

Book Reviews

Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak and Nancy Sullivan. *Conversations with Mexican American Writers: Languages and Literatures in the Borderlands*. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2009. xxv + 161 pp.

If you choose to eavesdrop on the conversations Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak and Nancy Sullivan have with an ex-construction worker, a self-proclaimed *payasa* 'clown,' a student of Russian Realism, a language braider, a word weaver, an L.A. exile, and several transnational scholar/artist activists, you will learn about the diverse stories of the nine Mexican American writers who share their experiences with language, literature, and life in the Borderlands. *Conversations with Mexican American Writers: Languages and Literatures in the Borderlands* presents some of the most important Mexican American writers publishing in the last thirty years: Norma Elía Cantú, Denise Chávez, Sandra Cisneros, Montserrat Fontes, Dagoberto Gilb, Diana Montejano, Pat Mora, Benjamin Alire Sáenz, and Helena María Viramontes. The insights into the authors' world views and literary choices found here provide fascinating contexts from which to read and teach their fiction.

Those teaching the authors in this collection of interviews will appreciate the clear, cogent contexts Mermann-Jozwiak and Sullivan have provided in their introduction. They present Mexican American history from the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that caused the border between the U.S. and Mexico to shift, to contemporary notions of the borderlands as a "zone of conflict" (viii). They also explain how issues of globalization and transnationalism affect everyday life for Mexican Americans. They introduce issues of class, space, diaspora, exile, and activism as they relate the authors' varied hemispheric perspectives on America that develop from their awareness of multiple cultural heritages. These concepts are useful in classroom discussion and provide the backdrop from which to hear the conversations between the interviewers and the authors.

As "students of sociolinguistics and American literary studies," Mermann-Jozwiak and Sullivan are interested in the interplay of Spanish and English in the writings of the authors they interview. This relationship to language is complex and varied. Some authors, like Fontes, do not code-switch at all, while others like poet Montejano and desert writer Mora regularly braid or weave English and Spanish within their writing. But these conversations also highlight the personal experiences of Spanish and English in the authors' lives. For

instance, Alire Sáenz states, “I think one of my fascinations with words and language came from the fact that I was bilingual. When you are a kid you think your reality is universal, and then you find out, no, it’s not, it is just specific to my little community” (47). Alire Sáenz credits his skills with language play to listening to the in-betweenness of his parents’ Spanglish. His artistic manipulations stem from this social relationship to language.

Other writers, like Gilb, provide insight into the sometimes negative relationship that society has to the use of Spanish or to bilingualism in everyday life. Despite his claims that he “hate[s] art and literature that just hold up a banner,” (102) Gilb, who spent many years in the construction industry, addresses the ways working class and immigrant communities are judged by dominant society for their language use. He shares a snippet from an article he found from the 1860s:

“The problem with these people is that they come to the neighborhood, and don’t want to learn English, they depress the neighborhood, they bring crime, they have no respect for our laws,” a whole list of things like that. It’s an English person in Pennsylvania talking about Germans! You read it and go, “My god, that’s it, that’s what we are hearing now.” (99)

Gilb’s insights into the pervasiveness of divisive and xenophobic rhetoric throughout U.S. history suggest a shameful tradition of ignorance, that as a nation we cannot learn from our past even when our ancestors have experienced the same kinds of violence we inflict today. Gilb shares how this legacy plays out in his own family, as his sons are not bilingual and have “nothing to do with the [Mexican American] culture” (101).

As Gilb’s experience suggests, it is difficult to maintain connections with Mexican American culture in an English-dominant, monolingual environment that can respond negatively to such experiences, even in a seemingly more progressive and accepting political climate. Even Cisneros, the self-proclaimed *payasa*, sees this problem: “They don’t know their history because we live in a colonized world. We live in occupied Mexico.... South Texans, tejanos, are not going to get their history because it would empower them” (68). Keeping power away from Mexican Americans by erasing them from history or withholding their history is itself a form of violence. Writing as an “exile” from her East L.A. home (82), Viramontes attempts to uncover these violences: “When you’re treated a certain way, no matter where you go, no matter who you are, you’re going to believe that this is the way it has to be. You carry the border with you. You don’t have to be near the borderlands to understand that transgression, that violence, in terms of the mind, the heart, and the imagination” (85).

In some ways, the incorporation of code-switching or Spanglish in everyday life and in literature is itself a form of activism. Mermann-Jozwiak and Sullivan certainly see this as they describe one of the collective aims of these

writers: "In their literary and activist work, the authors communicate their desire to counter the voicelessness of border subjects and the historical amnesia surrounding the border" (x). The conversations with these writers certainly highlight the experiences of Mexican Americans through the voices of their teachers and cultural producers. One need only pick up the text and listen carefully to the stories being told in the Borderlands.

Tanya González
Kansas State University

Barbara Mennel. *The Representation of Masochism and Queer Desire in Film and Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 220 pp.

In this complex and well considered discussion of masochist aesthetics and queer desire, Barbara Mennel connects Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's nineteenth-century novels *Venus in Furs* and *The Love of Plato* respectively with Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch's *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* and Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola and Billy the Kid*. Beginning with a discussion of masochism as it is defined by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, and as it relates to aesthetics, history and psychoanalysis, Mennel sets up a theoretical framework that uses the perspectives of each to question the others. The resulting analysis of texts and films shows a unique ability to integrate discussions of not only gender and sexuality, but also time, national identity and art, while incorporating the tension between theories regarding the representation of masochism and queer desire.

This volume examines each work as a historically specific text, thereby relating text, time and space, comparing the cultural environment in which Sacher-Masoch's texts were produced to the environment in which both of the films were produced, and then using that comparison to illuminate facets of the other. As a concrete example, the analysis of each of the texts and films includes a summary of relevant psychoanalytic discourse, so that each may be discussed in context of the time and place of production, but also in light of the relationship between the forms of psychoanalysis.

The chapter dealing with Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* discusses psychoanalysis, along with aesthetics and history, with special attention to gender as significant for psychic development and produced by history. No one of these phenomena can explain the fetish, which is a frequent component of masochistic aesthetics. Instead, Mennel describes fetishization as a "decidedly psychological process, but its signifiers reference the social in its historical specificity"

(47). This focus on psychology, history and the social carry through the discussions of fetishized women, the relationship of fetishization to nationality and ethnicity, and power as fetish when wielded by a beautiful woman. Sacher-Masoch's technique of framing the narrative of the cruel woman is discussed in light of its ability to reaffirm patriarchal structures while simultaneously positing an alternative.

Treut and Mikesch's *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* is connected to *Venus in Furs* through explicit references, but is also discussed within the context of the feminist sex wars of the 1980s and 1990s, especially in the sense that it predated those discussions of pornography as well as recast masochistic aesthetics by retelling the story from a feminist perspective. Women's ability to fetishize, in direct contrast to *Venus in Furs*, makes way for the possibility of "sexuality beyond the biological masochism to which women have been reduced" (96). Mennel also describes multiple systems under which the fetish can be interpreted and makes economic, artistic and psychological connections around it.

Returning to Sacher-Masoch's writings for a contemplation of *The Love of Plato*, the foci of discussion are the concepts of platonic love and female cross-dressing as they relate to present-day queer theory. Mennel's argument, as in previous chapters, is that these two concepts simultaneously undermine and reinforce mainstream concepts of gender in much the same way as masochistic aesthetics do in the chapters on *Venus in Furs* and *Seduction: The Cruel Woman*. The connection between nineteenth-century text and twentieth-century theory is drawn through discussions of gendered characteristics, such as essentialism and idealism, including not only gender as performative, but also the essentialized female's role as it is reinforced by the process of masquerade. The inclusion of a nuanced analysis of the reversal of expectation by way of privileging of homosexuality over heterosexuality in the concept of platonic love, while at the same time reinforcing the advantage of certain national identities, supports the discussion of the gendered essentialist/idealist binary.

Picking up on the concept of "safe transgression" (139) that allows for simultaneous representation and rejection of gender categories and masochistic aesthetics, the final chapter turns its attention to the 1999 film *Lola and Billy the Kid*. Referencing the tension resulting from simultaneous deconstruction and reaffirmation of gender performance, the chapter turns its focus to male cross-dressing and women's roles as portrayed by Turkish women and Lola's feminized corpse. Connecting to the earlier thread of nationality as it relates to gender and queer identity, Mennel also discusses the challenges, with their "multiple layers of exclusion and projection" (147), of representing gay Turkish-German characters.

In conclusion, this book represents a significant contribution to both German Studies and LGBT studies. A tightly woven text displaying the interconnectedness of gender, sexual identity, power relations, nationality and art, this

study questions many of the assertions of recent Queer Studies, and with good reason. It challenges historical, psychological and aesthetic perspectives to engage one another, and by doing so, provides a framework for enriched understanding of the subject.

Amy Gates-Young
Central College

David Damrosch. *How to Read World Literature*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. 139 pp.

How does one read world literature in an era when, while there is increasing access to texts from around the globe, more of our time is given over to surfing through many texts than to reading a few closely and deeply? David Damrosch sets out to answer this question in his slim volume, *How to Read World Literature*. The author, a leading expert in the field who works in a dozen languages, also edited in 2009 the MLA Options for Teaching volume, *Teaching World Literature*. Intended for teachers of world literature, that volume offers both theoretical discussions of what world literature is and concrete descriptions of specific courses. In contrast, *How to Read World Literature* is aimed at the novice reader in- or outside the classroom. It shares with other titles in the Wiley-Blackwell "How to Study Literature" series the goals of offering an introduction to the field of literary interpretation, of demonstrating how to read and write critically about literature, and of giving readers the skills they need to do so.

Damrosch expresses his passion for and vast knowledge of world literature through his engaging prose and the historical and geographical breadth of the volume. Its more than fifty texts range from canonical to lesser-known works and from classical dramas of ancient Greece and India, to Voltaire's *Candide* and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, to more recent works by the Caribbean-Afro-American writer Derek Wolcott and the Turkish Nobel Prize winner, Orhan Pamuk. More impressive still than the number and diversity of texts is that, even though Damrosch offers only a small taste of what each of these individual works has to offer, he never leaves the reader drowning in summaries of material to which she has no previous connection. Rather, he offers a series of *amuse-bouches* that leave one eager to taste more.

Three organizational principles inform the structure *How to Read World Literature*, making it suitable for use as a companion text in a wide range of classrooms: each of the six chapters focuses on a specific genre, introduces readers to a key question for the navigation of literary texts, and is more or less chronologically organized. Chapter 1 uses poetry to explore the ques-

tion, “What is Literature?” Readings from Sappho, the Chinese poet Du Fu, and Wordsworth demonstrate that “different patterns of belief concerning the nature of literature and its role in society” (8) have existed in different times and different places. The reader is indirectly taught the hermeneutic method as a means of coming to a deeper understanding of poems, and is encouraged to pause and reflect on those passages that don’t make sense, to read multiple poems by the same author or from the same place and time, to look at commentary, and to read texts more than once.

Chapter 2, “Reading Across Time,” explores how to approach the foreignness of the past in the epic. A comparison of West African epics, *The Odyssey*, and the *Epic of Gilgamesh* demonstrates how, by reading forward from the past or backward from the present, one learns how texts borrow from one another and how they are often rewritten over time. Here, Damrosch emphasizes the need to appreciate both the familiarity and the foreignness of texts from other times and places, thereby encouraging the reader to avoid the opposing pitfalls of exoticization and identification.

Chapter 3, “Reading across Cultures,” examines drama in order to offer strategies for coming to grips with texts written in different cultural contexts. The first strategy is to look for books with good editorial introductions. The second is to compare and contrast texts from different cultures. The third is to ground a reading of two disparate works in “some third term or set of concerns [genre, plot, themes] that can provide a common basis for analysis” (46). A comparison of Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King* and Kalidasa’s Sanskrit play, *Shakuntala*, focuses on the themes of guilt and seeing, while a comparison of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1750) by Molière and *Love Suicides at Amijima* (1721) by the Japanese dramatist Cikamatsu Monzaemon addresses the rise of the middle class in two different cultural contexts.

The next two chapters continue to address the topic of foreignness. Chapter Four, “Reading in Translation,” addresses the foreignness of language by contemplating the choices that translators make and the ways they “mind – and mend – the gap between then and now” (84). Readers are encouraged to compare short passages from different translations of a work so they can see the extent to which translator’s choices are linguistic and social and so they can come to a better sense of what the original meant. Key questions here are: “How foreign should a translation be?” and “How should one render dialect?” Chapter 5, “Going Abroad,” explores the theme of travel in the biblical story of Joseph, Marco Polo’s *Travels*, Behn’s *Oroonoko*, and Franz Kafka’s *Amerika*, among others. Readings of these texts underscore that, just as translators have to make decisions about how to render one language in another, so, too, do authors—and readers—have to make interpretive decisions when engaging in cultural translation.

Chapter 6 addresses the particularly current topic of “Going Global” by

asking how authors reach out to audiences in a globalized world. Here, the author uses the—ever awkward but useful—neologism *glocal* to describe a sliding scale of strategies that range from the delocalized style of Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges and Samuel Beckett, which is “free of any direct reference to the home country’s customs, places, people or events” (108), to the writing of Pamuk who “found in [...] *glocalism* a way to address modern Turkey’s ambiguous situation in the world [by being] thoroughly international in outlook and literary reference and yet resolutely local in his choice of material” (112-13). Using not only Pamuk but the earlier example of Rudyard Kipling and contemporary examples like Salman Rushdie and Ryu Murakami, Damrosch demonstrates how difficult the idea of home has become and hypothesizes a new bi-nationalism in much global literature.

The epilogue offers strategies for choosing further reading materials. These include taking hints from a favorite author, place, or period, taking courses in world literature or reading literary scholarship, getting to know different art forms, traveling, and learning not only one but two foreign languages: “ideally, every serious reader of world literature should know at least two foreign languages, one from one’s home region and one from a very different part of the world and an unrelated language family” (128).

The book’s theoretical approach is suited to novice readers. While the main approaches demonstrated are comparative and hermeneutic (one learns to read world literature by comparing texts across times and cultures and then rereading those texts), the book addresses current trends in literary theory in a concrete, non-jargonistic way, thereby preparing the way for more advanced discussions of New Criticism, New Historicism, Intertextuality, Post Colonialism and Transnationalism, and Deconstruction. At the same time, Damrosch resists the nihilism of deconstruction and the tyranny of top-down theoretical readings. He asserts that texts have meaning even if some of their meanings trouble us and he offers correctives to reductive analyses, such as readings of Kipling as the poet of the “White Man’s Burden,” by demonstrating how, in his use of language and translation to mediate culture, Kipling “stands firmly on the side of cultural hybridism” (112).

Oddly enough, the promise of being a how-to guide is the one area where this volume falls short. Despite its useful suggestions for reading strategies, *How to Read World Literature* is more an intellectual travel guide to world literature than a step-by-step guide for becoming a skilled reader. Yet perhaps this is the unintended message of the book: that for all of the reading guides and histories and theories of literature out there, the keys to learning to read world literature are enthusiasm and curiosity. Damrosch’s volume piques both.

Lisabeth Hock
Wayne State University

Maria DiFrancesco. *Feminine Agency and Transgression in Post-Franco Spain: Generational Becoming in the Narratives of Carme Riera, Cristina Fernández Cubas and Mercedes Abad*. Newark: Juan de la Cuesta-Hispanic Monographs, 2008. 217 pp.

Maria DiFrancesco successfully argues in this book that contemporary Spanish authors Carme Riera, Cristina Fernández Cubas, and Mercedes Abad inscribe powerful female figures that transgress and renegotiate conventional roles to thus challenge dominant representations of women in Western culture. Progressing from the first to the last to launch her literary career, DiFrancesco employs psychoanalytic theory, interprets Christian and Greco-Roman mythology, and considers Mikhail Bakhtin's *carnavalesque* to illuminate her discussions of female agency in the following texts: Riera's "Te dejo, amor, en prenda el mar" (1975), "Y pongo por testigo a las gaviotas" (1977), *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini* (1981), and *Tiempo de espera* (1998); Fernández Cubas's "Mi hermana Elba" and "Los altillos de Brumal" from a collection that combines these titles (1988), "Mundo" and "Ausencia" from *Con Agatha en Estambul* (1994), the novel *El colupio* (1995), and the narrative-drama *Hermanas de sangre* (1998); and lastly, Abad's *Ligeros libertinajes sabáticos* (1986) and *Sangre* (2000). DiFrancesco argues that these authors redefine mother, daughter, and sister in ways that "disrupt mythologized constructions of femininity" (15-16) and highlight women's creative agency and freedom to speak in post-Franco Spain.

One might consider Christian and mythic symbology tangential in some of these stories, yet the book's development of these references is one of its strengths. In her analysis of Riera's "Te dejo, amor, en prenda el mar" for example, DiFrancesco contends that the attribution of the epigraph to an unwritten Sapphic text signals not only transgression from the dominant heterosexual model, but also the absence of mother-daughter and lesbian relationships in Western texts. On occasion, DiFrancesco's readings of Catholic typology push associative limits; for instance, she suggests that in "Y yo pongo por testigo a las gaviotas" the roses that replace Marina's drowned pregnant body—itsself a denial of motherhood—connect her to the Virgin Mary, a primordial mother made absent in the Holy Trinity. Most often, however, attention to myth enhances the argument that these authors reshape Western cultural texts. In one such case, DiFrancesco argues that the female protagonist of *Una primavera para Domenico Guarini* critiques sexual assault and substitutes female masturbation for conjugal and motherly love in feminist retellings of Greek legends Chloris, Flora, Zephyrus, and Venus. She also contends that a connection Riera makes in *Tiempo de espera* between Lacan's theory on erotic pleasure during pregnancy

and the mythological Hera's blinding of Tiresias disempowers a male gaze that objectifies women, especially during sexual fantasy. These reinterpretations of myth exemplify the central argument of DiFrancesco's book: Riera, Fernández Cubas, and Abad make present female experiences largely absent from literary history and urge women to resist self-censorship, recuperate lost female genealogies, and incorporate maternity into feminist perspectives.

DiFrancesco's use of psychoanalysis to consider female agency is particularly effective when she attends to feminist revisions of this male-centered theory. Her reading of *El columpio* cogently reveals a mother's assertion of self within the confines of male dominance and her unconventional, somewhat violent encouragement that her daughter distance herself from a patriarchal family. Similarly, a focus on the female gaze in *Hermanas de sangre* successfully suggests that one woman's sacrifice leads other women to transgress traditional scripts. Though DiFrancesco's use of psychoanalytic theory to read protective spaces in Fernández Cubas's narratives proves a valuable means to understand searches for autonomy that break from traditional gender and family roles, the analyses would be more effective if they recognized the conflict that emerges when Freudian perspectives, which are patriarchal, inform feminine agency. One example of this tension is when Elba's sister in "Mi hermana Elba" easily turns her attention to a boy after Elba dies when transgressing the domestic space. In another instance, DiFrancesco asserts that Adriana of "Los altillos de Brumal" performs a subversive act when she renounces her familial ties and ultimately embraces an identity linked to cooking and other feminine activities. In her analyses of Fernández Cubas's stories, DiFrancesco effectively explains that play addresses parental absence and that when play ends, fragmentation remains; however, she disregards that these transgressive characters ultimately conform to conventional gender roles. Further, when DiFrancesco argues that play constructs an identity "beyond any gendered category" (160), she does not engage the broader question of whether identity may be construed outside gender.

In the final chapter, DiFrancesco successfully brings together feminist psychoanalysis, biblical references, and Bakhtin's theories on the *carnavalesque* to read three stories from Abad's *Ligeros libertinajes sabáticos* and the novel *Sangre*. DiFrancesco's particularly astute reading of "Pascualino y los globos" revises both Freud's Oedipal complex and Bakhtin's patriarchal-based theories. The corpulent female character's vaginal lips consume the male protagonist, enabling him to create a new self on terms that subvert a Freudian-inspired separation from the mother's body. In her study of biblical roots in Abad's "Malos tiempos para el absurdo o Las delicias de Onán," DiFrancesco's use of Bakhtin's *carnavalesque* informs male and female performances that defy sexual and narrative expectations. Referencing Bakhtin's banquet and Ionesco's *La cantatrice chauve*, DiFrancesco productively argues that banal narration of sexual ta-

boo subverts pornography's subjugation of women and adverts pornography's violent potential. Analysis of *Sangre*, the last in DiFrancesco's book, effectively brings together her thematic arguments. Though a daughter cannot overcome her mother's rejection and thus her own abjection, bodily communion affected through consumption of her mother's blood ultimately frees Spain from Franco's patriarchal authority and changes the course of Spanish history.

As cross-generational coupling in *Sangre* liberates the Spanish state, so, too, do Riera, Fernández Cubas, and Abad empower women to create their own stories. In these rich close readings, one might wish that DiFrancesco had situated her analyses more thoroughly within existing criticism on these authors or that the numerous typographical errors in the book had been corrected; however, these issues do not subtract from the substantive critical reflection on three formidable female writers in democratic Spain and their creation of female voices that challenge patriarchal conceptions of the self and social roles.

Maryanne L. Leone
Assumption College

Jennifer Wawrzinek. *Ambiguous Subjects: Dissolution and Metamorphosis in the Postmodern Sublime*. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2008. 156 pp.

In this analysis, Jennifer Wawrzinek examines the problematics of the sublime as well as its corollary, the grotesque. She explores its historical evolution and defines it within the Western tradition of the hierarchical sublime. After looking at the sublime from a woman's perspective throughout the book, the author chooses three examples from novels by Nicole Brossard and Morgan Yasbincek and finally the performance of the Women's Circus, Melbourne, Australia. Three sub-themes foreground the critical discussion throughout: nuclear conflicts, immigration debates and women's experience of sexual assault. The feminine form of ethics presented counters traditional views of the sublime, relying instead on feminine writing and the female body. It favors also the concept of translation, the recognition of difference in communication between self and world. In conclusion, the author argues that, beyond a single sublime, there exist valuable multiple transcendences that extol ambiguous consciousness, mutation, fluidity and the projection of openness.

The introductory chapter, "Sublime Politics," focuses on the rhetoric of modern debates about the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and immigration. Wawrzinek sees the masculine sublime as a vertical/binary structure that tends to promote aggressivity and war or other historical human behaviors such as domination,

colonization, suppression, nuclear proliferation and immigration conflicts.

Chapter 2, "The Haunting of Transcendence," details the historical development of the philosophical sublime from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century in order to circumscribe its political and cultural implications. The aesthetics of Edmund Burke, Georg Hegel, David Hume, Immanuel Kant and William Wordsworth demonstrate that transcendence, be it idealism or romanticism, is attached to the will to power and appropriation. Through the critique of the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the author highlights the importance of the grotesque as the forgotten third prong of the sublime and the beautiful. "The Postmodern Sublime" part of this chapter calls upon literary, structuralist, and postmodern theorists (Theodor Adorno, Antonin Artaud, Mikhail Bakhtin, Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Barbara Freeman, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Jean-François Lyotard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Patricia Yaeger) to reformulate the schema relating to the philosophy of nature and Nature and self and other. This prepares the reader for Wawrzinek's reworking of the sublime in relation to alterity, minority identities, ambiguous subjects and Otherness.

Chapter 3 gives an excellent, detailed critique of the famous experimental novel *Le Désert mauve* (1987) *Mauve Desert* by the now well-known contemporary French Canadian writer Brossard. The contrasting spaces of the Arizona desert and urban Montreal play on the dichotomies between feminine and masculine libidinal economies. The French-speaking lesbian voices and the English-speaking political male presence harnessing nuclear power translate into opposing structures. Brossard's lesbian desire, highlighting the language of the body, promotes surrender to otherness. Likewise, the act of writing and the process of translating become expressions of a proper and figurative translation, a discovery of going through and relating, with a willingness to move into the realm of transformation and metamorphosis.

Wawrzinek further explores questions of identity and seeks other forms of the sublime in relation to the subject in her fourth chapter with Yasbinček's novel *liv* (2000). Yasbinček, a relative newcomer on the world literary scene, is a Croatian-Australian novelist, poet and academic from Perth. In *liv* (from the speaker Olivia = O-liv-ia) Yasbinček offers migrant viewpoints by creating various voices through non-sequential textual fragments. The dispersal of identities vis a vis the hegemonic Anglo-Saxon Australian culture finds its expression in many forms of death. This emptiness within is gradually balanced by the discovery of new forms of becoming and of being through the body as a privileged site of discovery, touch and human connections. Wawrzinek selects the indigenous Australian image of Yasbinček's rainbow snake to symbolize multiplicities within hybrid identities for the construction of the self.

Chapter 5, called "When I'm Up There It Feels Like Heaven," addresses the

power of overcoming the odds as it relates to women who have been sexually assaulted and have found an outlet for expressing their personal ordeals through aerial acrobatics. In its 2001 performance of *Secrets*, Melbourne-based community arts group The Women's Circus metamorphoses the abject and grotesque into reclaimed freedom through words, music and artistic movements.

This ground-breaking critical book emphasizes a specific point of view on gender studies in relation to ambiguous or hybrid subjects. In her conclusion, Wawrzinek succeeds in reformulating "A New Transcendental," a transcendence infused with forms seemingly more appropriate for our twenty-first century vision of the world. This reconsideration aims at discarding control over others, or self over Otherness. And it includes the body as an integral part of the sublime in rebuilding identities. Wawrzinek's twelve-page bibliography collects American, Australian and French sources and more, providing the researcher with a fine resource on the subject of the abject and the sublime.

With regard to the layered meanings of Wawrzinek's title, *Ambiguous Subjects*, one discovers an insight into the writer's conclusion. What Brossard and Yasincek have created through the written word (one as a French-speaking Canadian woman and the other as a Croatian-Australian) can be viewed as the highest expression of hybrid trauma in translation texts. These women reacted within their fields of textual politics and poetics against the canonical models. What emanates from this critical analysis is the fortitude of the female spirit of these different protagonists and circus artists who have staged new forms of expression. The sublime in its old forms undergoes a post-postmodern metamorphosis to become more representative of the contemporary world. It encompasses pluralities and raises itself up out of abjection.

Finally, is language a failure? Wawrzinek leaves this question open with an ambiguous answer. A poetic quote about the failure of language is placed as prologue for each chapter of her book. Each time, the words are crossed out but, of course, still visible through the black line. This semi-erasure can still be read, thus asserting its rightful credibility, an indelible and visible sign of existence.

Claudine Fisher
Portland State University

Maria Cristina Fumagalli. *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity: Returning Medusa's Gaze*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2009. 198 pp.

Maria Cristina Fumagalli defines modernity as a specious concept imposed upon subject peoples, immobilizing them in a condition of irremediable inferiority. She personifies as the allegorical Medusa, the racist Eurocentric mentality that labeled Native Americans (themselves quite ethnically diverse, one should add) as primitive and unable to learn or to progress, lacking the dynamism of the Western cultures that evolved through the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and democratically-inspired revolutions.

Fumagalli examines writings and images that contest these deluded affirmations from the native's viewpoint. To demonstrate how widespread and long-lasting the colonizers' self-serving scorn has been, she adopts a loosely inferential, free-associative style of presentation and development as she moves from Guyana (1985) to Redonda (West Indies, 1901) to Guadeloupe (1995) to Tobago (1993) to Colombia (1972) to England (1621 and 1980) to Santa Lucia (2001), gathering six revised essays first published between 2002 and 2006. Her original, wide-ranging mind possesses a broad familiarity with the Western literary tradition and the visual arts. She reads images well. Her documentation is thorough, although one misses a few essential scholars such as Emily Apter and Stephen Greenblatt in *Transatlantic Studies*, Laurent Du Bois and Nick Nesbitt on Caribbean history, the volumes on Caribbean literatures in the International Comparative Literature Association's history of world literatures, and William Tyrrell on the Amazons. She needed, above all, to say more about the history of Spanish, French, and U.S. military and economic imperialism, and Latin Americans' long-standing desire to lead a second revolution against the latter.

Chapters 2 to 5 focus on individual works. The discussion of M. P. Shiel's little-known, apocalyptic *The Purple Cloud* (Ch. 2) offers a quite competent feminist reading—a modern-day Eve, one of only two survivors of a worldwide cataclysm, tricks her Adam into procreating and therefore perpetuating the human race. Modernist in the absence of a watchful God, people become entirely responsible for their own fate, this fantasy is otherwise tenuously connected to the main topic. Fumagalli does not detail how it challenges the theocratic biblical narrative or various Western narratives of progress. The sole Francophone author treated in detail is Maryse Condé (*La Migration des cœurs*) in chapter 3—and that chapter, unlike the others, remains close to plot summary and thematic paraphrase, although elsewhere Charles Baudelaire, Michel de Certeau, and a number of major nineteenth-century French painters are discussed well. Presented as a reworking of *Wuthering Heights*, Condé's novel, once again, appears to have little to do with Fumagalli's announced topic, the contestation of

imperialist discourse.

Chapter 4 on Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound* and on Walcott as a painter is excellent, containing several reproductions of his paintings. Fumagalli published a book on Walcott in 2001, and incisively reveals his acknowledged precursor Pissarro as a Caribbean painter whose later work preserves traces of his origins. But Gabriel García Márquez's story of the "Innocent Erendira" (Ch. 5) makes it clear that Erendira is victimized by her heartless grandmother, not by colonial oppression, despite Fumagalli's sweeping, unsubstantiated claim that the Erendira story is also "an account of sexual, economic, and colonial exploitation; an indictment of slavery and of the foreign debt that impairs the economic development of third world countries; and, overall, a powerful condemnation of the North Atlantic project" (85-86). A few buzz-words fail to patch Erendira into this book. It is easy to find better examples of counter-imperialism in García Márquez's work, and his distinguished political journalism should have been used.

I would not miss reading this impressive study. Nevertheless, the imposing constellation of references functions more like a sieve than a net. The organizing principles are shaky. Ethnographic and feminist approaches alternate, sometimes intertangling. Medusa serves both as an archetypal colonialist villain and as a rape victim (in Ovid), without elucidation of the relevance of her own victimization to Fumagalli's discussion. To be sure, the author repeatedly and often convincingly deconstructs the dichotomies of nature and culture, primitive and modern, Europe and the New World, imitative and original. Following the lead of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, she concludes: "centuries of interaction [she seems to mean, as retrospectively interpreted—and sometimes associatively created—by herself] have repeatedly sabotaged the fabricated dichotomy between modern and non-modern parts of the world and denied dominant discourses and hegemonic positions the possibility to go unquestioned" (136). Fumagalli advocates, as an effective oppositional strategy, Gilroy's embrace of "modernity" as "predicated on double consciousness and transcending both race and nationalism" (136).

But Fumagalli overlooks how the facts on the ground anticipated Gilroy while Caribbean political thinking experimented with more ambitious solutions than double consciousness. Among Francophones, it emerged from the international vision of Negritude, inspired by the encounters of Blacks from the Harlem Renaissance, the Caribbean, South America, and Africa. In the Caribbean, French Negritude narrowed to Antillanité, the hope of a regional confederation, thwarted by linguistic diversity and by economic and military weakness. On Martinique, with Patrick Chamoiseau and Jean Bernabé, the political vision narrowed further to the cultural revival of Créolité (local, but opening the possibility of dynamic hybridity). García Márquez's broader view, exemplified in his close friendship with Fidel Castro, in his journalism, in his political

exile from Colombia, and in his nostalgia for Simón Bolívar's dream of a Union of Latin American States (poignantly evoked in his homage to Bolívar in *The General in His Labyrinth*), should have been discussed. In general, Caribbean Hispanophone and Lusophone (if one includes Brazil) writers are unduly neglected, as they typically are in studies of the region.

Walcott's imaginative intellectual reconquest of Western civilization in both time and space should have been explored further. Walcott's universalist *Omeros* questions the glorification of the exceptional hero (Achilles) over the dignity of everyday life, by inserting namesakes for Homeric protagonists into a tragic romance about two Caribbean fishermen and the woman (Helen) they love. At the same time, his medium, the versicle inherited from the Bible, Whitman, Claudel, and Saint-John Perse among others, creates a fundamental human bond among widely dispersed times and places. The Cuban Magic Realist master Alejo Carpentier goes even further in *The Kingdom of This World* (1949), revealing not only transhistorical but also ethological parallels among the master-slave relationships between white colonists and their black slaves; black dictators and their black slaves; and the slave society of an ant colony where the reincarnated protagonist finds himself at the end. In short, Fumagalli's guiding concept of the colonizer as Medusa inadvertently shackles its Caribbean subjects to an unvarying relationship with their former political and current economic oppressors, while blinding us to the much more impressive scope of the Caribbean imagination, often exemplified by the very authors she treats.

Laurence M. Porter

Independent scholar

Macedonio Fernández. *The Museum of Eterna's Novel*. Trans. Margaret Schwartz. Rochester: Open Letter, 2010. 238 + xxiv pp.

For eighty years, the availability of the Argentine legend Macedonio Fernández's lifelong masterwork has been subject to opposing forces. Written in the 1930s and 40s, *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna* appeared only posthumously in print—in Spanish in 1967, in French in 1993, and now finally in English—thanks mainly to the herculean efforts of a few individuals. Macedonio's son, Adolfo de Obieta, labored for decades to type and edit his father's manuscripts. A willing Buenos Aires publisher who was clearly not in it exclusively for the money, as well as a handful of determined scholars, kept a spotlight on this, the world's preeminent unknown author. These pioneers had to face down the

equally determined forces of Jorge Luis Borges, Argentina's preeminent known author, who was intent on preserving his mentor Macedonio Fernández as a mythical figure valued only for the legacy of his oral pronouncements. Borges was explicit about this mission, and for several decades after delivering Macedonio's graveside eulogy in 1952, he seemed to succeed.

For readers in Spanish, the turnabout has been gradual but inexorable, and there are now at least six different published versions of *Museo de la Novela de la Eterna*. The English-speaking market, being both more consequential commercially and harder to crack, has had to wait for a conquering heroine in the form of one Margaret Schwartz. The reward for our patience is a deftly translated and surprisingly accessible novel that is best read from beginning to end, or from back to front, or in bits and pieces or in randomly selected fifths.

The *Museum* is not an easy book and was not meant to be. Comprising fifty-seven prologues, a vague and minimal plot and several dozen largely metaphorical characters who variously participate in, comment on, are excluded from, and contribute to the text, this is a novel meant for people who regard the act of reading as a creative adventure. It is, among other things, a *mise-en-abyme* of novels. Amid the prologues lies the novel, which is the story of a group of characters, presided over by a President, who inhabit a derelict ranch not far from Buenos Aires called "The Novel." These characters exist for the sole purpose of being sent in to the capital to transform the mundane real city, miraculously, into a place of metaphysical beauty: in other words, into a novel. Yet part of the "miracle of the novel," to borrow Macedonio's own phrase, is that this complex, extended and philosophical metaphor is also a love story, a tragedy, a hilarious commentary on Argentine society, a metaphysical meditation and an avant-garde exploration of the nature and limits of writing itself. If Macedonio had been American-born and had lived in Paris, Gertrude Stein—whose dates correspond closely to Macedonio's—might have been a minor figure by comparison.

In exact opposition to Stein, however, Macedonio was coy about his own genius—and the resulting recognition it might bring—but utterly candid about the techniques of writing and reading that he credits himself with inventing. The trick to reading "the best novel since it and the world began" (67), he tells us, is to forget about characterization and representation, to expect nothing and to question everything. Typically, though not exclusively, Macedonio fashions his comments about writing and reading by means of the same sorts of vivid, often comic metaphors that he uses to plumb metaphysical concepts:

Ever since I've been an author I've looked on in envy at the public there is for auto accidents. I sometimes dream that certain passages in the novel had such a throng of readers that they obstructed the progression of the plot, running the risk that the difficulties and catastrophes of the interior of the novel would

appear in the forward, among the mangled bodies. You will understand that if the novel had stopped for even an instant, I would have at that point inserted a new prologue in the hole thus produced in the narration. (26)

In the same vein, the *Museum's* characters, while presented as strictly metaphorical and rarely serving to advance a plot or represent a reality, can seem at the same time magnificently symbolic and astonishingly carnal. Indeed, this is the entire point of Nicolasa the Cook, the most endearing of the many characters who do not figure in the actual novel, either as inhabitants or as participants in the novelizing project. Nicolasa must resign from the novel because both her 140-kilo mass and her fragrant empanadas prove too corporal a distraction for readers of metaphor:

Despite her bulk, Nicolasa is very sensitive. She was mortified when she discovered that she might deprive the novel of readers, and she abandoned her enviable situation at the Empanada Shop and only worked in the winter, in the wide avenues of Buenos Aires, using her ample person to shelter transients from the wind and the cold. So many took refuge there that space became very limited. (89)

As these excerpts demonstrate, much of the success of this book owes to Schwartz's adept translation. Like any great translator, Schwartz loves words and has an outstanding agility with the English language. But the *Museum* also calls for exceptional powers of judgment. Spanish syntax, which even in ordinary prose can challenge a good translator, is contorted to its extremes by Macedonio. To these acrobatics are added frequent archaisms and obscure word plays that simply cannot be reproduced in English. Schwartz has taken the practical route, opting for readability while seldom sacrificing cleverness. If occasionally the result is overly colloquial or facile, such are the pitfalls of attempting the impossible. But ninety-five out of a hundred times Schwartz finds just the right solution: comical, emotive, pathetic or arch without being contrived or (again alluding to Stein) simply incomprehensible.

This excellent translation of an extraordinary book demands to be read by anyone interested in Latin American avant-gardes, in the art of metafiction and its philosophical precedents, and in stretching their muscles of literary understanding. It would make a provocative addition to any course on world avant-gardes and experimental fiction.

Todd S. Garth
U.S. Naval Academy

Russell West-Pavlov. *Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze*. Spatial Practices: An Interdisciplinary Series in Cultural History, Geography and Literature. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009. 275 pp.

Russell West-Pavlov's 2009 publication of *Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze* is a noteworthy exploration to the role of space in the three important French thinkers of the twentieth century. In his book West-Pavlov presents Julia Kristeva's, Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's theories of space, provides an excellent analysis of the similarities and differences among the three poststructuralists and points out the social significance that is derived of their theories.

West-Pavlov postulates that the theories of space of Kristeva, Foucault and Deleuze reveal a shift in French postwar philosophy from questions of "what is space" to "in what ways is space experienced." This shift presents a new spatial mode of analysis where space no longer is a receptacle for events or objects but it is the very fabric of psycho-social life, as it creates meaning and transmits knowledge about our society. The three poststructuralists stress that it is in a spatial process of configuration and re-configuration that human life takes place and unfolds in a dynamic manner. The spaces that individuals inhabit and the manner they live through them become processes that are experienced as ongoing series of events of which they themselves are a part.

Kristeva, Foucault and Deleuze approach the issue of space through their distinct perspectives. As a psychoanalytic critic, Kristeva is interested in the gendering of human subjectivity. Foucault has more of a historical sociological approach, while Deleuze's work moves in a more thematic way within a given social context. Taken together, however, their work provides a map of useful accounts of how space is connected to human life.

The first two chapters of West-Pavlov's book are devoted to Kristeva's work exploring space as a subjective entity. The first chapter reviews Kristeva's early work, in which she focused her attention on the Semiotic and Symbolic aspects of space and how the latter are manifested in and influence cultural and linguistic life. Kristeva uses the term *Chora* to incorporate the two aspects of space and regards it as the condition of social life and of pre-subjective space. In the second chapter, West-Pavlov reviews Kristeva's more recent work on the notion of space. In her latter work Kristeva explores the notion of space from a more psychosocial perspective, in which there is a distinct dichotomy between the pre-subjective and the post-Oedipal socialized space.

The next two chapters are devoted to Foucault. His theory of space is explored as a crucial element in practices of power and contestation in society, either as an aesthetic or literary space. At first, his notion of space is initially

abstract and similar to the structural functioning notion to Kristeva's *Chora*. However, later Foucault's social space is seen as a dynamic notion in practices of power-knowledge and abstraction in society. In this case his theory is aligned more with Kristeva's latter work, the symbolic. In both thinkers, space is explained as the way in which social reality is generated.

According to West-Pavlov's last two chapters, Deleuze looks at space without the double articulation seen in Kristeva or Foucault. Space for Deleuze is considered as nodes of thought, life as multiple flows of becoming. His reflection on space as processes of action in dispersed sites first spreads out to interconnect with other themes or topoi in a dense web of allusions and overlaps. As discussed in chapter five, Deleuze postulates that there are many spaces of life which can be discerned in a form of multiple flows such as relations of desire and attraction. In chapter six, Deleuze rejects the oedipal complex and the accepted theories of psycho-social lack. According to him the subject is multiple and not lacking. Deleuze works with the notion of fold to reconcile the difference between identity and difference, subject and environment, inner and outer, singularity and multiplicity. Through his work Deleuze shows a special ethos of plenitude which stands in contrast with what he calls the "oedipal economies of lack" that dominate contemporary society. According to West-Pavlov, Deleuze's perspective of plenitude and continuity enables us to integrate Kristeva's and Foucault's work into a larger spatial theory of inclusion.

The book aims to make more concrete the abstract spatial theory of the three French thinkers of the twentieth century by offering theoretical perspectives on space but also sometimes very insightful applications into samples of literary texts by Jorge Luis Borges, Édouard Glissant, Franz Kafka, and Virginia Woolf. Those interested in the analysis of spatial theory may find West-Pavlov's work useful, especially the illustration of concepts via literary examples.

Zoe Petropoulou
St. John's University

Maria Beville. *Gothic-postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009. 217 pp.

Perhaps all ground-breaking texts can be considered brave, even touched with a bit of bravado, and Maria Beville's work is no exception. Working within the sprawling fields of postmodernism and the Gothic, the text attempts to define a new genre, Gothic-postmodernism, by pinpointing "sublime terror" as "the genre's central dialogical element" (15). Yet the shape-shifting qualities of postmodernism, the sublime, and the Gothic are hard for Beville to neatly contain within her own genre outline, which results in a labyrinth of fine arguments

and well-supported observations without clear boundaries. According to the author, the conventions of Gothic-postmodernism include:

the blurring of borders that exist between the real and the fictional, which results in the narrative self-consciousness and an interplay between the supernatural and the metafictional; a concern with the sublime effects of terror and the unrepresentable aspects of reality and subjectivity; specific thematic devices of haunting, *the doppelgänger*, and a dualistic philosophy of good and evil; an atmosphere of mystery and suspense and a counter-narrative function. (15)

In light of this broad framework, it becomes difficult to find a postmodern text that does not deal with at least one, or several, of these aspects, and thus, the genre Beville works hard to pioneer loses its significance for lack of clear boundaries. Postmodernism, with its loosely defined aesthetics, has always already borrowed from other genres including science fiction, romance, and fantasy. Therefore, the need for a separate genre to address elements of the Gothic in postmodern literature should be further examined.

Yet even with these shortcomings, Beville's work contributes to Gothic and postmodern studies by providing insights into sublime moments of terror that haunt postmodern texts. Undoubtedly, this work is a fine introduction for students not familiar with the conventions of the Gothic terror and its relation to the sublime, and the text includes clear explanations of Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, Jean-François Lyotard, and Slavoj Žižek's writings on the sublime. Of importance to Gothic-postmodernism are the moments which "relate to sublimity that does not seek the divine" (89). To illustrate this concept, the text examines Gothic, sublime terror in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5*, and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*. The close readings of these novels, which are presented as models for the genre, do support the argument of the Gothic sublime as "seek[ing] out the most fundamental aspects of being on a personal, individual level" (89).

Yet the text also suggests "Gothic-postmodernism continues to revise notions of the sublime and its inherent terror, parallel to postmodernist theories of sublimity and reality" (89). Presenting a definition and then stating that it is under constant revision becomes an expected move on Beville's part, which certainly aligns with post-structuralist thinking, but does little for the work's attempt to outline a new literary genre.

Undoubtedly, Beville has hit upon an interesting intersection where the Gothic infiltrates postmodern literature, and these commonalities should not be disregarded. By expanding David Morris's work on the Gothic sublime and its relation to Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, Beville's work offers a powerful reading of the voiceless scream as it appears in Auster's *City of Glass*: "It is expressive of the unsayable, the unrepresentable; the sublime terror that can only

be understood by the subject on an abstract and non-verbal linguistic level” (103). The text then revisits this subject in its analysis of Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse 5*:

The image of open-mouthed silence clearly has significant potential in terms of constructing some concept of an encounter with the unrepresentable. By un-representing it, in other words, by presenting the human, silent, awful, but terrified response to it without direct reference, the intensity of the unrepresentable may be characterized and is effectively presented as a presence in absence, an unrepresentation. (110)

Here Beville hits upon how Gothic-postmodern texts present what often lies outside of language, yet is directly related to the experience of terror, and she does this well, examining similar images of the scream in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*, and Bret Easton Ellis’s *Lunar Park*.

In light of its many fine readings and insights, Beville’s text should not be dismissed as a failed attempt at outlining a genre; this criticism is too simplistic. When introducing Gothic-postmodernism, Beville suggests that this “distinct generic mutation in literature,” which combines the ideologies of the Gothic and postmodernism, “could be referred to as a literary monster” (16), and perhaps Beville’s text is a roughly constructed monster itself. The genre work she does is held together with some haphazard stitches, yet her insight into the Gothic as it appears in postmodern literature does have a fairly strong bite.

Terri Engnoth
Frostburg State University

Sharae Deckard. *Paradise Discourse, Imperialism, and Globalization: Exploiting Eden*. New York and London: Routledge, 2010. x + 252 pp.

This book, volume 25 in the Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures series, offers a new reading and an answer to the persistence of the myth of paradise in contemporary English literatures dealing with different parts of the world (Latin America, Africa and Asia), and employing postcolonial writers that transform the anti paradise motif from anti-imperialism to an overt critique of repressed realities that go beyond that. The book is structured in three parts, each one dealing with a particular geographical area considered as paradise by European nations, and following a geographical timeline in relation to European imperialism: Mexico (the New World), Zanzibar (East Africa), and Sri Lanka. The book focuses only on works written in English, as opposed to

the languages of the paradises (Spanish, Swahili and Sinhala). It explores areas that have been generally left out of traditional readings of paradise (i.e., in the New World paradise has been associated with the Caribbean, not with Mexico as the author does).

Each part shares the same pattern, structured in two chapters: the first one offers a general view of the region and how Europeans first came into contact with it, while the second one focuses on a particular author and work that shatters the notion of that region as paradise and offers an anti-imperialist reading. Thus, the first section (covering Mexico) offers in the first chapter an overview of Mexico as paradise in European and Mexican writing from Columbus to the twentieth century, sometimes contrasting views culturally, as happens in the section discussing José Vasconcelos's *La Raza Cósmica* (1925) and Wallace Thompson's *The People of Mexico* (1921). The author does a great job demonstrating how paradise discourses evolve in relation to imperial power and desire. The second chapter focuses on Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947), a work that, despite having been well received by the Mexican intelligentsia in the 1950s and 1960s, remains for the author "tied to the irrationality of neocolonial discourses which cannot conceive alternative forms of subjectivity or resistance" (73). The second section moves to East Africa which, as the author explains, contrasts markedly with America since instead of being seen as a new world it is always depicted as the dark continent. Deckard explores the mythologies surrounding this continent, from Homer to Milton, before focusing later on Zanzibar in the modern imagination, with references to the mythical Prester John's kingdom as an engine for European desire. The author clearly demonstrates the evolution in British literature of the representation of Africa, and includes a section on the German presence in the continent, *Ostafrika*. It is interesting how the author deals with slavery, one of the signs of hell and not of paradise, since it exists in East Africa locally and in Arab hands, so the Portuguese inherit a cultural practice that was already in place and are not demonized as slave traders as on the Atlantic or West African coast. However, because of the Koran principles, masters treated their slaves better in Africa than in the new world. Chapter 4 moves to study two novels by Zanzibar's Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Paradise* (1994) and *Desertion* (2005, 2006). Gurnah defends his right to write in English in order to subvert the European misrepresenting discourse of the past, and infuses his English with Swahili oral chronicles and Islamic literature intertexts, challenging Western preconceptions of Africa, since his readership is mostly British and English-speaking. This chapter shows some ecological conscience, which will be deeper in the final section. The third section, Ceylon, keeps the connection of Zanzibar as a connecting point in the Indic Ocean slave and spice trade. Chapter five explores the desire for the island by Arabs, Portuguese, and Dutch, all unable to penetrate the interior until the British took the island from the Dutch at the end of the eighteenth century and

finally conquered the interior by 1815. This chapter offers the view of some British writers of the island, from Harriet Martineau to Arthur C. Clarke. The sixth chapter focuses on Romesh Gunsekera's informal trilogy of novels: *Reef* (1994), *The Sandglass* (1998) and *Heaven's Edge* (2002). This final section has a heavier concentration in ecological criticism and literature, especially when analyzing *Reef* and *Heaven's Edge*, since this novel is populated by multiple "ecotopian images" (177) of endangered gardens, asking whether Eden could be recreated after an apocalypse on Earth.

This is an outstanding book that deserves attention, especially from scholars interested in ecoliterature, postcolonial issues, and comparative literature. Deckard's conclusion with the relevance today of utopian/dystopian literature and the current capital role of paradise in fiction as a locus of reconciliation and acceptance of the Other is important and much needed. However, the book presents some minor issues in terms of balance: the first section, unlike the other two, chooses a completely foreign author as representative of the anti-imperialist discourse, whereas the other two areas choose a native expatriate. Although the point is to bring Latin America into the postcolonial discourse, this selection proves once again the difficulty and issues involved in such a thing, since most Latin American writers (even political exiles) keep writing in Spanish and not English. Another option would have been to choose a Cuban-American or Dominican-American writer (e.g. Cristina García or Junot Díaz), but that would defeat the purpose of exploring the traditionally forgotten paradises, since it would be the Caribbean again. There are some citation issues (citing Spanish language authors with the second last name as opposed to the first, i.e. Vargas Llosa is also cited as Llosa [19]), consistency issues (the novel *Desertion* appears as from 2005 and 2006 in the same chapter), and typographical errors on a couple of occasions (48, 53) but that might be editorial grounds. Overall, it is a work well done which deserves attention.

Miguel Ángel González-Abellás
Washburn University

Sangeeta Ray. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: In Other Words*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. 150 pp.

Through her essays, books, interviews, and lectures, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has established herself as one of the most influential contemporary critical and literary theorists whose work engages with the interstices of postcolonialism, feminism, Marxism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis. Spivak's body of work in different iterations concerns itself with representation, self-representation, the Other, subject positionality, and the politics of the postcolonial and

multicultural. In *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: In Other Words*, Sangeeta Ray skillfully takes on the task of articulating and unpacking the theoretical and political stakes of Spivak—a daunting proposition indeed. Ray's initial trepidation with which she opens the book proves to be unnecessarily self-conscious as she astutely synthesizes Spivak's literary and theoretical contributions. Ray effectively imitates Spivak's methodology to illustrate both Spivak's influence on her thinking and the manner in which Spivak's critical intervention necessitates active engagement by all participants, the critic and reader alike.

What struck me most about Ray's account of Spivak's work is the author's acute awareness of both her own subject positionality and her own intellectual indebtedness to Spivak as a postcolonial theorist who articulates well the very contradictions of this positionality and existence. By carefully employing well-chosen anecdotes and analyses of Spivak's body of work, Ray traces the trajectory of Spivak both as an intellectual figure in the academy and as a model of critique. Ray enacts Spivak's critical maneuvers to make them intelligible both to a reader who may have only read "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and to those who know Spivak's work well.

Ray lays out Spivak's intellectual contributions in the following chapters: Chapter 1 "Writing Autobiography, Writing Spivak: In Lieu of an Introduction," Chapter 2 "Reading Literature, Teaching Literature: Whither Soul Making?," Chapter 3 "Reading Singularity, Reading Difference: An Ethics of the Impossible," and Chapter 4 "Reading Women, Reading Essence: Whither Gender?" The first chapter does an excellent job of explaining Spivak's critical stance and the intellectual tensions at the heart of her work through Ray's very own encounters with Spivak both as a reader and as a Bengali woman herself. She enacts Spivak's critical practices, outlines Spivak's "movement from a middle-class family in Calcutta to the upper echelons of academia in the United States" (3), and describes the shifts in her critical engagement with Spivak over time. Reading Spivak's "Translator's Preface" to Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* taught Ray "the significance of responsibility of one's writing and reading" (2). Through Spivak's work, we understand "unlearning one's privilege and power as loss" (3), the difficulty to do so, and the shifting terrain of subject positions. Ray skillfully illustrates Spivak's various injunctions from "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text From the Third World" to *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, and Dialogues*. She also points out the paucity of sustained engagement with Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* in spite of several reviews. Ray wants her own book to be "a thinking through with Spivak the important questions about reading, pedagogy, ethics, and feminism" (23).

The second chapter delves into a detailed account of Spivak's close readings of literature in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Ray analyzes Spivak's shift from reading Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Mahashweta Devi's novella *Pterodactyl, Pirtha and Puran Sahay* as an important intervention about representation, the Third World, the native informant, and soul making. Spivak's reading of J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and *Disgrace* illuminates the importance of teaching; the example of Spivak's encounter with the girl in rural India seems to hold the key to an ethical political stance, but also to her intellectual investments. The third chapter outlines Spivak's ethical call to reading, especially when knowledge seems to be in particular crisis. The Spivakian methodology of persistent critique is especially important in the coupling of ethics and alterity and for her recent work on planetary ethics. "Since globalization is tied to the march of capital and development, the other is either erased as other, consolidated as the almost same, reproduced as subjects of tradition, or negated as not quite subject yet of Reason" according to Ray (84). Ray thus explains Spivak's impetus to "imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents" (84). The concluding chapter illustrates Spivak's contributions to transnational feminism while being informed by French feminists, including Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva. Ray turns to Spivak's essays "If Only" and "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to probe the problem of representation in gendered terms, specifically the gendered subaltern. She investigates "what happens when the postcolonial feminist moves from the colonial and national to the transnational with Spivak" (132).

Through the looking glass of Spivak, Rays reminds readers of why literature, ways of knowing, and the political are not only still relevant and key questions for critical thought, but why the need for their convergence is even stronger than ever. Ray's book will be useful for scholars who want an in-depth analysis of the trajectory of Spivak's work, as well as for students who are being introduced to Spivak's work, especially in a postcolonial and feminist context. Ray, as a leading postcolonial feminist critic herself, enacts Spivak's methodology well. Reading Ray to read Spivak will be pedagogically beneficial for graduate students who are learning reading and textual practices that are at the very heart of both Spivak's work and this text about her body of work.

Cybelle H. McFadden

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro