

## Book Reviews

Mieke Bal. *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually*. Translated by Anna-Louise Milne. Stanford: The Stanford UP, 1997. 284 pp.

Mieke Bal's most recent book combines several lines of inquiry familiar to readers of her ground-breaking work on narrative and narratology; on textual analysis and theory; and on art and cultural studies. These theoretical perspectives and interdisciplinary approaches come together in one of her most ambitious projects—an interpretation of ekphrasis and visual elements of Proust's fiction. *The Mottled Screen* takes up the question of the status of the image in *A La Recherche du temps perdu*. She marks the convergence of literature with the visual impact of painting, considered as a translucent colored screen, in the notion of Proustian flatness.

The stakes of Mieke Bal's project are high: the author seeks to understand the discursive modality of seeing as well as the visual modality of reading. The argument develops within the terms of a two-fold dilemma. First, the book emphasizes a reading of literary and visual material through the flat surface (in contrast to the depth of consciousness): for Bal, the flatness of painting is evoked by the screen of the book's title, borrowed from Proust's famous passage on reading in the first section of the novel and inscribed in the Proustian narrator's childhood experience of summer in Combray. Second, according to the author's explicit approach to painting in Proust's novel as "figuration"—a term that the author uses to define a literary poetics of painting, rather than a thematic or an aesthetic view—*The Mottled Screen* explicitly dismisses the rhetorical aspects of figuration. This bold premise allows Professor Bal to locate her approach to a painterly poetics at a distance from the figures of metonymy and metaphor and the poetics of art, love, and allegory that occupy criticism of Proust from Spitzer and Poulet to Bryson, Compagnon, Didi-Hubermann, Doubrovsky, Hamon,

and others, via some landmark essays by Damisch, Genette, Barthes, and de Man.

In her Introduction, the author writes: "The mottled screen, as a figure of the unfolding of simultaneous, different states, is a metaphor that inscribes variations and nuances of color on a flat image" (18). She mentions Lacan in the context of the screen; psychoanalysis informs her exploration of certain enigmatic appearances in the painting of Chardin and Rembrandt. Unlike Lacan, however, Bal rejects the perspectives of the art historian; she quotes Vincent Descombes's judgment of Proustian aesthetics as what readers like. Comparable to contemporary viewers of impressionism as a display of prettiness, these readers would deny the subversion of historical values that is at stake in the modernist valorization of the new. In the case of Proust's depiction of the young Narrator as aesthete, aesthetics could be understood as a painting of errors, caught between two ages—or two centuries, as demonstrated in a literary-historical context by Antoine Compagnon's work on Proust.

Bal explores the image of the shimmering screen that Paul de Man confronts in his famous essay on Proust in *Allegories of Reading*. It could be said that de Man interprets the Proustian screen as a kind of screen image (parallel to Freud's use of the term screen in "screen memory") for the non-coincidence of literal and rhetorical meaning. De Man's interpretation engages the reader with the visual and textual elements of Proust's use of Giotto's *Allegories* as well as their modernist form in Proust's fictional landscape of reading, but de Man underscores the disjunction of the Proustian Narrator's mastery of reading from Proust's strategy to mask (or screen) the flight of meaning.

Bal's definition of figuration goes in a different direction: it excludes style and the figures of allegorical art. Her avowedly anti-aesthetic perspective shapes her readings of enigmatic appearances in Proust. Her analysis of Proust's visual writing builds from painting in Part One to photography in Part Three, via optics in Part Two. The latter also explores discoveries of homosexuality, and a feminist interpretation of the body and the family structuring of the novel. Bal's theoretical and textual trajectories reach their peak in Part Three. The author explores our inheritance of Barthes's meditation on photography and mourning through the questions of surface versus depth, flatness and banality versus idealization, and the attempt to preserve the effect of the real that photography alone can deliver with searing immediacy.

Flatness and visual evidence of an interpretive strategy of writing remain in the foreground of Bal's figurations of visual art. Bal's

analysis of Proustian images opens the text to the articulations of meaning in still-life and photography, in details and patches, and in the subjectivity of envisioning otherness. Given its attention to questions that have been central in recent Proust criticism, it is unfortunate that the book does not mention all of the relevant secondary literature.

At its most innovative moments, Bal's argument recalls the claims for Modernism in art made by Clement Greenberg in the 1960s. Self-referential and self-reflexive, according to Greenberg, modern painting highlights its painterly qualities even as it underscores its own limitations as a medium: for this reason, the flatness that is Bal's critical vector in this study is always doubly charged, positive in its modernity as well as negative in its usage as banality. *The Mottled Screen* combines an exploration of modernist art with the impact of psychoanalysis and feminism on cultural studies to unfold the consequences of Proust's writing of images. From the self-reflection of painting in Chardin and Rembrandt to early photography of movement by Marey and Muybridge, from the desirable legs of the reflective Bathsheba offered to David in Rembrandt's painting to the linear dance of bodies in Matisse and Francis Bacon's tormented, disgusting figures seeping into the blackness of his canvases, Professor Bal expands the limits of critical reading to challenge the power of images, rendered as texts. Like Barthes, whose analysis of the image she integrates within her own argument in the third part of the book, Mieke Bal leads us through the darkness of Proustian desire and loss, and into the light of the image.

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Anny Brooksbank Jones and Catherine Davies, eds. *Latin American Women's Writing: Feminist Readings in Theory and Crisis*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. 250 pp.

This collection begins with a curious epigraph, a well-worn observation by Victoria Ocampo: "one can only see oneself in a mirror" (1). In the context of the introduction, who, I wonder stands as the "one," and what is the specular device that makes the self-seeing possible? Here is the first "theoretical crisis" that this anthology raises. Its ambitions are to elucidate "the triple articulation of theory's own contested status as politics, the crisis of feminist theory, and theory as a

discursive field in which social crisis is registered and played out" (1). It is immediately apparent that the essays selected to perform this task will also illustrate the near impossibility of a metacritique of this sort.

As a reader of the individual chapters, I am struck by the disparate results of the pieces. Sharon Magnarelli's essay on Griselda Gambaro offers a lucid commentary on *El despojamiento* through an analysis of spectator/spectacle/specularity in feminist terms. Magnarelli's deep understanding of Gambaro's work shines through, and she dips into theory (Irigaray and Butler) when it explicates "femininity" in the play, although Kappeler's study of pornography may not have been the best critical option. Nora Domínguez does a competent reading of gender performance in the novels of Norah Lange, also drawing on Butler. However, the essay is weighted down by lengthy footnotes and by the descriptions of Lange herself. Nellie Campobello's *Cartucho* is the subject of Doris Meyer's chapter, in which the boundaries between autobiography and testimony are examined in relation to gender. A subtle inflection of Bakhtinian analysis supports this excellent essay. Susan Frenk gets off to an awkward start with her overblown geographical metaphors in "The Wandering Text: Situating the Narratives of Isabel Allende. The author nevertheless gives a credible view of Allende's writing in relation to the family romance, the *telenovela*, and other indices of "readability" that aid in revealing political and social issues. Diamela Eltit, subject of Jo Labanyi's "Topologies of Catastrophe," has become the latest name in women's writing in Latin America, and her work is generally acknowledged as difficult, cryptic, and unsettling. Labanyi uses Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, a most appropriate theoretical source, to illuminate aspects of female masochism and the abject in *Vaca sagrada*, and she concludes that Eltit "argues that both men and women must recognize their need for, and complicity with, horror" (102). Kristeva is also the theoretical basis for Adriana Méndez Rodena's study of the desiring subject in María Luisa Bombal and Juan Rulfo. Although the author elucidates aspects of the Narcissus myth in relation to women in careful ways, she also employs some theoretical language that, unfortunately, sounds more like jargon than analysis. Still, I like the idea that the desiring subject in modern Latin American fiction has its source in the 1930s through Bombal's development of problematic female subjectivity. "Blood and Mirrors: Imagery of Violence in the Writings of Alejandra Pizarnik" by Susan Bassnett mostly calls on Irigaray for its analytic work. And yet old-fashioned commentary like "The very fact of being in the world puts her into a state of existential anguish, and the only way out is through the mirror into the other world, into death"

(131) mars the essay. Bassnett makes intriguing comments about the woman reader as voyeur, in a position analogous to the Countess's victims, but there is slight grounding for the argument. Linda Gould Levine's commentary on Cristina Peri Rossi's "gender project" in *Solitario de amor* gives a nuanced and fascinating reading of a novel that has changed the way we understand gender in Latin American literature. Gould Levine's appeal to "French feminisms" and feminist psychoanalysis works efficiently for her thesis that Peri Rossi envisions the possibilities for radical male subjectivity through utopian androgyny. Although I have a different take on this novel (I see encoded language of butch-femme roles at play), I appreciate how this chapter elegantly sets up its argument. The Brazilian writer Sonia Coutinho is Luiza Lobo's topic for her chapter, in which she discusses the *flâneur* in relation to women, the city, and genre (detective fiction, metafiction). Catherine Davies studies the poetry of Cuban Excilia Saldaña by making use of Bhaba, Freud, Jung, and Kristeva to show how Saldaña's "post-colonial *écriture féminine* inscribes the aesthetics and the politics of the black Atlantic in terms of the fragmented, hybrid, female body" (198). In "Latin American Feminist Criticism Revisited," Anny Brooksbank Jones examines work by critics such as Patricia Elena González, Eliana Ortega, Sara Castro-Klarén, Jean Franco, Debra Castillo, and Amy Kaminsky. Brooksbank Jones places great emphasis on micro-and macropolitical dimensions in these works, and her overview is in general balanced and informative, despite the frequency of evaluative phrases. The worst of these are "untheorized" and "undeconstructed," terms she applies to Amy Kaminsky's *Reading the Body Politic*, a book that in fact shows great awareness (and wariness, even) of theory. Some of the critiques leveled at Kaminsky sound like projections: that innocent, simple wish for delimiting contexts and establishing solidarity (which is not what Kaminsky claims to want, in any event) looks a lot like this formulation by Brooksbank Jones and Davies, from the Introduction: theory "offers something like the possibility of dialogue with Latin American writers or a bridge through and across the texts" (9). This possibility somehow appeals to the notion of harmonious communication and mutual recognition and acceptance (but by whom, of whom?), which seems to be an attempt to assuage the very tensions on which the anthology claims to be centered. Debra Castillo's rejoinder to Brooksbank Jones's essay contemplates two metaphoric moments: Adrienne Rich's travel to Nicaragua, "nation of poets," and María Luisa Puga's encounter with silent schoolchildren, Yaqui Indians who hide their heads and do not engage in the dialogue she seeks. Castillo posits the notion of "under-reading"

in her articulations of a violent, divisive cultural cut, and shows how ethics-talk and ascriptions of agency are highly constructed. Castillo reexamines the “supposed universal values involving the most basic relations of agent, process, and object” (224) so effectively as to make the essay to which she responds contextually palatable. Jean Franco writes the Afterword, a look at two signal authors of our times: Tununa Mercado and Diamela Eltit. Franco praises the way they “endorse a feminism which is neither one of equality nor of difference” and “show us that ‘nation’ and ‘community’ cannot be rethought without first exposing the limits of a system in which gender has been implicated in social control” (236).

Even though the overall ambition of this anthology exceeds the results, it is a very welcome contribution to that construct known as “Latin American Women’s Writing,” and it represents “cutting/edge” work, in Castillo’s formulation. To return to the epigraph: of course one can “see” oneself without aid of a mirror. Just look at the hands as they write, the legs as they march, or the shoulder onto which you turn your head when you don’t want to speak.

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Tomasa Cuevas. *Prison of Women: Testimonies of War and Resistance in Spain, 1939-1975*. Trans. Mary E. Giles. Albany: State U of New York P, 1998. 247 pp.

This book is a translation and adaptation of three volumes by Cuevas: *Cárcel de mujeres 1939-1945*; *Cárcel de mujeres: Ventas, Segovia, Les Corts* and *Mujeres de la resistencia*. It presents oral testimonies of several political prisoners, Cuevas’s included, during the Spanish Civil War and the following Franco regime. The book starts with an introduction by Giles explaining the circumstances that led her to the discovery of the first text by Cuevas, as well as the editorial changes she decided to introduce in collaboration with the author so that her translation could connect with readers who were not familiar with the key historical events that provide the background to the testimonies. By introducing some changes in the original texts, Giles wanted to avoid

unnecessary repetition and highlight Cuevas's voice as a connecting thread.

It is both regrettable and unpardonable that a misprint on the cover identifies Tomasa Cuevas, who is a woman, as Tomas [sic] Cuevas. Two other errors that must be noted are found in Giles's introduction: the incorrect translation of *Confederación de Derechas Autónomas* as "Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights" (although the mistake is rectified in the useful glossary included at the end of the book, where it is correctly translated as "Spanish Confederation of Right Wing Groups") as well as a confusing comment on page xii which suggests that the Spanish Civil War started in 1938, in the paragraph that begins: "A little more than two years after the election [of 1936] civil war broke out in the peninsula." In spite of these errors, the introduction is generally useful for the reader who is unfamiliar with the main historical events surrounding the Spanish Civil War and the different political parties involved in the conflict. Also for purposes of clarity and with the reader in mind, Giles includes two maps that help to locate the different prisons throughout Spain in which Cuevas was held.

Giles divides Cuevas's own testimony and those of the other women in two parts, the first one encompassing the Civil War years entitled "War and Prison," and the second one from 1944 to 1976 called "Resistance and Prison." In the first three chapters Cuevas presents her childhood and adolescence in Brihuega and her growing solidarity with the working class to which she belonged, her first arrest in 1934 and the beginning of her life in the Guadalajara prison in 1939. The third chapter ends with her introduction of two of her companions there, Blasa Rojo and Nieves Waldemer, whose voices will be heard during the following two chapters. This pattern of inserting Cuevas's voice and that of the other women interviewed by her continues throughout the text and produces a total of 12 chapters.

Cuevas introduces each of her companions' testimony with a paragraph that explains how she came to know them and the circumstances that led her to interview her friends during the years of democratic transition. This editorial strategy manages to give the book the unity and clarity that Giles wanted to achieve. Thus, Cuevas's voice becomes indeed the main voice that connects the testimonies among themselves while the secondary voices provide the text with the richness and diversity this type of literature needs.

From the testimonies as a whole one senses the desire on the one hand to document the repression and intense brutality of the Francoist

regime, and on the other the ultimate goal of educating the younger generations so that the horrors of war will never occur again. The text achieves those objectives successfully, since these women's memories do not simply record conventional images of persecution, torture, and cruelty, but also convey gestures of kindness and humanity by some police officers and doctors with whom they came into contact during prison time. The women come across not only as communists convinced of their political ideas, driven by an uncommon power to resist suffering, but also as intelligent human beings who criticize the party for sexually discriminating against them and who are also capable of recognizing goodness in their "enemies." Several black and white pictures of some of the women, young and old, incarcerated and free, alone or in the company of their imprisoned companions, add emotional power to the testimonies by reinforcing the idea of authenticity in the narration and by leaving the reader with a sense of admiration for these women's strength of character.

Giles's afterword describing Cuevas as a brave, rebellious warrior, a model wife, mother and friend seems, thus, unnecessarily sentimental and overwrought since it breaks the delicate balance the testimonies manage to achieve on their own. It would have been more valuable for the student of literature who tackles testimonial narrative for the first time if Giles had provided Cuevas's text with a theoretical framework that would have supplied a much needed sense of objectivity to a type of literature that is, by definition, subjective. Yet, despite some weaknesses, this book is worth reading since it provides insight into a relatively new area of literature that has not received much exposure.

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

This new book by David W. Foster has to be read as a celebration. Certainly, it is a condensed version of Foster's academic concerns, which he has been collecting in his more than thirty years visiting the city itself, and scrutinizing Argentine literature and culture, their clues,

subtexts, coded secrets and intricate labyrinths. However, this book is neither a guide for a tourist interested in the hegemonic aspect of Argentina nor a manual that promotes Buenos Aires as a whole. In Foster's book, the city is a sign or, rather, a signifier, and, as the author points out when writing about Sara Facio's photography, "it is a principle of semiosis that no sign has a meaning in and of itself" (183).

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

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

This is a very important issue to be considered when reading Foster book, because in it we can find *porteño* passions which are not Foster's (i.e. soccer, television, and even psychoanalysis). And, of course, there are Foster's passions which are seldom those of Buenos Aires (or, at least, they are not the Argentine intelligentsia's devotions, such as Eva Perón, Gatica or Enrique Medina). In this sense, the statement on the last page that "[m]uch has been made of the independence and liberty

of Argentine women, especially in Buenos Aires and especially following the role modeled by Eva Perón" (194) is, for instance, a very Fosterian provocative suggestion that, surely, would hardly find support among the Argentine writers and artists. Whatever the cultural producers' political affiliation is, it is likely they persevere in identifying themselves and their role as intellectuals in the tradition of Victoria Ocampo or Alicia Moreau de Justo.

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

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

However, Foster's Buenos Aires is not the inventory of privileged images of the social text, whether they are emphasized by the intelligentsia or political leaders; for him the city is, to the contrary, a controversial space, like the protagonist's apartment in Talesnik's *La fiaca*, namely, "as much a microcosm of the spaces of the Argentine middle-class as it is a free zone engaged in a subversion of the demands of that class" (42). Buenos Aires is represented here as the intimate map where interpretations of urban life are those proposed by the cultural production itself (55), that is, an archipelago of discourses which transform the city in a polyphonic, multilinguistic, painful, ironic, machista, and disturbing space. Foster knows how to translate these urban secrets to those readers who are not familiar with *porteño* slang, not only be-

cause every Spanish quotation has been translated into English, but because Foster is able to calibrate the exact English equivalent for terms like *compadrito* (71) or to measure the appropriate cultural resonance for *rosado* in the famous title of Borges's short story (76).

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

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Belinda Jack. *Francophone Literatures: An Introductory Survey*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997. 305 pp.

More and more university professors who teach French wish to include in their courses texts written in the language, but originating from regions other than France itself. Consequently, they seek information and bibliographies to direct them toward basic facts and background material. The aim of this book is to fulfill that need in a compact and affordable form.

Belinda Jack introduces her subject by explaining the meaning of the word "francophone," and the reasons why these literatures should no longer be studied merely as appendages to French writings. She summarizes the role of colonialism in the spreading of the language outside Europe. She describes its situation today around the world, observing also that French now evolves far away from the *Académie française* and that a number of nations are multilingual, all of which are factors influencing its usage.

Because history and culture define a literature, Belinda Jack has had no other choice than to organize her material geographically. Thus, she has divided her text into four parts: Europe and North America, Creole Islands, North Africa and the Near East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Madagascar. For each region, she gives a short history of the arrival of French and the development of the literature in that language. She summarizes general trends for the different genres: the novel, theater, and poetry. Where appropriate, she lists nonfictional works, journals, and magazines that have played a significant role in supporting French

letters. In view of the large number of books to be discussed, she has had to decide which authors to include. She chooses generally those considered essential by most literary critics. Moreover, in order to present her readers with different possibilities of studying these literatures, she lists some female writers of renown. At the end of each part, she adds supplementary bibliographical entries.

The book is thus clearly organized. It also raises the most important issues pertaining to each of these literatures. The chapter on Canada, for example, reminds us that French was considered a low class language since the English conquest. It explains how its literature began to be taken seriously only in the 1960s. After the necessary stage during which French Canadian writers imitated examples from France, they decided to chart their own course, bringing to the forefront their own history and religion, introducing local vocabulary, and discussing problems specific to the region. Today, most do not even try to please Parisian critics, but seek instead to interest a local readership that has been growing along with the separatist movement. By contrast, in the Algeria of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, French was the language of an intellectual elite, but during the war of independence, people began to view the use of French as antinationalist. Today, writing in French represents resistance to Muslim fundamentalism. Haitian writers do not face these political problems often, for economic reasons, many of them have had to live in exile in France, Canada, or the United States where their Algerian colleagues have found protection from religious extremism. For all writers, exile poses particular difficulties, such as where to find a publisher or how to identify the audience for whom one must write. Thus, they aim at an international audience while endeavoring not to lose their cultural identity.

In her conclusion, Jack stresses the fact that France's "assimilationist" policies failed: different regions around the world may have adopted French as their official language, but they created literatures appropriate to their own cultures and needs, and, in so doing, they subverted French models. In fact, it appears that French was absorbed in three phases: during the first, the language belonged to an elite; during the second, it became more common among the "colonial subjects;" and during the third, "the Empire writes back," to repeat Salman Rushdie's expression (279).

Despite the many virtues of this book, I have to express some reservations. I do recognize that when one tackles such an ambitious project, some chapters will be better than others. Here, the chapter about Belgium suffers from a superficial treatment. Jack does not explain that

the region produced a literature in French before 1830. She could have pointed to Froissart and thus demonstrated that even in medieval times the use of French was not limited by the borders—still not yet fixed—of the kingdom. She should also have mentioned Maurice Grévisse and Henri Pirenne, both internationally known scholars, the first a grammarian and author of *Le Bon Usage*, and the second the historian who demonstrated the importance of oriental influence on the Occident in *Mohamet et Charlemagne*. To dispatch Emile Verhaeren in two lines shows a certain unfamiliarity with Belgian literature. Gustave Charlier and Joseph Hanse in their *Histoire illustrée des lettres françaises en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Renaissance du livre, 1958) would have easily remedied the problem. Yet, she does describe well today's state of affairs, and she manages to capture in a few pages the special relationship Belgian writers have with French literature. Unavoidably, there are some minor mistakes, for example, one I have made myself: she includes Marie Nbiaye among African writers. This author, born and educated in France, never had any contact with African cultures, apart from having had a Senegalese father. She is thus a French Black writer. Jack's list of "Studies in African Literature" does not include newer works. She should have added a few critics from around the world. Also, I would have liked her to stress the role of French Canadians in the development of the "Francophonie" concept. Today, because the French government has created a *Conseil de la francophonie*, people forget how much the Canadians contributed toward this idea (in order to gain legitimacy) as demonstrated by the television program that popularized the term in the seventies.

Apart from these reservations, the book is a very useful guide, and it certainly underscores the richness of today's francophone literatures.

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

Danielle Marx-Scouras sets out to correct the record on the controversial French journal, *Tel Quel* (TQ), by offering a comprehensive

examination of its history from inception to its phoenix-like rebirth as *L'Infini* that traces the intellectual and cultural climate in which it struggled, fought, and thrived. A journal that sought controversy, *TQ* has nevertheless drawn "virulent and relentless attacks" from academicians, journalists, and politicians who have succeeded in belittling its importance and refusing to recognize its central project. Marx-Scouras defines this project as *TQ*'s "coherent cultural program" for continual "cultural renewal" (8). The record Marx-Scouras wants to set straight is the commonly held criticism against *TQ* for its "eclectic confusion" and political shifting—in short, its perceived opportunism in joining (or creating) the avant-garde theory or movement of the hour. Instead, she claims to demonstrate how a coherent cultural program of renewal was set in place in the review's inaugural issue and continued unabated until its end in 1982. Essentially, *TQ* liberated literature from its enslavement to a politics of engagement without, moreover, relegating it to a simple rehashing of aesthetic ideology ("art for art's sake"). Ideally, Marx-Scouras argues, *TQ*'s cultural venture salvaged the very notion of avant-garde by giving back to literature its "subversive potential," *TQ*'s constant shifting and theoretical reversals in effect representing the avant-garde at its very best, that is, taking charge of its own subversion as well as that of the reigning political or cultural ideology. Realistically however, as Marx-Scouras discusses in her concluding remarks, certain criticisms must be leveled against *TQ*'s claim to cultural renewal when it can be equally demonstrated that the journal's avant-gardism remained confined to the very parochial limits of France (or perhaps Western Europe) while it totally missed the advent of Eastern European, Third World, and minority dissident politics and aesthetics; in other words, *TQ* failed to acknowledge, let alone anticipate, the transnational avant-gardes of the 80s and 90s.

Marx-Scouras's study progresses chronologically. Chapter 1 (roughly 1958-1962) examines the stunning debut of *TQ*, whose program sought the radical disengagement of literature from politics in the wake of de-Stalinization and decolonization. Positioning itself on the Right, Marx-Scouras argues, was *TQ*'s way of exposing the real reactionaries: the communist Left and surrealists who would not break with the Soviet bloc for years to come. With its new interest in semiotics, psychoanalysis, and the New Novel, *TQ* claimed literature's renewal and empowerment, having once freed it from the shackles of a history and politics the new generation of writers refused to admit as their own. Chapter 2 covers the first half of *TQ*'s "theoretico-formalist phase" (1960-1965)—perhaps its richest years, due in part to its public suc-

cess, in particular, at the 1963 colloquium at Cerisy (which would culminate in the 1968 publication of *Théorie d'Ensemble*). Disengagement is pushed to an extreme—"to the articulation of literature as a practice of writing (*écriture*)" closer to the work of philosophy and psychoanalysis. This time, *TQ* targeted not only writers and their outdated politics of engagement, but the subject (writer) and his or her object (novel) themselves. The "interrogation of language" takes the place of the "work" that seeks metaphysical, political, or aesthetic "truth." Marx-Scouras again underscores the radical and subversive nature of the *TQ* project since its turn to theory—which is simultaneously raised to the level of practice—in effect re-embraces the political since it critically examined, and reproached as such, all systems of discourse, language, and social codes.

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

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

Chapter 5 deals with *TQ*'s final and probably oddest turn: this time its voyage to a new continent, America. With the crisis of the French Left of the seventies and *TQ*'s break with China in 1974, Marx-Scouras measures the journal's own shift as a crisis stemming from "a fear of the 'massification' of culture and society and the subordination of the individual to the collective" (180). This conveniently allows for *TQ* to read its ultimate swerve to the Right again as the fortunate, if not altogether prophetic, anticipation of the collapse of the Soviet Union and

communism. Always ahead of the crowd, *TQ* "befriended the dissidents and *nouveaux philosophes*, relinquished Marxism, and declared the avant-garde dead" (21), thus exhausting its critics and rivals by declaring the exhaustion of culture, history, and politics *tout court*.

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

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Jeffrey Mehlman. *Genealogies of the Text: Literature, Psychoanalysis, and Politics in Modern France*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1995. 262 pp.

In spite of the potential promises held by its title, this collection does not propose a study in literary criticism but rather a cross-disciplinary investigation of a sturdy undercurrent of anti-Semitic ideology at work in French literature and thought from Sainte-Beuve to Paul Morand, with special attention to Maurice Blanchot and Paul de Man. In his study of what constitutes a "genealogy of the text," Jeffrey Mehlman reveals what today's literature and theoretical frameworks of

French thought owe to reactionary discourse which has lain, either deeply buried within literature or thinly veiled beneath its surface, as a foundation for ensuing discourse. Building on that premise, the author argues that repetition allows such discourse to recur in contemporary literature and, most importantly, that its presence has not been analyzed, let alone refuted, by authors as recent as Derrida. The latter are then found guilty of an apparent refusal to be a “resister,” i.e. a responsible “intellectual” in the tradition of Zola writing *J'accuse*, and collaborating with the enemy.

And yet, as Mehlman is describing the matrix of modern (and postmodern) texts, he both acknowledges the ambivalence inherent in the very act of writing and asks straight questions about the role of “literary adulation” and its perils (Chapter 7); he ends up interpreting writing as caught in the painful dialectics of the irreconcilable terms of World War II France: “in both senses of the question—how can one resist writing? We are always already in the toils of the written, always already collaborators *dans le texte*” (101).

The scrutiny with which texts are read, the span and precision of the research, the type of trans-disciplinary and intertextual connections established in this provocative book deserve the utmost praise. Some chapters are more convincing than others such as Chapter 2 (“Cranionometry and Criticism: Notes on a Valeryan Criss-Cross”) which takes literature as a pretext (in all senses of the term) to narrate a history of ideologies which led to two world wars. However, when Mehlman, the literary critic, returns to his elaboration of what constitutes a literary textual genealogy, his demonstrations are extremely persuasive. Hence Chapter 5 (“Pierre Ménard Author of Don Quixote again”) brilliantly shows how reading and writing are acts of juxtaposition, leaving us with questions such as What do we write? rewrite? juxtapose? Chapter 3 (“Literature and Hospitality: Klossowski’s Hamann”), proposes a rich intertextual weaving of repetitions with a *différance*, depicting how textual genealogies are formed and renegotiated from one author’s text to the next. Similarly, his thorough analysis and interpretation of the Romain Gary’s identity crisis finally resolved through the Ajar *canular* (Chapter 11, “The Holocaust Comedies of Ajar”) constitutes a scintillating exposé in favor of Mehlman’s intertextual call-and-response model.

Chapters 6 and 12 on *L'arrêt de Mort* rely on Mehlman’s earlier revelation of Blanchot’s fascist ideology of the 1930s, and epitomize what seems to be one of the major concerns of this collection of essays: to show the novel’s “way of negotiating its own perverse embeddedness

in literary history and, ultimately, in European history *tout court*" (83). He drives his political point home by stringing together a series of ideological betrayals or silences in his chapter on de Man. "Between Paulhan, on the one hand, claiming his collaborators were originally resisters and his resisters collaborators, and Derrida, on the other, that Heidegger was a Nazi only to the extent he was a humanist and Husserl and Valéry humanists only to the extent they were (Eurocentric) racists, the continuity seems so substantial as to be conclusive" (128). And yet, Mehlman deplores that, after Heidegger's murky Nazi past had been revealed, for instance, no one sustained the initial howls of shock and disgust for very long. It is this general return to apathy and silence that he vigorously condemns as an act of collaboration displaced from 1940s France to present-day American Academia (or, more precisely, to French thinkers revered by American Academia such as Derrida conveniently "muting" de Man's 1940s articles for *Le Soir* in his 1988 essays on his by-then deceased friend).

The main "readerly" difficulty with this collection of essays is that, although its noble focus seems to be the denunciation of the specter of collaboration hovering about French literature, it is hard to accept the existence of that very same specter (as opposed to a different one), anachronistically and prophetically grimacing in much earlier texts such as Sainte-Beuve's. As a result, this reader fails at times to see the logic or the coherence behind this vast intellectual conspiracy theory which spans generations of French writers and thinkers but really always already re-enacts and reconfigures a central trauma (and a global trauma it was and still is indeed): World War II, Nazi Germany's eradication of Jews (and others) and of real (obviously critical) thinking, and the collaboration of French writers. And yet, this polemical book is important for at least two reasons: a) with Papon on trial at the time of my reading, Mehlman's exploration of the literary manifestation of collaboration is timely and enriching; and b) dismantling the foundations of thought and received wisdom in currently praised literary criticism is always healthy. However, this reader finds herself often uncomfortable with the seemingly self-righteous views held by the author as he keeps digging deeper and deeper across time in order to unearth the dirty secrets of French literature and criticism.

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Nancy Shawcross. *Roland Barthes on Photography*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1996. 144 pp.

At the outset of her compelling new reading of Roland Barthes's final essay, *Camera Lucida*, Nancy Shawcross notes that "the age of mechanical reproduction begins with the photograph" (ix). From this premise, she explores the implications of Barthes's writings on photography for his semiological perspectives and contextualizes his ideas on photography among those of other theorists such as Benjamin. The lucid discussion of Barthes's *analagon* which begins Chapter 1 illustrates the methodological complexities of Barthes's investigation while pre-saging the theoretical and philosophical issues that Shawcross will address in the chapters that follow. Rigorously examining the mechanisms of Barthes's perceptual framework in general and his proposition that the photograph constitutes a "message without a code" in particular, Shawcross finds interesting correlations between the observations on photography expressed in Barthes's essays on photography and his commentaries on Japanese art in *Empire of Signs*. Any attempt I might make here to summarize Shawcross's findings would hardly do justice to her scholarship. She masterfully incorporates a discussion of such notions as "satori" and "trace" into an illustration of the semiological paradox which Barthes strives to bypass: the logical impossibility that Saussure's typology imposes upon the very concept of "message without a code."

The mythological undercurrents which pervade Barthes's work receive much attention in the second chapter. Essential among these is the significance of the "mechanical." Shawcross contends that "Barthes relies on the positivistic myth that if the document or testimony is mechanical—or if it partakes of the mechanical—then subjectivity is eliminated or reduced" (26). She suggests that Barthes's recourse to such myths ultimately aligns the photograph's denotative status with a mythology of objectivity. Barthes's aspiration to view certain photographs as primitive—"without culture"—further evinces the mythical suppositions upon which he calls to support his notion of "pure" imagery. Shawcross challenges Barthes's tenuous conclusion that photography can exist outside of culture by calling attention to the "concomitant yet contradictory qualities of connection and separation" that figure into the realm of history invoked in *Camera Lucida*. Shawcross compares the historical configuration in Barthes's *œuvre* to a number of other reactions in an illuminating account which includes reflection upon the relevance of Balzac's commentary on early photographic images to

Barthes's more recent perspectives. The comprehensive study of early methods of photograph which Shawcross endeavors in the latter part of the chapter contrasts Talbot with Daguerre and expounds the philosophical and mythological connotations of each. She argues that Daguerre's tendency to associate photography with illusion (rather than science) attests his greater influence on Barthes's vision. For Shawcross, Barthes's argumentative process considers the scientific basis for photography as a means of producing "the ultimate illusion": "Barthes is not struck by the marvel of this invention as a product of scientific accomplishment; rather, he senses the mystery of a chemical process that allows light to be captured in a tangible form" (36).

The rhetoric of the photographic "illusion" and the tendency to judge photography in relation to painting constitute the major issues of the third chapter. Noting the frequency with which historians cite Baudelaire's art criticism as an authoritative source on this subject, Shawcross questions the inclination to overly generalize the comments contained in the *Salon of 1859*. Shawcross sees Baudelaire's denunciation of the photograph as reflecting a broader concern: "Although daguerreotypists are coconspirators with the public, it is the public's unquestioning belief in nature that offends Baudelaire. Like Barthes, Baudelaire rails against the failure of the public to doubt, to think, and to challenge the world in which it lives" (53). Shawcross does not profoundly alter the quodlibet at the heart of Baudelaire's polemic, but she does call into question certain theoretical perspectives which relate Barthes's "message without a code" rhetoric to Baudelaire's stance on the threat photography poses for esthetics. She ponders the notion that the "photo as immediate satisfaction of desire" formula ascribed to Baudelaire has often sought support in the rhetoric created by Barthes. Citing passages where Barthes seems to argue that the photograph elicits or sustains desire, Shawcross posits the opposite reading as an equally viable alternative. In arguments such as these, Shawcross displays an acute awareness of the semiological and esthetic tensions which alternately oppose and align Barthes and Baudelaire. She ultimately arrives at an interesting approach which highlights an essential duality in photography: the photograph vacillates between "the civilized code of perfect illusions" and "the wakening of intractable reality."

Shawcross grapples with Barthes's proposal of "*une tierce forme*" in her fourth chapter. This third genre which bridges the essay and the novel gives Shawcross occasion to evaluate Barthes's concepts of the "studium" (the world of codes) and the "punctum" (an acultural or supercultural structuration). She observes that these neologisms con-

front the reader with a paradox, for “any systematic or critical appraisal of photography by means of these terms vitiates their essence” (85). Shawcross thus finds Barthes’s seemingly simple equation of “the new punctum” with Time intriguing and devotes her fifth chapter to temporal considerations. Those who have lived in the age of photograph, Shawcross proclaims, enjoy a privileged relationship to time. Articulating this privilege as the capacity to “have a *sympathy* for a time outside our memory which was unknown to those who lived before the invention of photograph” (102, Shawcross’s italics), she examines the concept of history in relation to memory and reads both against the configurations of Time proposed by Newton, Darwin, Einstein, and others. Through this analysis, she develops her position that Barthes restructures history in view of the advent of photograph.

With this book, Shawcross offers a challenging new perspective of Barthes’s work which will prove invaluable to scholars interested in semiology, photography, and critical theory. The insights her intertextual approach provide highlight both the cohesiveness of Barthes’s *œuvre* and the confluence of the visual and literary arts with theoretical and philosophical concerns.

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Lewis W. Tusken. *Understanding Hermann Hesse: The Man, His Myth, His Metaphors*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1998. 253 pp.

Who reads Hesse nowadays? Only a quarter of the undergraduates in my class this year admit to having done so, and scholarly interest also seems to have abated. Of the 657 studies since 1981 listed in the MLA Bibliography, only fifteen percent have appeared since 1990. Yet Hilda Rosner’s translation of *The Journey to the East* was recently reprinted for the thirty-eighth time since 1956. Are these works being read by aging hippies, or is there a new audience out there? The author of the work under review believes that “the approach of the Christian millennium” (3) has produced a renewed interest in spirituality to which Hesse’s works respond. If Timothy Leary’s drug-zapped groupies of the sixties were inspired to read Hesse, why not New Age millenarians?

What appeals to these enraptured readerships is not Hesse's literary and critical quality, but his "message." But, argues Tusken, the rebels of the Vietnam era who learned to "light up and drop out" were getting the wrong signals. Hesse's true message is religious and concerns the common core underlying the diversity of all religions. It is this "new mythology" that Tusken sets out to expose in his book, thus linking Hesse to the so-styled "theo-lit" tradition that uses literature as a vehicle for religious expression.

Leaving aside the brief introduction and conclusion, the book consists of twelve chapters unified by the terms of the subtitle. A well informed and psychologically insightful chapter sketches Hesse's life from his birth in 1877 to his first literary success; the nine chapters on Hesse's novels from *Peter Camenzind* (1904) to *The Glass Bead Game* (1943) are interrupted twice more by brief biographical interludes covering the years from 1904 to 1914 and Hesse's "awakening" during World War I. The "myth," which first shows up in *Peter Camenzind*, is "the divine poetry expressed by life itself" (49). As Tusken recapitulates, "Hesse's new mythology . . . is an optimistic statement that being, itself, is affirmation and that a single humanity is moving toward a distant goal" (213)—a human spirit drawing from the West "the Christian ethic of love and service" and from the East "the recognition of a single, universal soul-force." Hesse expresses this "legacy" through metaphors of oneness in which all polarities are resolved.

While his language is homiletic, Tusken is referring to the polarities customarily discussed in Hesse criticism: light and darkness, good and evil, *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, spirit and nature. But Tusken goes a step further by reducing all the polarities to such sexual metaphors as male and female, father and mother, or *animus* and *anima*. He sees the basic metaphorical situation foreshadowed in *Peter Camenzind*, where Peter's relationship with Richard interferes with his ability to learn to love humankind through Elisabeth. The absence of the feminine in the all-male world of *Beneath the Wheel*, where the relationships are dominated by Hans Giebenrath's father and his friend Hermann Heilner, extends the failure to achieve what contemporary pop psychology knows as "gender wholeness." It is only in *Demian* that Hesse succeeds, through the figure of Frau Eva, in adding to what was previously Hesse's purely masculine Christianity a feminine content synthesizing the whole.

In Tusken's multicultural scheme, Hesse's heroes up to and including Emil Sinclair exemplified "a youthful search-for-self in a western European, typically German, environment"—an oppressive mas-

culine world of pietistic Christianity. In *Siddhartha* Hesse's hero leaves this masculine world to "embark on a quest through a world of darkness with feminine attributes" (102). In *Steppenwolf* the sexual duality develops into what Tusken terms a "mariage à trois" of Harry Haller with Pablo (his Jungian *animus*) and Hermine (his *anima*). In *Narcissus and Goldmund* the balance is tipped when Goldmund the artist is vouchsafed insight into the feminine world denied to the monastic intellectuality of Narcissus. Women hardly appear in Hesse's last two novels. Accordingly, in the disproportionately lengthy chapter on *The Glass Bead Game* Tusken calls Joseph Knecht's plunge into the icy lake where he dies "a playful act of intercourse" (189) since death is the ultimate feminine act. (This interpretation resembles the questionable argument that the monastery Mariabronn in *Narcissus and Goldmund* has "a bisexual connotation" [129] because Maria is feminine and *Bronn* [= fountain] masculine).

Tusken's book contains a number of felicitous insights: on the circumstance that Sinclair's home was once a monastery, on the fact that Sinclair's spiritual rebirth takes place on straw in a manger, on the male-to-male kiss that occurs leitmotivically in the novels. In general, Tusken has a fine eye for the associations among Hesse's various works. However, the book offers little literary or historical context, and the analysis amounts too often to recapitulation with commentary. Rather than imposing his own organization on the material, the author reviews the plots and looks in them for sexual metaphors.

The text is marred by a number of distracting typos and mistakes: Sonnematt (84), Helene Voight-Diederich[s] (39), Alice Leuchthold (142), Jacob Bur[c]khardt (154), my name (misspelled in two different ways!), "Olympic" for "Olympian" (1, 213), and "Homocentric" for "anthropocentric" (213). The title of Hesse's essay "O Freunde, nicht diese Töne" is not "taken from Schiller's celebrated 'Ode to Joy'" (73, 235); it is the bass recitative introducing the poem. The German word *Jüngere* does not mean "disciple" (*Jünger*) but simply "younger people" (177). Castalia was not "originally the name of a spring" (187) but the nymph who leapt to her death into that spring (like Joseph Knecht himself!).

The author does not seem to have his target audience clearly in mind. Despite the announced intention of the series in which it appears, the book is not a general introduction to Hesse's *œuvre*, failing as it does to mention entire aspects of his writing—stories, fairy tales, autobiographical writings, poetry—and omitting bibliographical information about Hesse's works in English translation (other than the nine

novels). While the book highlights one important aspect of Hesse's spiritual universe, the gender metaphor cannot encompass that universe in its breadth and diversity. Religion and even "new" mythology amount to more than gender and sex.

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