Kristevan and Lacanian theory, what we have here is closely observed evaluative criticism that is unaware of its own Eurocentric and conservative assumptions.

Understanding Children’s Literature is also profoundly traditionalist. Despite its talk of postmodernist themes, metafictional fictions, narratological features, and ideological debate, this volume is grounded in formalist readings of literary texts. The formalist readings may be filtered through semiotics, but the focus remains the close reading of texts, largely for the sake of exercising the imaginations of readers. The discussions of such topics as ideology and politics (Charles Sarland), history and culture (Tony Watkins), linguistics and stylistics (John Stephens), intertextuality (Christine Wilkie), and psychoanalysis (Hamida Bosmajian) are lively and astute. And yet, one might ask for some consideration of such absent topics as disability study, gay and lesbian themes, racism and colonialist themes. The presentation of violence in work for children is also missing, as is consideration of child loving. But I cavil. *Understanding Children’s Literature* is a welcome addition to the growing library of children’s literature studies.

Hunt’s introductory essay nicely covers the issues related to the study of children’s books: ideology, criticism, the reader, the history of the subject, and so on. Following this introduction is Karen Lesnik-Oberstein’s meditation on childhood and children’s literature. Her sense of the problems of definition is acute and useful. However, her

range of reference is somewhat dated; of forty works cited, over half date from the 1970s or earlier, whereas only four date from the 1990s, the latest carrying a publication date of 1992. Following Lesnik-Oberstein are essays that take up semiotic themes. Perhaps the most impressive of these are Stephens's essay on linguistics and stylistics and Perry Nodelman's essay on the picture book. Nodelman's focus is on the first page of John Burningham's *Mr. Gumpy's Outing* (1971), and what he has to say bears out his contention that "[c]lose attention to picture books automatically turns readers into semioticians" (79). He speaks, I believe, of both professional and non-professional readers. Other essays that take up text-related issues are Wilkie's on intertextuality, Lisa Paul's chronicle of feminist criticism, and Robyn McCallum's study of metafiction and experimental work. Peter Hunt writes a useful short essay on Bibliographical Studies. And Hamida Bosmajian gives a short, but comprehensive review of psychoanalytic criticism.

Three essays deal with Reader Response criticism and related matters. Michael Benton provides a skillful overview of Response criticism; Geoffrey Williams relates children's literature to the subject of literacy and children's reading skills; and Hugh Crago gives a compelling explanation and even defense of bibliotherapy. The book then ends with a General Bibliography to supplement the Works Cited from each essay, and a Glossary that provides short but cogent definitions of some of the more obscure terms the reader will encounter in these essays. All in all, this is a useful and provocative book. It strikes me as a bit mean-spirited to chide the authors for infelicities in writing. Generally, the prose in *Understanding Children's Literature* is clear and correct. Generally, but not always. Take the following sentence, for an example of the not always: "But instead of being about boys seeking adventure, profit, and someone to rescue, girls were in the starring roles" (117). What this sentence appears to say is that girls, instead of being about boys, inhabit starring roles. This may be a nice feminist slip of language, an ignoring of patriarchal grammar, to indicate just how free of boys girls are — they are not about boys; they star themselves independently. But just how girls might "be about boys" remains unclear. Sometimes slips are just failures of editing, as in: "An increasingly noticeable phenomena has been..." (149). Or sometimes they suggest a failure of intensity such as when one writer twice labels Northrop Frye a "New Critic" (43, 44). One essay fails to note the date of Roberta Trites's *Waking Sleeping Beauty* (123; date is 1997). And so on.

I will return to my beginning and reiterate that both of the books I review here are useful additions to a growing body of critical and theoretical writing on children's literature. If I find fault with both of them, I do so only because this is the nature of my task and we can find fault with any book. The important point is that we can learn from both these books. The "Kristevan Readings" Westwater provides must help any reader of adolescent fiction in which abjection and melancholia are endemic, and the survey of methodological and theoretical approaches to children's literature in Hunt's volume is precisely what the student of children's literature requires. (RODERICK MACGILLIS, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY)

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MARIO J. VALDÉS. *Hermeneutics of Poetic Sense: Critical Studies of Literature, Cinema, and Cultural History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998. Pp. xi + 169. US\$ 45 hardcover.

Hermeneutics of Poetic Sense brings together a number of essays under four broad rubrics: hermeneutics, text and memory, parody, and literary history. In examining these various topics, Mario Valdés meditates on issues of considerable importance to the theory and practice of interpretation in our postmodern era, especially as the latter apply to the study of Spanish and Latin American literature of the twentieth century.

In the opening chapter, Valdés is intent on contesting the "radical scepticism" of deconstruction which holds that literary meaning is wholly contingent and wholly indeterminate (3). Drawing from a number of sources, and preeminently Wittgenstein, Ricoeur's magisterial multi-volumed *Time and Narrative*, and theoretical physics, notably chaos theory, he seeks to establish the relationship between order and disorder in that act of meaning constitution we call reading. Certainly, it is the seemingly paradoxical claim of chaos theory that, even in a context of "chaos," pure randomness seldom occurs, and that patterns generally exist in even the most apparently disorderly of contexts. So, Murray Gell-Mann, Nobel laureate in physics, can talk of "deterministic chaos."¹ And, by way of example, we come to see that climate change is not necessarily a random occurrence unpredictable over time but rather, perhaps, the product of monarch butterflies flapping their wings in Mexico's Sierra Madre or urbanization or El Niño or greenhouse-gas emissions or some amalgam of these and other causes. Similarly, textual interpretation is, for Valdés, not an act of random hermeneutic play but rather one that is, jointly, pre-structured by the work itself and operationalized through the reader's imaginative engagement, with the latter activity similar to that which scientists deploy in an effort to understand phenomena in their domain.

And "Why do we impose order on objects," Valdés asks (7). It is because to have "sense," we must have order, and this imposition of order "does not invent relationships but rather takes up one aspect of things and ignores others" (7). At the same time, while textual meaning may be determinate or indeterminate, it is nonetheless sharable in either circumstance. And, like Ricoeur, who emphasizes the distanciation of the text from its author, Valdés abjures any suggestion that the writer can, in any way, control readerly response to the textual artifact.² Finally, it is the

1 Gell-Mann, *The Quark and the Jaguar*, 47-48. I am grateful to Jan Varsava for calling my attention to Gell-Mann's work and for bringing the ponderous subject of theoretical physics closer to the ambit of a layman's understanding.

2 See, for example, Ricoeur's "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," 131-44.

“trained critic” who “transforms the play of randomness” in a literary work into a coherent reading, and it is the “hermeneutic critic” who places that reading in the “company of the many other readings that might have been” (31).

In the second chapter, Valdés considers the play of memory and its influence on notions of self, other, and community. Examining passages drawn from Proust’s *The Past Recaptured* and García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and using Ricoeur’s notion of “refiguration” — a mode of “reflective thinking” responsive to narrativity and the formative role it plays shaping lived experience — he demonstrates how personal and collective modes of memory write the cultural history of a people or a nation. In another short essay, Valdés considers characterization in two films, *Casablanca* (1942) and *Frida* (1984), which is based on the life of Mexican painter, Frida Kahlo.³ The final section of the chapter discusses how cultural identity is fashioned, offering an insightful “heuristic plan” that outlines the four modes of reference, i.e., ostensive, sociocultural, intra- and inter-textual, and experiential, which in his view mold notions of cultural identity.

In Chapter Three, Valdés looks at parody in twentieth-century literature, focussing on Unamuno’s *Amor y pedagogía* (1902) as an exemplar of a modernist parodic irony and on John Updike’s *S.* (1988) as illustrative of its postmodern form. In the former, and this establishes it as modernist for Valdés, we find omniscient narration and overt satire; in the latter, satire is achieved through indirection by the use of (what Bakhtin calls) inserted genres, i.e., letters and transcribed tape recordings. Although the periodizing of parody and irony is left underdeveloped — and certainly a great many other novelists could have been brought forward in developing a contrastive typology between modernist and postmodern forms — Valdés draws needed attention to two writers who have, for varying reasons, received inadequate critical consideration.⁴ And with regard to Unamuno, this aim is advanced further at the end of the chapter when the latter’s *Niebla* (1914) is read as a precursor of postmodernism.

In the final chapter, Valdés provides a cursory history of (literary) postmodernity in Spain and Latin America before going on to analyze certain literary historiographical issues. While the former operates on a fairly high degree of generality, non-specialists will find it a helpful overview of main trends and themes. The concluding essay, like various other parts of the book, fittingly pays homage to Ricoeur’s considerable contributions to philosophical hermeneutics in the *Time and Narrative*, and in particular to our understanding of the relationship between lived experience, history, and narrativization. Contrasting Ricoeur’s views on historiography with the scientism of Braudel and his fellow annalists, the author suggests that the latter are incapable of moving beyond a very limited factuality to create a vibrant narrative tableau of the sort envisioned by Ricoeur and other philosophers of history such as Hayden White and David Carr. As Valdés himself says, “Historical narrative” does not simply describe events but “also

3 For a more recent cinematic treatment of Kahlo’s life, see Julie Taymor’s *Frida* (2002).

4 It should be noted that Valdés is the author of *Death in the Literature of Unamuno* (1966).

imitates them, that is, performs them, performs the same kind of creative act as those performed by historical agents” (129).

Hermeneutics of Poetic Sense has a variety of merits. It establishes a number of interesting links between contemporary theorizing in the field of physics and the manner in which we understand literary works. Further, in a contemporary context of often inflamed debate on various theoretical and critical issues, and a frequent reluctance to integrate the thematic-political and the formal within scholarly discussion, the essays of this volume demonstrate admirable balance and measure, acknowledging that history and narrativity are co-shapers of our lived experience and its symbolic rendering in literature and film. At the beginning of the book, Valdés offers what might be mistaken for a mere commonplace. “My position,” he advises us, “is that the highest achievement we can aim at in criticism is to have spoken honestly and openly of our era’s sensibilities and to have written with judicious discretion and, above all, clarity” (24). Such aims as these are never out of season, and we can admire Valdés for having advanced them in *Hermeneutics of Poetic Sense*. (JERRY A. VARSAVA, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA)

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ROBERT REBEIN. *Hicks, Tribes, and Dirty Realists: American Fiction after Postmodernism*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001. Pp. 248. US\$ 29.95.

Buckminster Fuller once famously described himself as a verb. It is our own ambiguous fate to live in a period whose identity is more typically summed up in a prefix: the *post*-modern. Modernism, to be sure, was always a profoundly uncertain and contradictory concept, but its impressive mansion is securely located at what is now one of the most desirable addresses on the Main Street of cultural history; our own moment, on the other hand, seems to be positioned on what sounds suspiciously like a grammatical service road, or worse, exit ramp. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that murmuring malcontents are beginning to be heard in various quarters suggesting that it is time to move on. Robert Rebein is not one of those. On the contrary, his new book, *Hicks, Tribes, and Dirty Realists*, argues that, in the case of American fiction at least, postmodernism is *already* a thing of the past, and rather than staring obsessively in the rearview mirror, it is time we got our eyes back on the road and began to get a more accurate sense of the actual lay of the land around us. And it is this which his book proposes to do.

Rebein's concerns, to be fair, are really more practical than theoretical; his dispute with the postmodernist paradigm is largely confined to his first chapter, "After Postmodernism," and makes the entirely valid point that histories of the literary present are almost invariably informed by a certain whiggish mythology, whereby the past is always prologue. If postmodernism writing is defined by, to take a typical list of attributes, a thoroughly ironic self-reflexivity, an infatuation with formal and linguistic games, an affection for fantastic fabulation, and a genial contempt for the naive assumptions of "realism," then it needs to be seen, Rebein contends, like polka-dot shirts and Vasarely posters, as a phenomenon inextricably rooted in the cultural moment of the late sixties and seventies, reaching what can now be recognized as its apogee when the 1974 National Book Award was given to Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. And good riddance, one feels Rebein only just restrains himself from saying. For despite its pop pretensions, literary postmodernism was always (now it can be said) a pompous academic bore, "ridiculous in its assumptions (all magic has fled from the world, it's all been done before, etc.) or too simply too limiting in its strictures" (6). To the question of what comes after postmodernism, Rebein suggests that we look to what was in fact there all along, and indeed long before — the vigorous tradition of literary realism that is "paradoxically, more open to new techniques and influences than ... literary postmodernism" (21), and which has always been the preferred (and usually only) reading of the broad cross-section of the public that reads literature at all.

But the heart of this book is not a theoretical polemic; after the introduction, the rest of the work is given over to what might be called a classificatory field guide to the varieties of contemporary fiction (my metaphor is partly inspired by the dust jacket photo of what appears to be a foggy forest at daybreak — an updated sacred wood, perhaps). Subsequent chapters are devoted to the main species of current writing: minimalism, "dirty realism," "hick chick," neo-regionalist novels of return, the new western, Native American/Latino writing, and, somewhat surprisingly, the white prison novel. Apart from the minimalists, whose deadpan focus on surfaces earns Rebein's censure as a neglect of "significant action and detail," most are treated sympathetically, their main representatives identified and described, most important themes and works briefly outlined, and their significance in contributing to the return of realism measured and approved. The range of authors treated is wide, running from hard core naturalists like Denis Johnson and William T. Vollman, to favorites of library reading clubs, like Jane Smiley and Louise Erdrich. And if none is likely to win the Nobel Prize, an array of Pulitzers, National Book Awards, and selections by Oprah Winfrey supports Rebein's claims of their currency.

What they have in common, despite their many differences, is their unembarrassed embrace of realism and eagerness to provide a detailed and authentic depiction of the world(s) "out there." It is undoubtedly true that the past twenty years have seen, as Robert Stone put it, a "renewal and revitalization of the realist mode." There are to be sure different ways of interpreting this development; for some, it may appear less like a sign of vitality than a symptom of imaginative fatigue, which bears a suggestive similarity to the return to (conservative) normalcy that has characterized American politics since the seventies. It is not entirely unfair to describe the popularity of the new realists as the

result of a revolt of the middle class of readers, a revolt elsewhere evidenced, perhaps, by such phenomena as B. R. Myers' microcephalic rant, "A Reader's Manifesto," in *The Atlantic* last summer, and the deep wells of *ressentiment* that it apparently tapped. Rebein, however, is more sanguine; the rediscovery of realism is a recovery in a double sense, both a going back and a process of healing — the stylistic equivalent of the plot of therapeutic return that organizes many of the novels he analyzes.

This is confessedly an overview, and will undoubtedly be valuable as such both to students encountering the terrain for the first time and to anyone interested in a large scale map of the varieties of contemporary fiction. Rebein's broad categories offer a useful starting point for further discrimination. At the same time, what is missing here is a sense of sustained critical attention to the particularity of the narratives in question — to style, to language, to *writing*, in short. In the rare instances where Rebein devotes more than a few pages to a novel, such as Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, the results are not such as to make the reader regret their infrequency. What is too commonly left out is the rich specificity of the works in question, which is an ironic consequence insofar as it is part of Rebein's argument that what makes these novels exciting is their mastery of detail, their painstaking accumulation of peripheral and casual particulars that make for a sense of "world." For all the utility of Rebein's comparisons and categorizations, it is hard not to feel that there is a certain reductiveness inherent in his approach, a result which paradoxically leads one at times to question the large claims he makes for the importance of the authors he discusses.

From another point of view, though, this reductiveness, in the etymological sense of a leading-back, is appropriate, for one thing that emerges from Rebein's survey is that a characteristic feature of post-post-modern fiction is a willed limitation, a return to roots, a conscious rejection of the high octane ambitions that have fueled American literature throughout most of the twentieth century — the desire to put all the world, or at least America, into a book. One way this limitation expresses itself is in the enhanced importance given to a sense of place and this literary century seems to have ended, as it began, with a striking outburst of regionalism. Or as Rebein puts it in his conclusion, "American fiction at the end of the millenium embraces past traditions and forms even as it remains resolutely *topical*, both in the sense of belonging to a particular location or place, and in the sense of being of current interest, contemporary" (165). Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News* is only one among many examples, and the popularity of both the novel and its recent film version is a reminder of the continued appeal of stories of the winning of wisdom in a more simple world to urbanites whose journeys of self-discovery are largely confined to the pages of Eddie Bauer catalogues. The purpose of such a novel is not to tell us new things, but to remind us of things we already (or should already) know — the wisdom of the past, the goodness of common things, the value of knowing where you belong.

There may be something sensible and mature about such writing. It is the novelistic equivalent of a sports sedan — a bit of stylistic acceleration, but with plenty of room for the family (as well as a spacious trunk to carry those childhood secrets that, sooner or later, one will have to come to terms with). At the same time it is difficult to come

away without the feeling that there is something which is lacking as well — the sense of disorientation, of unresolvable ambiguity, of the vertiginous irony and isolation that come from going beyond limits — the feeling, in short, of not knowing where you are, or should be. It is not clear that there is much room for this in a future defined as a return to the great tradition of William Dean Howells and Sinclair Lewis. It is therefore perhaps significant that Rebein chooses to end his survey with a chapter on the white prison novel. For all its documentary interest, this is not, one would have thought, one of the central literary forms of our time, nor one likely to pose a challenge to the status of Pynchon or Barth. But in a curious way, prison novels may indeed, as Rebein argues, offer a “reflection of contemporary literature more generally.” For the prison novel is nothing if not a story of limitations and a tale of topicality, of the ultimate inescapability of place. Whether this the place we want to be, and whether it really represents a prospect “more open” than the project of postmodernism, is another question. (DAVID H. EVANS, DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY)

* AKIRA MIZUTA LIPPIT. *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Pp. 256. US\$ 22.95 hardcover.

Animals are suddenly everywhere in literary criticism and critical theory. Bookshelves are filling up with works examining animal subjectivity, the animal imagination, human-animal relations, and the ethical practices demanded by the presence of animals. Western culture's relation to animals is deeply conflicted; many of us would never dream of harming the precious pets who share our lives, yet have no difficulty consuming other animals whose cultural status as “food” condemns them to short, painful, and distorted lives before they face terrifying deaths. How such contradictions can exist and how we humans can best understand our relation to the non-human world are urgent questions in these days of cloning, genetic modification, animal organ transplants, and environmental crisis. Akira Mizuta Lippit's book *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* seeks to untangle some of the ways that the concept of “the animal” has been used to define the human, and suggests that this definition is undergoing a massive technological transformation that ultimately replaces the actual animal with one that is infinitely reproducible.

The process of such a transformation is necessarily complicated. *Electric Animal* is a genuinely interesting, densely written examination of the rhetorical position of the animal in the discourses of philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature, and film. Humanity has often defined itself in relation to animals: they are what we are not. However, Lippit argues that the condition of modernity demands that animals vanish, and that this vanishing must further be continually re-represented in language, literature, and film. The animal must never completely disappear, but must be always shown in the process of disappearance. Thus, every representation of the animal is also a representation of its absence, as the actual animal is replaced by what Lippit suggests is a spectral animal, who haunts the edges of human

language as a trace, spectre, excess, or supplement. This spectral animal emerges as a sign of mourning, another constituent element of modernity.

To figure out how we got here from there, Lippit initially canvasses the place of the animal in philosophical discourse, moving from Descartes through Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Rousseau, Hegel, Heidegger, and Nietzsche, and identifying common strands in the developing definition of “the animal.” If an individual is defined by the ability to reason, then animals, seen to lack reason, cannot be individuals and thus exist only as interchangeable elements in a set, or as a multiplicity. Humans are also marked by consciousness, which animals are seen to lack. Because humans have consciousness, then can lose it in death, and so experience authentic death, while animal deaths seem to be a case only of matter redistributing itself. Further, animals are seen to be unable to imagine their deaths in that they exist in the perpetual present, and this failure in imagination is one more way in which their deaths are inauthentic. The result of this philosophical inquiry seems to be the establishment of a hierarchy, with humans at the top, having genuine existence and death; rocks at the bottom, being unconscious of their existence, and animals somewhere in the middle; not entirely unconscious of their being but certainly not given the same level of awareness that humans are. Linked to this hierarchy is language: animals do not have language and cannot be fully represented in language as they will always exceed it. Attempts at representing animals in language only partially succeed. “Killed by the word,” writes Lippit, “the animal enters a figurative empire (of signs) in which its death is repeated endlessly.... [that which we call] ‘dog’ is immortalized, preserved (taxidermically) in the slaughterhouse of being, language” (48).

The fundamentally new way of understanding the human being in relation to the environment occasioned by Darwin’s evolutionary theories allowed Freud to develop ideas of the animal in relation to the unconscious and the irrational. To Freud, writes Lippit, the animal represents the primitive and the originary, an element of the human but entirely other than the conscious mind. Freud sees the unconscious as a site where desires can be circulated without being made manifest in language: this definition, argues Lippit, is analogous to the category formerly occupied by “the animal.” The unconscious and the animal have further affinities, he suggests, in that they are both endowed with perpetual vitality (neither can “die”) and that both are unrepresentable. Lippit sees Freud’s ideas as particularly important in understanding the place of the animal, writing that “while conventional philosophy maps animal being outside human worlds, the discovery of the unconscious opens a route for animals to reenter the world” (127). Lippit suggests that this route can also be found in Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, eventually leading to their condition of “becoming-animal,” a heterogenous, shifting, and multiple state.

Lippit then looks at three authors closely related to Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis, Lewis Carroll, Franz Kafka, and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, pointing to the ways in which these authors thematize the animal and challenge human/ animal boundaries through representations of unstable subjects, ultimately concluding with representations of the becoming-animal. Carroll’s radical wordplay provides an instance of language’s instability; Kafka’s representations of human-animal metamorphoses depict what may happen to language when its subject is no longer

human; and Ryunosuke's novel *Kappa* explores madness and humanity through the eyes of a mythical, part-human, part-amphibian creature. Lippit sees a trajectory through these authors to cinema, writing that "language becomes, after literature, a form of technology" (161): language reaches its limits when confronted with animality, and must thus be transformed.

Lippit correspondingly turns his attention to photography which, like the unconscious, he likens to animality in that a photograph is always frozen in life, its subject never dead but always going to die. Like photographs, animals lack (or are seen to lack) subjectivity, which makes identification with them impossible. Paradoxically, however, it seems that looking at photographs of an animal permit identification with it, suggesting that the medium of representation effects some fundamental change in human-animal relations. As animals began to disappear from the everyday lives of many people, they became increasingly represented in the new reproductive media. This new media, argues Lippit, has become a "technological crypt" mobilized to enable continuing mourning of the animal. If, as philosophical tradition holds, animals cannot truly die, then they cannot be properly mourned, yet as they *must* be properly mourned, they must be transformed into an immortal medium that will allow their vanishing to be continually represented. Film holds them in a curious suspension, neither alive nor dead, yet always on the edge of death. The place from which the animal comes, a non-place beside the human world, is now according to Lippit a technological rather than natural space. The animal is transformed in cinema as it appears as animation, giving its life to what is now its crypt.

Lippit's thesis is both intriguing and timely. What effect has technology had on our conceptions of the animal, and how does technology alter our conceptions of the human? If modernity is built on the bodies of animals, then the transformation of flesh into insubstantial and flickering images fits the kind of postmodernity that changes cartoon rodents into billion dollar commodities and names a national hockey team after Disneyfied ducks. Strangely, the sections of Lippit's book in which he deals with literature and film are the least satisfying. He seems to be building momentum for a conclusion that never arrives. More context is needed for the reader to understand his choice of examples — why Carroll, Kafka, and Ryunosuke instead of anyone else? Are these authors exceptional, or do they best represent general movements? I would have liked also a more extended discussion of cinema; indeed, the section "Cinema" occupies only five pages of the book. Lippit's introduction of animation near the close of the book is interesting, and leads into other topics that I would have liked to hear him speak about, such as the relation between animation and the animal: why is so much animation centred on the animal subject? Following Lippit's argument, animation is a form of resurrection, as these animal figures are endowed with life and language; at the same time, we kill these animals repeatedly, representing them as we wish to see them, their animal selves extinct.

Two quibbles are both minor and major. Lippit's argument moves by affinity — Hegel's idea of animals as automata is like the mechanical representations of animals made manifest through cinema, the unconscious is like the animal which is like the photograph. These statements of affinity, while usually convincing, occasionally appear

stretched, though if a reader is willing to go along the results are rewarding. A more significant question, raised by Lippit's study, lies outside its bounds: what is the relation between the rhetorical animal and the real animal, between language and the world? In analyzing representations of the animal and how it has been mobilized in different critical discourses, are we any closer to animals, or are we looking only at ourselves? (ALISON CALDER, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA)