

## Book Reviews

Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote, eds. *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*. Rochester: Camden House, 2006. 344pp.

This highly readable volume of articles on contested cultural identity in postunification Germany emphasizes the pluralism of memory cultures as they are expressed in an array of different texts and discourses. In their excellent introduction, the editors characterize the anthology: "Touching upon gender, generations, memory and postmemory, trauma theory, ethnicity, historiography, family narrative alongside many other topics, the contributions engage in a productive dialogue that gives a comprehensive picture of current German memory contests" (12). The articles are grouped under the rubrics "Positions," "Mediations," "Ethnicity/Hybridity," and "Memory Politics" which seem on the face of it to be somewhat arbitrary. However, a satisfying and compelling conversation between articles emerges through such leading concepts as generation, postmemory, transgenerational trauma, imagining, and reimagining, which are not just employed as interpretive lenses but are interrogated as well. Not surprisingly, the most prominent period for postunification memory contest is the Holocaust and World War II. Eleven articles are devoted to this period by way of its resonance for later generations; of these, three articles are devoted to W. G. Sebald's position in post-1990 memory discourse. Of the three remaining articles, one focuses on remembering the GDR past, one focuses on Afro-German identity, and one on the 1950s in the Federal Republic.

The lead article, by historian Peter Fritzsche, "What exactly is *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*? Narrative and its Insufficiency in Postwar Germany" is both well-written and compelling. Fritzsche provides the historical context for and lays out the premise of the book: a prescriptive discourse on memory as national identity is bound to be insufficient. Alternatively, he analyzes the narrative strategies Victor Klemperer and others used to preserve an active subject

and redemptive plot in constructing the Nazi past and in imagining *Heimat* while explaining their failure to master the past. In the next article “Generation & Masculinity in Meckel, Timm, Hahn & Leopold,” Anne Fuchs captures the contradictions that confound the construction of memory in specific family legends, emphasizing the privatization of history that takes place within this transgenerational, autobiographical literature; it acknowledges “deferral and transference” as it shifts from the historical past to the past’s negative influence on family relations. In the following section “Mediations,” these themes are refracted through a fascinating and important article by Chloe E. M. Paver on the *Wehrmacht* and the *Fotofeldpost* exhibitions, which underscores the interdisciplinary range of the volume. J. J. Long’s article “Monika Maron’s *Pawels Briefe*: Photography, Narrative, and the Claims of Postmemory” returns to the role of the photograph in an autobiographical narrative. In his elegant argument, Long tests the concept of postmemory as it applies to this text and finds it necessary but wanting.

Film as text comes up a bit short in this anthology. Matthias Fiedler argues for serious academic engagement with postunification popular film about the third Reich and provides a historical overview of the “reproachful discourse” on film as a predicament in German Film Studies. Fiedler’s useful account of such films focuses on their success as part of a flourishing cinema culture after 1990. The memory contest in regard to the GDR is discussed in only one article, “Telling It Like It Wasn’t: Familial Allegories of Wish-Fulfillment in Postunification Germany” by Elizabeth Boa. In this insightful and crucial article, which keeps the volume from being focused almost solely on the transgenerational experience of the Holocaust and World War II, Boa analyzes Maron, Thomas Brussig, and Jürgen Becker by taking the family constellation as a point of departure to discuss Stalinism versus Nazism in *Stille Zeile sechs*, broad satire as a generational strategy in *Helden wie wir* and sentiment as a strategy of reconciliation in *Good Bye Lenin!* A particularly enlightening article for me was Andrew Plowman’s “The 1950s in Ludwig Harig, F. C. Delius, and Thomas Hettche.” Plowman contrasts Harig’s (born 1927) and Delius’s (born 1943) with Hettche’s (born 1964) rendition of restoration and interrogates the ambivalences toward “conservative moments and modernizing tendencies” (258).

Under the rubric “Ethnicities/Hybridities,” Dagmar Lorenz’s informative “Imagined Identities: Children and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors in Literature” takes Ilse Aichinger’s position of radical isolation in earlier postwar texts and Becker’s GDR texts as a counterpoint for analyzing writers from a post-Shoah generation, namely Ruth Beckermann, Nadja Seelich, Esther Dischereit, Robert Menasse, as well as third and fourth generations—Doron Rabinovici and Vladimir Vertlib. Cathy Gelbin discusses the figure of the golem in constructing a “meeting point of tradition and modernity” (198), while Jennifer Michaels elaborates on the remembered experience of Afro-German women’s

struggle (May Ayim, Helga Emde, Ika Hügel-Marshall) for a biracial identity in the postunification period in Germany. Roger Woods's article documents the difficulty the German New Right faces in remembering nation and underscores the inadequacy of the traditional concept of nation.

Despite the fact that Sebald has become a prominent focus for postwar scholarship, the contributions in this anthology bring interesting and important new insights. "Being Translated: Exile, Childhood, and Multilingualism in G.-A. Goldschmidt and W. G. Sebald" is an intriguing discussion of multilingualism while simultaneously bringing Sebald into closer relief by contrasting him with Goldschmidt. Mary Cosgrove challenges the scholarship of the English-speaking world, particularly American scholarship relying on English translation, by casting light on Sebald's works in a more local German literary context "within and against which Sebald wrote with a vengeance" and taking on Sebald's discourse on Jews (231). The volume's last article by Fuchs, "A *Heimat* in Ruins as *Heimat*: W. G. Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur*" examines Sebald's contradictory narrative of *Heimat* in the ruins as sentimental, nostalgic and critical.

Although there is room for nitpicking, this volume is an important contribution to our understanding of the cultural processes involved in remembering and attempting to master the German past(s). *German Memory Contests* has a useful bibliography of works cited in the articles at the end of the volume. It apparently has drawn on an international conference in Ireland and was funded by the Humanities Institute of Ireland (three scholars represent US universities). Reading this volume is a pleasure—it feels unhurried, thoroughly researched, and finished. Those of us interested as generalists or postunification specialists can only hope more such excellent research and analyses will be forthcoming from Ireland and the UK. This is an extraordinary anthology by anyone's measure and belongs in every college or university library.

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Herschel Farbman. *The Other Night: Dreaming, Writing, and Restlessness in Twentieth-Century Literature*. New York: Fordham U. P., 2008. 152 pp.

Studying dreaming, not dreams, Herschel Farbman chooses for his oneiropomp Maurice Blanchot, whose speculations encircle the study and structure its categories. Let readers be advised that Blanchot's Surreal program in his *School of Night* precedes the first page of the book and, even when not quoted or

questioned by Farbman, dominates. A catalogue here of Blanchot's concepts, structures, and pursuits would eclipse the book.

Farbman excludes brain-dream and social studies and composes an intense phenomenological meditation on dreaming, writing, and restlessness, to which he adds fatigue and death, in the writings of Freud (dreams are pictograph writing), Blanchot himself (dreams and writing are neutral), Samuel Beckett (writing is restlessness), and James Joyce (dreaming writes the alphabet), with comments that include a variety of other texts, e.g., the "Song of Songs," a troubadour poem, *Don Quixote*, *Kubla Khan*, and, at the end, Socrates—a list suggesting a skipping-stone across the surface of Western literature and philosophy. The Introduction gives special attention to Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" and the Conclusion to Plato's "Phaedo." The book's subtitle should be modified to "Some Twentieth-Century European Literature." I regret his omission of references to and analyses of Descartes's dream of a book, a meditation leading to Blanchot's radical dualism, and Francisco de Goya's response in *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*, an image with words and with pen fallen out of hand. Both are directly related to this study.

Farbman states his own goals:

This book is in search of the current location of this nocturnal meeting place where the poet, stripped of laurels, encounters the non-poet in him or herself and finds, in this encounter both the inspiration and the undoing of his or her work. Here the poet joins everyone else not as the representative of everyone else but on common ground. Everyone dreams. (10)

This goal appears political, about democracy, and belongs, academically, in literary studies at the soft margin of politicized anthropology. The next goal is about community, communication, and culture. "This book argues that this nightly experience that can't be shared is an experience of language as shared—of the sharing of language—and that the experience is essentially literary" (10). This goal introduces another democratic experience, death. "The nocturnal meeting place, the little opening I'm looking for in this book, cannot be too far from a graveyard. It's in the graveyard that sleep looks most like death and there that it pays most to know the difference (the difference being the dream, eternal enemy of eternal rest)" (11). I cannot say if Farbman reaches his goals, for after three readings I still find the presentation more a meditation on a few texts from the authors than an argument whose logic permits agreement or counter-statement. For example, "Though none of the writers studied in this book claims . . . that works of writing are produced in his sleep, each brings to the fore of his work the restlessness that persists even in the depths of sleep, and each experiences that restlessness as an indication of the inevitability of writing" (17). But restlessness is not mentioned in the Freud essay: "The aim of this chapter [on Freud] is to articulate something of the writing anxiety implied

in Freud's vision of the dream as writing" (25). And it is only implied in the Joyce essay. I must say I do find the presentation increasingly interesting and poignant, but still beyond evaluation. In this brief review, I can only indicate my responses to its assumptions. My prejudice is that I find Farbman's assertion that "An entirely dreamless sleep would not be sleep at all, but death" (43), which recalls Michel Foucault's "it is only because we dream that we are kept from dying in our sleep," café metaphysics requiring a good wine.

"This book is about a relatively recent episode in this story [of 'transformations' of the 'waking heart']. [Freud's] *The Interpretation of Dreams* and [Joyce's] *Finnegans Wake* bookend an age of big modernist projects, many of which—from Proust's *Recherche* to surrealism to Benjamin's unfinished *Arcades Project*—make the dream a central concern. ... After World War II, in the cold light of the early aftermath of the age of dreambooks, Beckett and Blanchot ... discover with new clarity and new fatigue, that what wakes when the 'I' sleeps doesn't sleep when the 'I' wakes. Restless night stretches on after night" (4-5). Did the process of dreaming change after the war? Doesn't this imply that the world war invades the dreaming process as well as the dreams and that dreaming is not ontologically self-enclosed? A social study of this relatively recent episode seems directly relevant.

It is a mistake, too, not to consider the brain studies, for they are about the dreaming-process, less about the dream-content. When the heart was a seat of emotions, literature could have its cardiac tropes, but the springs in that throne have broken and the sedentary center has moved to the bean-bag brain. There is good reason to study the brain's active presence in dreaming. Someday, people may say, my arm fell asleep the other night and it dreamed (e.g. arms, hands in Salvador Dalí's, legs, feet in Joan Miró's paintings). Brain studies may thread from neurons to dreaming, talking, writing about dreams, to, perhaps, psychoanalysis. Perhaps dreaming is merely the brain's borborygms. The descriptive neutrality (by subtraction of anecdotes and reduction to measurement) of science may lead into a critique of Blanchot's ontological dualism by indicating, for example, that when the sleeper awakes, a switch in the brain's chemicoelectricity network is turned to "Off" and that the story-telling sadness after this cessation expresses only a Dubliner's sense of loss or a Parisian's sense of death and tells us nothing about the process. Regardless of cessation, Job has faith he will dream again.

That the analysis of hypnagogia in Peter Schwenger's "Writing Hypnagogia," in *Critical Inquiry* 34.3, can employ the same Blanchot categories and dynamics suggests, finally, that the idea of the other night is not necessarily so totally, so absolutely, so perfectly other, that there may even be a pons joining the body, brain, hypnagogia, and dreaming in contrast to the pontifications of Blanchot. By the way, I find writing more like hypnagogia than dreaming dreams.

A study of Beckett's pre-war need to write, his post-war restlessness in the writing, and his style, during and after the war, of some fatigue syndrome may be read in his novels as brilliant melancholic mythologizings of borborygms of the brain. Joyce and Beckett show in their writing in response to their borborygms they were in love with laughter. Farbman, whose own wit enjoys puns, has minimized humor and its implications in their writings. He touches upon Beckett's comedy only to hurry off to the figure of the mother. "Loud," Joyce wrote, "heap miseries upon us yet entwine our arts with laughters low!" (*FW* 259). Farbman follows closely the operations of Blanchot, and if when reading some twentieth-century literature you believe Blanchot's program will clarify your questions, this meditation is for you.

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Richard Neupert. *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2007. 408 pp.

*A History of the French New Wave Cinema* offers a detailed analysis of one of the most captivating cinematographic movements by placing it in the social, political, and economic contexts in which it took place and by emphasizing its leaders and major collaborators. This second edition of this history of the French New Wave, written in English, includes the addition of a chapter about the Left Bank group, which was embodied by the figures of Alain Resnais and Agnès Varda. Richard Neupert's goal is to put into evidence the sometimes misunderstood, or maybe even forgotten, cultural and historical context, leading his reader to not only focus on those who shaped the New Wave, but also on the effect it had on future filmmakers. Drawing inspiration from poetic realism, Italian realism, and disdain for the Tradition of quality and mainstream Hollywood, the New Wave was born in a tense period yearning for changes in every domain—beginning with politics and education. This nest of avant-gardism, auteurism, liveliness, and nerve became a turning point in the history of the *septième art*. More than a flash-in-the-pan trend, this cinematic revolution would prove to have an undeniable and indelible impact on the next generation of filmmakers.

The first chapter, "Where did the Wave Begin?," describes a variety of forces at work, the crashing together of which would provide the source of the wave. The author insists on the rise of interest and popularity of cinema criticism through cine-clubs and a stream of postwar film culture publications (journals,

gazettes, magazines, reviews...), and shows how this novelty is smoothly a part of a wider artistic movement catalyzed by the New Novel, New Theatre, and new media (in the form of the television, whose birth and development also explains social reasons for the decrease in popularity of the cinema in the sixties). In addition, he emphasizes new filming techniques. With personal expression increasing a new sense of authorship, the New Wave carries its name from the violence of its start and the unexpected reach of its consequences. Chapter Two allows the reader to rediscover masterpieces of French cinema, through the pioneers who gave their own touch to the movement: Alexandre Astruc and his *caméra-stylo* 'camera pen'; Varda, a former photographer; and Jean-Pierre Melville, with his realistic adaptations of novels by Vercors and Jean Cocteau. In the third chapter, Neupert presents Roger Vadim and Louis Malle. Usually not considered part of the New Wave directors' cohorts, these two precursors of modernity became real models of reinterpreting cinema for the next generation. With *And God Created Woman* and *Elevator to the Gallows*, they introduce a novel way to promote new stories and new aesthetics of sexual drive representation.

The following three chapters each concentrate on one major director of the Wave: Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, and Jean-Luc Godard, respectively. The first is considered as having launched the Wave and helped facilitate its reception among the public, especially thanks to his prolific body of work within a little less than a year and a half. With concise descriptions of *Le beau Serge*, *Les Cousins*, and *Landru*, Neupert gives the reader a good glimpse of Chabrol's talent, and it is a delight to become more acquainted with terrific but sometimes unfairly neglected films. Truffaut—recognized as the New Wave's leader with his *400 Blows*—embodies along with Godard the very spirit of the movement. Cinephilic, intellectual, and inspired by iconic figures as Alfred Hitchcock and Cocteau, Truffaut remains one of the most fascinating French directors, who, thanks to a great deal of creativity and modesty, also managed to arouse a dormant film criticism. In the same vein, Godard imposes himself as a daring critic, taking charge of rebuilding French Cinema. Inseparable from his revolutionary *Breathless*, an iconic film of the Wave starring soon-to-be-famous Jean-Paul Belmondo, Godard reached glory thanks to an impeccable narrative style (*dysnarrative* is actually more appropriate in his case), techniques of discontinuity, and grandiose auteurism. Truffaut and Godard are the very essence of the New Wave and prove together the duration of the movement that could have been but an ephemeral trend.

Next, Chapter Seven highlights the *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s circle members; in the shadow of the main figures of the movement (Chabrol, Truffaut, Godard) lurk other major names who may be not even considered by some as part as the club. Nevertheless, from *Cahiers* critics to accomplished filmmakers, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and Pierre Kast played their

part in transforming the landscape of French Cinema. Neupert's historical analysis closes on the "New Wave's Left Bank" representatives: Resnais and, exiting the movement as she entered it, Varda. This branch appears concurrently to the Wave at the end of the 1950s and also shows a modern approach of aesthetics and cinematographic techniques—blending their own narratives and representative strategies. This last chapter is a valuable addition as it puts an emphasis on the internal division of the very Wave—new cinema is not a smooth current but is made of several tides, with thousands of contributing surges.

Rich in particulars, stories, and still shots, and using a strong but accessible style, this book would be an exemplary tool to introduce this movement to students. While maintaining an entertaining voice to keep the reader engaged, focusing on historical events, and discussing a broad range of directors and film titles, Neupert gives his audience a great opportunity to reconvene with the New Wave's best-known characters and to be introduced to others. Aside from being entertaining as the story of a poignant moment in history, the book is also a valuable tool for seminars on the subject thanks to monographs that are thoughtfully woven together and to exercises that prompt deeper analysis about the featured authors.

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Dianne Marie Zandstra. *Embodying Resistance: Griselda Gambaro and the Grotesque*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2007. 229 pp.

How and why do Griselda Gambaro's novels elicit laughter, terror, and disgust simultaneously? What is the effect on the reader of these disparate emotions? How does the grotesque in the narrative works of Gambaro relate to Argentine society? These are a few questions that Dianne Marie Zandstra attempts to answer in this study. Gambaro is mostly known for her theatre. *Embodying Resistance: Griselda Gambaro and the Grotesque* makes a significant, valuable, and necessary contribution to studies on Gambaro's narrative work. Zandstra analyzes six of Gambaro's novels using theory of the grotesque and the *grotesco criollo*, specifically the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Wolfgang Kayser, Geoffrey Harpham, and Julia Kristeva, among others. Of particular interest to Zandstra is the reaction of the reader to these grotesque images, characters, and language found throughout much of the work of Gambaro. The author points out that Gambaro herself openly acknowledges her debt to the *grotesco criollo* tradition in the Argentine theatre of the 1920s, specifically the works of Armando

Discépolo. In fact, Zandstra mentions that Gambaro believes that the role of the artist is to work for her society and that “lo grotesco es una condición del carácter argentino” (16). Zandstra shows in great detail, and in an accessible writing style, the grotesque at work in Gambaro’s novels, while at the same time demonstrating its relationship to social ills in Argentine society.

In Chapter 1, Zandstra summarizes and contrasts various theories of the grotesque and the *grotesco criollo*, a movement specific to Argentine theatre from approximately 1920-50. She dedicates specific sections to the theoretical work of Kayser, Bakhtin, Kristeva, and Harpham, using clear and helpful examples from literary works and visual art from the Renaissance to the present. Relevant characteristics of the grotesque to this study that are highlighted in the introductory chapter include alienation of the reader through: dehumanization of the victim, simultaneous instances of laughter and horror, and repulsive images such as excrement and other bodily secretions. Zandstra also focuses heavily on Bakhtin’s concept of the subversive nature of the grotesque and Kristeva’s notion of abjection.

*Nada que ver con otra historia*, Gambaro’s re-telling of Frankenstein, is the subject of Chapter 2. Zandstra shows how Gambaro uses the protagonist and narrator Toni, a Frankenstein monster assembled by Manolo, to reflect the dehumanization of Argentine society under military dictatorships, and resulting uprisings such as the Cordobazo of 1969. By pointing out the intertextuality of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and other works such as Jorge Luis Borges’s short story “Las ruinas circulares,” Zandstra brings to the fore the reaction of the reader to the monstrous images in the novel.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the novel *Ganarse la muerte*, which was banned by the military government of Argentina in 1976 for being a “threat to society” (73). Interestingly, Zandstra includes, in an appendix, the decree from the government that banned the novel. Distortion of society and humanity, as well as estrangement and distance, are the major themes treated in her analysis of *Ganarse la muerte*, using principally Kayser’s theories of the grotesque. Language in the novel and its effect on the reader are also given lengthy treatment; the author cites long passages from the novel, including poems written by one of the characters, to illustrate her stance. Despite significant treatment of these themes, Zandstra clearly focuses on the political and social messages in the novel. This is evidenced in the chapter’s concluding sentence: “By refusing to allow human beings to become abstractions, Gambaro has refocused public attention on an Argentina that neither said what it was doing nor did what it was saying” (105).

Chapter 4 analyzes two novels: *Una felicidad con menos pena* and *Lo impenetrable*. The former is described by Zandstra as a social parable and the latter as a parody of an erotic novel. Despite these differences, and the fact that they were written sixteen years apart, the author groups them together because

of their treatment of the grotesque body and the presence of body language that contradicts the written word. As a theoretical framework, Zandstra relies on Bakhtinian ideas of the grotesque body and the significance of bodily functions such as defecation, in addition to Kristeva's ideas on abjection. As in Chapter 3, Zandstra also focuses on language. In this case Zandstra contrasts male and female discourses showing ultimately that the male word is subverted by body language. Likewise, Zandstra concludes, the male body is "trampled underfoot" while the female body is "celebrated with all of its flaws" (137).

In the final chapter, Zandstra contrasts two novels that form part of a trilogy: *Dios no nos quiere contentos* and the second installment, *Después del día de fiesta*. Zandstra mentions the third novel of the trilogy, *Promesas y desvaríos*, but does not explain why only the first two form part of her study. Both novels share a common protagonist, Tristán (who is a lover of poetry and music), and the theme of the artist's relationship with society. The author describes Tristán as a social misfit who is constantly abused and mistreated by society resulting in scenes with grotesque images. According to Zandstra, Tristán is the classic *grotesco criollo* character, inspiring both laughter and pity in the reader. Zandstra demonstrates this by analyzing his relationship with a series of odd characters, often in locations that lend themselves to the grotesque, such as the circus. Once again returning to the social and political aspects of Gambaro's work, Zandstra sums up her vision of the grotesque in these two novels in the following way: "The driving force of the second novel is the same as that of the first: Tristán seeks the transforming power of beauty as expressed through art in the midst of grinding poverty, violence, hatred, and degradation" (172).

Readers interested in Gambaro or the grotesque/*grotesco criollo* will find Zandstra's book a stimulating read. Each novel analyzed is briefly summarized so that even a person not familiar with the novel in question will be able to benefit from the study. The book is clearly well researched, with sufficient citations from previous studies of Gambaro's narrative work. The theoretical framework is also clearly explained and generally applied convincingly, although one wonders if Kristeva's theory of the abject deserves an entire section in Chapter 1, given how infrequently it is seen in subsequent chapters. One weak element that appears throughout the study is that of the role of the reader. Zandstra frequently claims that the grotesque elements in Gambaro's works cause the reader to react in determined ways. The reality is, however, that there are as many different reactions as there are readers. Nevertheless, these small criticisms do not undermine this fine accomplishment and significant contribution to the study of the narrative of Gambaro.

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Mathew J. Marr. *Postmodern Metapoetry and the Replenishment of the Spanish Lyrical Genre, 1980-2000*. La Sirena: The Barracks, 2007. 138 pp.

The above is a promising topic for a scholarly monograph on Spanish Peninsular poetry: the self-conscious reflection on the gestation of a poetic text coupled with an introduction to those poets who came to prominence in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Some thirty of the one hundred and five pages of its four essays explain postmodern theories of narrative (even though the author's subject is poetry); another forty introduce us to an interesting group of male poets (Javier Salvago, Luis García Montero, Felipe Benítez Reyes, Vicente Gallego and Carlos Marzal). The last essay begins with a ten-page excursus on poetry and humor, which it then follows with twenty pages on the deflated poetic ideal of Roger Wolfe.

The argument that holds these different strands together is: the *novísimos* (of the 1960s and '70s) killed Spanish poetry—ostracized it from the “cultural mainstream” (85)—whereas the *postnovísimos* (1980-2000) are replenishing it and will bring it commercial success. According to Matthew Marr, the *novísimos*, who came to prominence in the waning years of the Franco dictatorship, turned readers off with their “aesthetic decadence, xenophilic motifs, esoteric intertextuality, baroque language, and the overt thematization of linguistic theory in verse” (12). Marr is equally scathing about all post-Romantic and Modern poetry: too sincere, too “melancholy,” “sanctimonious,” “somerly philosophical” (16-17), too serious, “solemn,” “meaningful” (86-90). By implication, the poets Marr studies are not as ponderous and are turning readers back on to poetry.

In Marr's second and third essays we are introduced to Salvago (b. 1950) via most engaging readings of his “Tocata y Fuga,” “Variaciones sobre un tema de Manuel Machado” and “Mi generación” (31-40, 43-45). Next comes García Montero (b. 1958) via stimulating readings of his “Espejo, dime” (40-43) and discussion of “Poema X” (76-81). After this we have Gallego (b. 1963) and his charming metapoetic reflections “El turista,” “Muchacha con perro” and “Recado de escribir” (45-48, 65-72). Marr inserts a reflection on Jenaro Talens's panic over the collapse of the sign (57-61) before introducing Benítez Reyes and his intriguing meditation “El artificio” (61-65). He then moves on to the fascinating talent of Marzal (b. 1961) via a solid analysis of the metapoem “El poema de amor que nunca escribirás” (72-75).

Marr's argument is that the above poets are in the process of “restoring vitality” (82) to the Spanish lyric, and on the basis of Marr's selection and analysis of these ten poems, I take his point. These are serious poets whose talent is evolving. Marr demonstrates that they are intent on subverting and revis-

ing the style and ideals of their immediate precursors. He also shows where they deploy considerable ironic humor and metapoetic ingenuity to simulate a poem's gestation. Certainly they deploy humor, but as part of their struggle with (as opposed to Wolfe's debunking of) the Hispanic poetic tradition. Unlike Marr, I find Gallego's "El turista" (45-48) of the late 1980s a more fascinating poem precisely because it engages Pere Gimferrer's decadent "Oda a Venecia" of the mid-1960s. To put it another way, I find these poets to be sincere, serious, somber and philosophical; I read them as skillfully engaging conventions of the post-Romantic and Modern lyric: the very tradition Marr decries as too baroque to matter to readers today.

Marr's fourth essay (85-116) is devoted to a very different poet, Wolfe. This is an entertaining read, partly because Wolfe gazes on his own navel and other parts of his anatomy. Wolfe's humor could certainly attract more readers to poetry, but would such readers ever take on a Marzal? Moreover, how does Wolfe replenish the humorous Spanish poetic tradition—never alluded to by Marr—of the *ultraistas*, Gloria Fuertes, Ángel González, Ana Rossetti or Amparo Amorós? It is in championing Wolfe that Marr hammers home his argument that these are the poets who are replenishing the Spanish lyrical genre. However, by appending Wolfe to these readings, Marr made a tactical error that weakens his argument on replenishment. Moreover, he devotes many pages to explaining Linda Hutcheon's theories on the postmodern narrative, and I question whether the categories selected (e.g. process mimesis) clarify his analyses.

With respect to Spanish critics and criticism, Marr prefers those who have taken an historical approach to poetry, who talk about and around a poem rather than getting to grips with its nuts and bolts. Spanish culture encourages this style, which in its place, i.e. in introductions to anthologies, and in the weekly cultural supplements of the intellectual newspapers, is all to the good. But academic discourse requires more ballast. Marr himself frequently writes in an overly emphatic manner. He can be cavalier in his asides and at times relies on bombast, invective or sarcasm. Academic discourse, at least in English, is different: prior studies on a topic (e.g. the Spanish lyric) must be engaged. For example, Marr ignores women poets, who between 1980 and 2000 were certainly replenishing the Spanish lyrical genre; also, he tries to make us believe that the metapoetical impulse sprang up with "*jouissance*" (55) in the Spanish lyric only after 1980. Readers will have less confidence in Marr's thesis when gaps such as these are noted, although they can enjoy Marr's essay on Wolfe and can benefit from his readings of Salvago, García Montero, Benítez Reyes, Gallego and Marzal, who are important voices in Spanish poetry today.

In conclusion, my lyrical sympathies lie with poets, like Marzal, Salvago and García Montero, who are anxiously aware of the Spanish lyrical tradition and who struggle in their work to articulate the agony and, on rare—epiphanic—moments, the ecstasy afforded via linguistic illumination. In metapoetic

texts, Juan Ramón Jiménez did confront the ecstasy, whereas the recently deceased González, in profound and playfully ironic meditations, confronted the agony. The highly self-conscious, lyrical subject in Jaime Gil de Biedma offers insights into the personae of the urban *flâneur* and the gay other; the remorsefully self-conscious speaker in Guillermo Carnero's dense and absorbing work continues to voice the postmodern, *thanatotic*, agony that beauty and sensual perfection are illusions neither he, nor his readers, nor language will fully grasp—but wish *we* could! Clara Janés's extensive *opus* is exploring the multiple possibilities of quasi-mystical experience via sound and the word, and Rossetti's truly postmodern *divagaciones* are lyrical treats that enchant her readers. If my traditional blinkers prevented an empathetic understanding of Marr, I can only offer my apologies.

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Gail A. Bulman. *Staging Words, Performing Worlds. Intertextuality and Nation in Contemporary Latin American Theater*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2007. 276 pp.

Because theater can be an important vehicle to portray the multifaceted identities of contemporary nations, *Staging Words, Performing Worlds*, takes a closer look at intertextuality and how several dramatic plays written and performed in Mexico, Venezuela, Argentina and Cuba deliberately make references to older texts—newspaper articles, songs, paintings, narratives, historical documents—to, more often than not, create a parody, an ironic view, a false idea of history or a simple homage while conveying therein a new reformed construction of national identity.

Wisely, the book is prefaced by a pivotal introduction that presents several linguistic theories, codes, and genres of intertextuality (Julia Kristeva, Mikhail Bakhtin, Ferdinand de Saussure, Gérard Genette) alongside the various transnational and globalization codes used when defining the ever-so-ambiguous space called nation (Homi Bhabha, Fredric Jameson, Ernest Renan, Benedict Anderson, Nestor García Canclini). The introduction also emphasizes how text-making and identity-making are parallel processes inasmuch as revisiting a national history through different textual scripts is a way to revise a national story and re-imagine communities.

The four chapters—each dedicated to two or three contemporary playwrights from the aforementioned countries—provide a meticulous and well-documented study of nine plays that uncovers new artistic meaning and provides multiple dialogs with the past, the present and the future of these Latin

American nations through the use of intertexts. In the course of this revision of cultural and historical textual voices, these particular dramatists are able to restage, reconfigure and re-imagine new national scripts because “intertextuality moves the text beyond a dialogue between texts and expands other meanings” (17).

In the case of Mexico for example, as explained in chapter one, *la malinche* happens to be one of the most admired yet insufferable iconic figures, both at a national and transnational level. In his play *La Malinche* (2000), dramatist Victor Hugo Rascón Banda brings to light a new concept of national identity and the modern status of Mexico by repeating, altering, expanding and at times subverting the *malinchismo* narrative. The different intertexts Rascón Banda utilizes in his play—*La visión de los vencidos*, Carlos Fuentes’s article in the newspaper *Reforma*, and Gabino Palomare’s song “La maldición de la Malinche,” among others—have “a thematic and structural fiber that highlights the themes and structures of the new text and reveals a unique ideology” (68). The second play to be studied in the realm of contemporary Mexican theater is Maruxa Vilalata’s *En blanco y negro: Ignacio y los jesuitas* (1997) which, via the life and teachings of Jesuit Saint Ignatius de Loyola, reconstructs a religious and historical script to urge humans to rethink their own worldview and to avoid presenting history within a black/white spectrum; rather, she poses the idea of religious and antihistorical traditions of Mexican theatre to “penetrate the most deeply felt traumas of the national psyche” (74).

The second chapter studies the paratextuality—following Genette’s theories—utilized in two Venezuelan plays, César Rengifo’s *Un fausto anda por la avenida* (1979) and Néstor Caballero’s *Con una pequeña ayuda de mis amigos* (1983), to shed light on what imperialism and national consciousness mean to Venezuela. According to Gail A. Bulman, both dramatists use paratextuality to humorously highlight the “psychological conflict at the root of a Venezuelan identity crisis and as an impediment to national progress” (100).

The protagonist in Rengifo’s play—a sixty-year old Venezuelan Faust who one minute is an honored national hero and the next becomes unemployed amidst a military coup—follows the footsteps of his predecessor by living in a perpetual transition and instability that reflect the economic and political aspects of Venezuela as a nation. On the other hand, Caballero’s play takes its title from John Lennon and Paul McCartney’s song “With a Little Help from My Friends” and explores a friendship at its performative level at the same time that it reveals the past and current conditions of doubt and uncertainty in the nation.

Chapter three, which is dedicated to Argentina, takes precedence as the author devotes almost half of her book to a close reading of Eduardo Pavlovsky’s three different versions of *Poroto* (1996, 1997, 1999) and Rafael Spregelburd’s *Heptalogía De Hieronymus Bosch: I, II, III* (1999). In their respective works,

both Argentine dramatists rely on the vanguard-like questioning of the aesthetic with an everlasting concern with national trauma, both to individuals and the Argentine nation. Via reinterpretation and shifts between theater and narrative, and between theater and art, these plays present an objective view of modern Argentina via the reinterpretation of intertexts which, in dialog with the main text, revise the script, transform the protagonist, and (re)present the national view and ultimately present and pose a new interpretation of self and nation.

Cuba, where intertextuality has often been used in theatre to unravel conflicting national discourses, becomes the theme for the last chapter, in which Bulman studies three plays: José Corrales and Manuel Pereira's *Las hetairas habaneras: Una melotragedia cubana basada en las troyanas de Eurípides* (1976-77), Raúl de Cardenas's *Un hombre al amanecer* (1988-89), and Pedro Monge's *Otra historia* (1996). Through very concrete intertexts, these dramatists rewrite their nation to take an in-depth look at the impact of exile on the transnational Cuban community and Cuba as a nation. The first play analyzed—which dominates this section—, as the title suggests, takes on Euripides's classic *The Trojan Women* (415 BC) to pose two ideological concerns: "the double loss of nation and its implications for the future"(197). This double loss refers to Fidel Castro's government and the subsequent exile, making the loss of national consciousness in Cuba through exile parallel to the one the Trojan women experience in ancient Greece.

The organizational approach taken by Bulman in her study is indeed efficient and comprehensive as it moves from a general view of the concept of nation as created within the theatrical narrative and the theater of a specific country, into an in-depth analysis of certain dramatists and their individual *modus operandi* with intertexts. Aware of her limitations to include more plays, her analysis follows a general idea: intertextuality as a way to move from language, to structure, to content, and ideology in Latin American contemporary theater. The concept of nation as seen through the lens of textual constructs is a theatrical device often used by dramatists in Latin America whose plays create intertextual relations that open up several national discourses to new interpretations. By comprehensively analyzing some of these contemporary authors, Bulman's *Staging Words, Performing Worlds* is a must-read for those interested in Latin American contemporary theater, concepts of intertextuality, and the nation/narration discourse.

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Alex E. Blazer, *I Am Otherwise: The Romance Between Poetry and Theory after the Death of the Subject*. Normal: Dalkey Archive, 2007. 246 pp.

In this highly stimulating and persuasive study of the theoretical standoff between language and death in contemporary American poetry, Alex Blazer skillfully integrates close textual readings of four poets, Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery, Jorie Graham, and Barrett Watten, with four critics who explored language's relationship with the constitution of subjectivity: Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Maurice Blanchot, and Jacques Lacan. The book opens with a brief consideration of the role of death in the poetic subject from the English Romantics through the American Transcendentalists, the Modernists, and the Beat generation, up to postmodernism. Blazer's clever and highly-informed pairing of poets with critics (Rich-Bloom; Ashbery-de Man; Graham-Blanchot; Watten-Lacan) then sheds new light on the development of late twentieth-century poetry and its relation to the ongoing debate surrounding the death of the subject.

Not least among the book's qualities is the clarity with which it traces the radical transformation in American poetry from the use of death as an absolute limit, as a defining boundary, the engagement with which constitutes the romantic subject, to the use of death as a principle within language, whereby language becomes the constitutive factor of the self in the postmodern subject.

Blazer distinguishes each of the four poets in his study in terms of what he sees as their primary mode of interaction with the linguistic constitution of subjectivity that increasingly displaces the romantic trope of death: Rich's work is governed by anxiety, Ashbery's by irony, Graham's by anguish, and Watten's by obsession. Given the semantic density of the terms anxiety, irony, anguish, and obsession, it comes as somewhat of a surprise that so much emphasis is placed on them. Notwithstanding this potential for ambiguity underlying his key terms, Blazer's evaluation of each poet is engaging. Rich is seen as a romantic who uses poetry to approach the void, uses language-centered theories to name her anxiety, and then writes herself out of that state by circumscribing its affect through her identity politics. While Ashbery also tends toward a romantic approach of language and subjectivity, he uses poetry to ironize the void, to transcend it in abstract expressionism. Graham confronts death as would the romantic but then annihilates the void by hollowing out "the transcendent metaphysics garnered from looking death in the eye" (17).

By contrast, Watten, the language poet and scholar who works fully within a postmodern framework, best illustrates for Blazer the highest awareness of poetry's contemporary possibility, that is the obsession with the fact that poets are alienated, are othered, by their own source of creativity: language itself.

Watten obsessively verifies that the void is language itself and subjectivity is coextensive with it. He evacuates himself of being and in so doing makes the issue of both creative anxiety and projection of the self, which Blazer highlights in the other poets, moot. Watten's subject is a destitute one that desires no object other than non-symbolic language itself and in his work all things are subsumed into this language. In this way, the poet becomes a perpetual-motion machine of forms without content: a machine of motion itself.

The book's title pays homage to Watten and reflects the considerable function he plays in Blazer's reading of the contemporary poetic subject. The line "I am otherwise," is taken from Watten's book-length poem *Progress*, a resistant, paradoxically inchoate thread of short stanzas that still manage to speak of Watten's self and its destitution. Watten's work is presented in fertile conversation with Lacan's subversion of the subject within language. In the final analysis, Blazer sees the Rich-Bloom, the Ashberry-de Man, and the Graham-Blanchot dialogues as less successful because, unlike the Watten and Lacan pairing, they do not illustrate the trauma that lies at the core of their practices. If, as Blazer contends, trauma functions as the theoretical bridge back to a self, however "emptied and othered at the core"—and if Watten and Lacan are best-equipped to take us over that bridge—a sustained discussion of trauma, or even a brief presentation of the logic of trauma, would have been welcome in his study.

Blazer argues that, unlike the Romantic poets, contemporary language poets no longer invest in the paramount concerns of life and death but rather in language as the subject's condition of possibility, which is fundamentally one of destitution. The book's far-reaching thesis is that, paradoxically, the Romantic confrontation with death returns today through this post-modern experience of alienation, this hollowing-out of and through language. If the (romantic) subject was defined through a confrontation with death, the (postmodern) subject is defined through a confrontation with language. At the same time, both subjects are haunted by death because language is now seen as emptied out. The corollary of this confrontation with death as language is the return of the subject or more precisely what Blazer refers to as the psyche: that which experiences the emptying out of itself.

Blazer strikes a fine balance between erudition and bright linguistic playfulness in his treatment of these four prominent American poets. Besides small details (such as the inclusion of Walt Whitman's references in the bibliography), one only wishes that room had been allocated in the study to a discussion of the place French and German Romantics occupy in this question of the paradigmatic development of the subject. Besides the fact that three of the four critics chosen are French, Arthur Rimbaud's famous "je est un autre" calls out to be read again in the context of Blazer's analysis. As for the German Romantics, one could argue that they, rather than postmodern poets, inaugurated the assimilation of critical linguistic theory to literature. Nonetheless, the book moves

remarkably smoothly in its analysis of the relationship between romantic and postmodern poetry, and of their defining confrontations with death. Blazer also offers innovative research into the fundamental relationship that exists between contemporary language poetry and critical theory. It is likely that *I Am Otherwise* will facilitate productive and invigorating dialogues among practitioners in the fields of both poetry and criticism.

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Marcelline Block, ed. *Situating the Feminist Gaze and Spectatorship in Postwar Cinema*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008. lxii + 319 pp.

Although several decades have passed since Laura Mulvey first published her seminal essay on gender spectatorship and film titled “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), this text continues to be at the center of contemporary conversations on feminist and postfeminist film theory. *Situating the Feminist Gaze and Spectatorship in Postwar Cinema*, edited by Marcelline Block, with a preface by Jean-Michel Rabaté, is a heterogeneous collection of essays on international examples of cinema, ranging from Claire Denis to Alfred Hitchcock to Quentin Tarantino to Agnès Varda. A first glance at the list of films discussed in the three sections of the book does not immediately elucidate the common denominator linking an apparently diverse selection of themes and titles. Nonetheless, as Block clearly explains in the introduction, the contributors to this collection seek to elaborate models of a (trans) gendered gaze by almost universally interrogating Mulvey’s feminist stance on cinematic scopophilia, which identifies the male viewer as the active bearer of the look and the female (body) as the passive object of such a look. What emerges from this discussion is the need for contemporary feminist and postfeminist film theory to revisit the dynamics of voyeurism outlined by Mulvey’s analysis. In particular, the collection’s authors contend that de-centering and de-gendering the gaze theory may allow for a more fluid reading of different cinematic categories and genres which do not fall under the label of mainstream cinema, understood to be patriarchal. For this reason, multiple theoretical approaches (psychoanalysis, cultural studies, queer theory, structuralism, feminism, post-feminism) are explored and applied to the reading of individual films even though, for brevity’s sake, only a few can be mentioned here.

In the first section of the book, “De-Gendering the Gaze,” the authors, Lisa DeTora, Rachel Ritterbusch, M. Hunter Vaughan, Ian Scott Todd, and Noëlle

Rouxel-Cubberly examine instances of women's reappropriation of the gaze via a questioning of Mulvey's binary subject/object categorization. DeTora, who opens the section, identifies the monstrous feminine, monstrous maternities, and the transformation of females into males in *Jurassic Park* as a subversion of Hollywood's filmic narratives which promote aesthetics of pleasure rooted in fixed gendered relations. The de-fetishisation of the female body is also central to Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, as discussed by Vaughan, who underscores the limitations of a Mulveyan analysis in a film which de-eroticizes female nudity and objectifies the male gaze of the protagonist.

A similar theoretical approach is also applied to the films analyzed in the second section of the book, titled "Theorizing Terror." Here, Monica Soare and Chuck Robinson identify women as agents of resistance to an episteme linking violence and gender in two film subgenres, peril thrillers and horror films, where women defy the viewer's expectations and, again, challenge gendered conventions of what spurs visual pleasure.

Section III, "Postfeminist Interventions" is particularly effective in its attempt to articulate a cultural and political discourse on female aesthetics through examples of relatively mainstream American cinema. Amy Woodworth and Jeremi Szaniawski both define postfeminism as re-embracing traditional canons of femininity such as beauty and youth. Their treatment of films by Sofia Coppola and Tarantino, respectively, illustrates the application of postfeminist language and imagery. In Tarantino's film *Death Proof*, specifically, a transgressive type of visual narrative (e.g. a dismembered female body) is intentionally developed to subvert roles and expectations.

Finally, in section IV, "Re-Inscribing the Female Subject in History," Georgiana M.M. Colville, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Elizabeth Gruber, Izabela Kalinowska, and Sharon Lubkemann Allen examine how the female body becomes an active subject in the process of writing history. This last section is the least directly connected to Mulvey's theory of the gaze. Colville (deliberately?) bypasses Mulvey's model entirely and discusses the process of creation and destruction in Marguerite Duras's films. Applying a multiplicity of analytical approaches, from psychoanalysis to deconstruction, Colville uses Duras's cinematography to explore "the relationship between the feminine, the sexual and the sociopolitical" (199). While the article provides valuable insight into Duras's *oeuvre*, ultimately it falls short of addressing the main theme announced by the section title. Conversely, both woman and history are central to Flitterman-Lewis's discussion of Varda. Through the analysis of Varda's installation to be displayed in the Pantheon in Paris in honor of the Righteous of France during World War II, Flitterman-Lewis highlights Varda's challenge to what is literally and figuratively a stronghold of patriarchy. Varda's female repossession of history and her transgression of gendered historical and cultural codes are echoed in the last article. Using structuralism as her principal tool of investigation,

Lubkemann Allen defines Chantal Akerman's transgressive cinema as "crossing geo-cultural borders and challenging cinematic boundaries" (255). The article is a particularly fitting conclusion to the book as it reconnects with the original discussion of Mulvey's theory of a gendered gaze. Lubkemann Allen argues that Akerman's cinema defies what can traditionally be considered pleasurable in the viewing process, citing her most famous film to date, *Jeanne Dielman*, in which the spectator is literally forced to watch a woman's daily routine in (nearly) real time.

Ultimately, this book represents a fresh and innovating addition to existing theories and methods of critical and aesthetical inquiry into women and cinema. The variety of theoretical models used by the contributors in this volume suggests that the feminist gaze today can and should be revisited from a de-centered, de-hierarchized position. Perhaps, as some of the authors imply, a Deleuzian perspective which allows for multiple horizontal readings rather than a vertical, dual interpretive paradigm would be a more appropriate mode of investigation. By advocating a non-monolithic approach to feminist and postfeminist cinema, the book successfully ties together multiple points of view and effectively rewrites the discourse on the gaze using a new language without rejecting the old.

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