

*GYÖRGY M. VAJDA and JANOS RIESZ, eds. *The Future of Literary Scholarship/Die Zukunft der Literaturwissenschaft/L'Avenir des sciences littéraires*. Frankfurt/Bern/New York: Peter Lang Verlag 1986. Pp. 140. SF27.00

This volume, slim in size but rich in seminal suggestions, consists of ten contributions by prominent comparative literature scholars from eight countries who participated in the inauguration of the comparative literature curriculum at the University of Bayreuth on February 15 and 16, 1985. Janos Riesz, who has succeeded in making Bayreuth the imaginative and focused leader among the newer comparative literature programs in West Germany, summarizes the principal thought of each panelist in a brief introduction. György Vajda, the engaging father figure of European Comparative Literature for the last quarter of a century and past President of ICLA, looks into the crystal ball of literary scholarship under the constellation of the productive tension between synchronics and diachronics, quality and quantity, analysis and synthesis ('Über die Zukunft der Literaturwissenschaft'). He shows that Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism, which applied de Saussure's synchronic view of language to diachronic phenomena, have been elaborated by Durišin and Even-Zohar in comparative literature theory. He follows Juri Lotman's axiological model of literature within culture: the top represents the highest, the bottom the lowest values, and the middle is neutral. Although Ingarden's hierarchy of four layers of analysis is conceded to be a bit 'historical' it is accepted along with his early recognition of the reader as the co-creator of the total work. The structuralist distinction between signifier and signified, exemplified for instance by Barthes' analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, will, says Vajda, remain a lasting component of literary analysis though some of the structuralist gamesmanship will prove ephemeral. The same goes for the six basic elements of communication theory: Sender, Message, Context, Code, Contact, and Receiver or, in Siegfried Schmidt's materialistic parlance: production, mediation, reception, and processing, with varying shifts of emphasis such as that of the Constance School on the receiver. Vajda sees well that all tradition in literary research also has a future, that our methodology is accumulative,

not substitutive. He asserts that literature, via the motion picture, comic books, cartoons, radio, television, and video presently reaches a wider audience than ever. One wonders, however, who is getting the better of the adjustment process. At any rate, Vajda's view of the future of comparative literature is optimistic.

Eva Kushner's 'La Pluridisciplinarité en études littéraires' takes us on a breathtaking tour of the interfaces of the study of literature with research in the sciences and social sciences. She recommends, in place of an interdisciplinarity often invoked but seldom authentic, a pluridisciplinarity that explores the points of contact between literary and other 'practices,' for one cannot *sensu strictu* speak of 'disciplines' any longer, and I agree. She concludes her fundamental exploration with the salutary thought far too often missing in our theoretical debates: 'Souhaitons qu'à travers tout cela (la science de la littérature) n'oublie pas la présence vivante des œuvres, sans lesquelles la plus réussie des pluridisciplinarités perdrait son sens' (p. 39). Amen. But are we really a 'science'?

Jean Weisgerber's 'A Blueprint for Comparatists' is, as usual with him, a model of intelligent good sense attentive to the real beef in our pluralistic dishes but impervious to the multitudinous fashions dominating the intellectual box office. At a time when literary critics have delusions of grandeur about the creative portion of our calling it is refreshing to have this very distinguished scholar and, by the way, fine stylist display realistic modesty about our function as 'recorders' (I would say: 'detectors') rather than makers of meaning. He, like Eva Kushner, adopts a non-doctrinaire, multidisciplinary, polysystematic stance, and, like György Vajda, affirms that no approach is ever obsolete if it fits the object: 'Greek science is definitely passé. Aristotle's poetics is not' (p. 43), and 'any true comparatist is born and bred a pluralist' (p. 43). But pluralism does not have to end in anarchy: 'Pluralism is made necessary by facts while monism is an aim to achieve'; it 'may be out of reach but this is no argument for giving up the quest' (p. 44). He wisely wonders whether we might not be expecting too much homogeneity from Jaus's 'horizon of expectations,' pushes the international dictionary of literary terms, proposes that structural coherence and inclusiveness of literary works serve as bases for comparative evaluation, and that teamwork is instrumental in achieving our goals.

Miklós Szabolcsi manages the difficult feat of writing a wholly abstract paper (there is not a single mention of any primary author or work in it) on 'Some Problems of Modern Literary Historiography' while maintaining throughout his vigorous personal touch. He passes

in review various options: histories of literary realities, values, structures, geneses, receptions, authors, institutions, groups (a basic sociological unit whose literary equivalent: *cénacle*, *chappelle*, *Kreis*, *Gruppe*, needs to be explored), currents, movements, schools, programs. He acknowledges the productive influence of historiographic approaches by Pirenne, Toynebee, and the *Annales* school (Marc Bloch, Braudel, Mandrou, Le Goff, Le Roi Ladurie) as well as the impact of cultural anthropology on literary historiography from Auerbach and Frye to Lukács and Bakhtin. He is well aware of the precarious balance between an approach stressing collective consciousness and the individuality of the literary work.

Among the most helpful contributions to this volume is Daniel-Henri Pageaux's 'Pour un nouveau Programme d'études en littérature comparée: Les Relations interlittéraires et interculturelles.' It is full of sensible, undogmatic comments on the excessive scientific pretensions of literary scholarship; on the difference between Lévy-Strauss' 'se déprendre' and an illusory objectivity; on the desirability of a 'scienza nuova' free of national bias, scientism, 'parisianism,' modernism, and theoretical impatience, more akin to the comparative history of religions, mythologies, ideas, societies, and signs (see the discussion between Fumaroli and Genette in the *Débat* of March 1984); on the justifiability of studying literature as an esthetic experience as well as a socialization process; and on the need for openness toward more cultural than literary angles. He wisely observes that reception study will not be a major factor in comparative literature scholarship unless it branches out from intraliterary to broader cultural factors affecting reader reactions, and views with favor the complementarity of literature; 'Toute culture ... se définit en s'opposant aussi à l'Autre' (p. 68). He extends this to many other facets: colonial vs. indigenous literature (Africa, Asia, Latin America), oral and written, spatial (one culture vs. another one; spatial realignments like the Mediterranean cultural orbit, to which one could add the Atlantic and Pacific rims), and temporal alternation vs. the notion of 'longue durée' formed by Braudel and developed by Genette, Guillén, and others. Pageaux's move away from highly dialectic, theoretical confrontations to balanced practicality echoes analogous motion in the preceding essays by Kushner and Szabolcsi. They are all the more welcome since they result from different approaches. The price paid for this pluralism is a certain indeterminateness that marks a number of the essays in this book.

This is certainly not a criticism that can be leveled against the author of the next essay, Itamar Even-Zohar. His five-page message with the excessively ambitious title: 'The Quest for Laws and its Implications

for the Future of the Science of Literature' is so apodictic that the renowned co-inventor of the polysystem model is likely to be much less successful than Pageaux with readers that want to be persuaded, not told. He elevates provocative hypotheses into self-assured truths, perpetuates the one-sided view that the Romantic Age is synonymous with irrational ideologies (in substance? in process? [p. 76]), asserts that scholars dealing with literature who offer generalizing conclusions 'while rejecting the idea of laws ... fabricate ones that are offered by them as absolute and irrefutable truths' (how about limited, empiric generalizations in historical scholarship? [p. 76]), and claims that 'literature as an institution does not behave differently from any other socially established institution' (p. 78). The hyperbolic style detracts, unfortunately, from the perfectly justified observation that 'the time is ripe for partial conclusion-taking in a variety of fields' (p. 78) or that the evolution of science has 'made it possible to reconcile the idea of regularity with that of uncertainty and unpredictability' (p. 77), thus effecting a significant rapprochement between science and literature.

Richard Björnson also has vast aspirations but handles them very differently. 'Literatur und menschliche Welt-Erkenntnis' proposes the application of the concept of a 'cognitive map,' conceived in 1948 by the American psychologist, Edward C. Tolman, to the genesis of literary works as well as to the rehabilitation of referentiality between the literary text and the objective world, a dimension scuttled by the advocates of intertextuality. The idea is the registration and integration by each individual of the world of experience into an internal map providing long-range orientation. Specifically, cognitive mapping can illuminate the process of literary creation, the relationship between literary texts and the physical world, the act of reading, and elements entering into literary criticism. Unlike most other essays in this book Björnson not only provides ample scholarly documentation but works seriously with illustrative texts: Gabriel García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad* permeated by his reading of Faulkner in the early 1950s, Dostoevski's change of direction in writing *The Demons*, two African novels of the 1950s: Jean-Marie Carret's *Kellam, fils d'Afrique* and *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba* by Mongo Beti, both domiciled in the Cameroons, and Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*.

William Whallon's 'The Future of Literary Scholarship in Greek Tragedy' bears a deceptively formidable title, but it 'covers' the subject in little more than two pages: it is a 'happening' whose flavor had to be experienced at the conference to be savored.

Dionyz Đurišin, the foremost theoretician of Comparative Literature in the Socialist countries, is the author of a historical survey of theories

of literary intercultural relationships entitled 'Aspects ontologiques du processus interlittéraire.' It touches on the domains of genesis and contacts, typology and structure, the interliterary process and 'communities,' and world literature. It contains few surprises, hardly any textual examples, is perhaps somewhat too condescending toward past efforts, and has a very modest documentation entirely limited to Eastern Europe. There is a tendency toward rather pale generalizing und memorable conclusions. From a scholar of such distinction one would have welcomed a more profiled kind of analysis/synthesis.

When it comes to the last item in the book, which is not a study at all but a letter — a real letter — from the President of the German Society for General and Comparative Literature, Jürgen von Stackelberg, to one of the editors, György Vajda, the reviewer will cast all learned convention to the wind and will confess that he was enchanted by the spontaneity, the directness and the personal stamp of this epistle, which contrasts refreshingly with the pretentious lingo that seems to have become the badge of the most visible scholarly Establishment. Stackelberg, 'Romanist' in Göttingen, throws all formality aside and goes to the heart of the problem of comparatism in Germany: the entrenched protectionism of 'Nationalphilologen' who, though a 'scholarly anachronism' (p. 117), resist sharing, formalizing, and organizing their comparatist activities, who consider integration tantamount to dissolution. He confesses that he feels perfectly at home in comparative practice but can't stand our theoretical discourses. He quotes from the wonderful justification of historical perspectivism in Erich Auerbach's introduction to his book, *Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Späntike und im Mittelalter* and echoes Auerbach's observation that it is all too easy to make fun of the excrescences of nineteenth-century positivism but that it is equally absurd to deny the links between life and work, between author and text. He upholds Auerbach's affirmation that abstract categories can be grasped only as historical phenomena, that to get to the 'Ding an sich' we have to use approximations which consist of what the text meant to its contemporaries, to successive generations, and to ourselves; that the most productive lesson to be learned from Marx is to test abstractions against past record (never mind his predictions); that production and reception aesthetics, Marx and Jass, ought to be integrated; that Africa and Latin America, just because they have amalgamated foreign and indigenous influences, are the best immediate bet for balancing out Eurocentrism; that German scholars are in danger of being paralyzed by inhibitions about the authenticity of literary history and would do well to pick up the 'can do' and 'are doing' stance of their French colleagues;

that there is not enough concern these days in scholarship about 'what and too much about 'how'; and that we need to cultivate comparative studies on basic human phenomena in literature: love, pity, cruelty, joy (see Lucien Febvre). All this is so eminently sane that it may strike some as trivial: but sanity is at a premium in today's literary scholarship, it sells neither books nor their authors. Of the many dividends that accrue to us comparatists is the realization that much of our scholarly stance and our codes are culturally (and also strategically) determined. Anglicists, Germanists, Romanists, Slavists, Africanists need each other as correctives, and we need more Stackelbergs to tell us so. (HENRY H.H. REMAK, INDIANA UNIVERSITY)

*JAMES BOYD WHITE. *When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character, and Community*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1985. Pp. xvi + 378. \$12.50

When Words Lose Their Meaning is a study of the impermanence of semantic contexts. It deals with the periodic failure of language to provide the range of expression appropriate to its speakers' exigencies. It observes that phraseologies and phraseological distinctions tend in time to lose their edges and must be either discarded or reshaped; the study shows that discarding is not practicable because of its cost to a language, that reshaping must be a creative process of reshaping through literary reconstitution, and that the reshaping process involves a community of writer and reader that both is fashioned by and fashions the culture that itself shapes and reshapes the language. James Boyd White interprets and explicates this dynamically literary relationship of writer, reader, and culture as a new way of reading.

The book's main title, oddly, proves to be itself doubly symptomatic of the semantic problem it treats. If the title attracts the readers of those books, currently increasing in number, on the abuse and corruption of the English language — for example, *Strictly Speaking*, *A Civil Tongue*, *Paradigms Lost*, and *Less Than Words Can Say* — such readers will be disappointed: the book is not a humorous summary of rampant imprecision in English-language usage. Neither is it, as its title may otherwise indicate, an account of absolute semantic loss: the book has to do with words and phrases and larger semantic units that lose their meanings [emphasize the plural], not with the failure of words, and consequently the need of something other than words, as a vehicle

of meaning. The title, then, does not mean what it would at first appear to mean to either of two different kinds of reader, (1) the reader who seeks another entertaining lesson in civil grammar or (2) the semanticist to whom the grammatical number of *'Meaning'* is not a matter of idiomatic indifference. The book's true title is its subtitle.

Neither a civil grammarian nor a structuralist, semioticist, or 'post-modernist,' James Boyd White takes a position well outside the neighborhoods of Edwin Newman, John Simon, and Richard Mitchell in the one case and of Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Pierre Guiraud in the other. Leo Strauss is mentioned, but not Lévi-Strauss. Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Derrida, Tzvetan Todorov *et alii similes* are not mentioned.

White is a comparativist literary critic who observes the artistry of narrative that is common to literature and law, in both of which disciplines, incidentally, he holds professorships. He begins his study with language that fails its speakers in the Homeric epics, Thucydides' history, and Plato's *Gorgias* and concludes it with constructions of the U.S. constitution.

His text opens with examples from classical literature of the artistic presentations of breakdowns in a culture whose language fails to retain meaning for the factors that change within it. The text moves on to examples from modern literature of artistic presentations of both the breakdown in a language and the reconstitution of the language through the lessons of reading: writers like Swift and Johnson write essays that, by the very ways in which they (the essays) expose the impasses to which a language has brought itself, offer readers the means to surmount and transcend those impasses. The text turns finally to literature as politics (Edmund Burke's reflective presentation of his belief that, culturally, it is better to reconstitute an existing constitution than to eliminate an existing government) and to literature as law (the legal language of the U.S. constitution as artistic narrative which is implicit with its own means of construction).

Among the constructions of the U.S. constitution singled out for special consideration is the 1819 *McCulloch vs. Maryland* decision, which U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese III evoked as an example of the coincidence of 'original intention' and strict construction (see, for example, *Time* [Aug. 11, 1986] pp. 55-6). White is edifying with his probing literary analysis, whereas Meese appears to be caught up in something akin to the intentional fallacy.

Despite its close to irritating length and its strain on one's patience, White's scrutiny of the cultural basis of literature and of the literary character of law is very rewarding and amounts to a triumph of

methodology in comparative literature. It is a timely and effectual study in the nurture of language through the writing and reading of literature and through the formulation and construction of legal documents.

White, moreover, wants the very book he has written, viz., *When Words Lose Their Meaning*, to reflect his subject (viz., reconstituting language) by itself reconstituting its author's subject: '[T]his book is meant to work out and exemplify a way of reading that is a way of being and acting in the world. ... The kind of reading I mean is not merely a method of interpretation or analysis but an active engagement with a book that is itself a form of the cultural and ethical activity that is our subject' (p. 284). His use here of the verb *to mean* may be a case in point. In the sentence just quoted 'meant,' without regard to tense and voice, is a shade different in denotation from 'mean,' and both differ in denotation from the word 'meaning' in the book's title: 'meant' means 'intended,' 'mean' means 'refer to,' and 'meaning' means 'denotation.' In dialogue with the writer the reader asks, 'What do we understand each other to mean? The community of writer and reader is then, in effect, turning to the culture and asking, 'What does *meaning* mean to mean at this time?'

White's narrative is generally true to its intention of giving the reader a lesson in the reconstitution of language. There are, though, at least two items, one specific and one general, about which the reader may be dubious.

The specific item is this: White quotes Jane Austen's Emma, '... [S]illy things do cease to be silly if they are done by sensible people in an impudent way,' and then asks, 'How can a "sensible" man act in an "impudent" way?' (p. 177). The question seems to belie White's considerable understanding of Austen. It is not Emma here, but Austen by way of Emma, who reminds us of the difference between a shameless way and a shameful way. A person can be shameless, that is, unbothered by a sense of shame or, literally, 'without shame,' because of her or his impeccability in a specific situation. To act shamelessly, however, is considered shameful because of general human imperfection. A sensible person (like Austen, but unlike her character Emma) is precisely the one who can appreciate impudence as justifiable on the grounds that one need not feel shame [experience pudency] where there is no reason for her or him to be ashamed. Austen has Emma say a profoundly right thing about one of the wrong people: the irony is exquisite if the reader is careful enough to appreciate it.

The general item is White's inconsistency in using sometimes the generic masculine and sometimes the cumbersome but insistently necessary he/she construction. White accommodates 'he or she' when

he writes about Jane Austen's fiction, but, even then, only initially: for example, '... [E]ven when he or she fully understands the spoiled and self-indulgent character of Emma's reverie, the reader may miss something' (p. 16), and then, 'The reader who knows Jane Austen well ... will not be like every other reader who knows her well, but he will be deeply different from what he would have been had he never read her at all' (p. 19); and, within a single paragraph (on p. 163), '... *Emma* in some respects works directly on the reader, involving him or her immediately in distortion and misconception. ... [Jane Austen] can be said to make out of her inherited materials a moral language of extraordinary range ... and to teach her reader how to make it *his* own so that *he* may use it in *his* own life ...' [reviewer's emphases].

The question asked rhetorically instead of as an introduction to inquiry and the initially used, then subsequently abandoned, he/she construction are false notes, particularly the latter, which does not displace the generic masculine in the sections on male writers and which, accordingly, does not thereby support the understandable and even laudable tokenism of adding one female writer to an otherwise all-male cast.

It may be that White's rhetorical question calls our attention to an ordinarily unheeded dimension of impudence in the context of sensibility and that his discriminate use of the he/she construction is meant to remind us that use of the generic masculine is now impudent in a culture that is depriving the generic masculine of its meaning and is calling for a generic feminine/masculine, however difficult it may be to answer that call. If so, his intimation of the need for reconstitution is not accompanied by even a tentative satisfaction of that need.

These notes are false, but they are not flaccid — like the wretchedly meaningless phrase 'in terms of,' which, unfortunately, White frequently resorts to — because even as breaches of intention they serve to identify the intention and therewith to contribute to a literary criticism concerned with and effectually explicative of subtleties and profundities of artistic communication that continue to elude both the practical grammarians and the abstrusely theoretical 'post-modernists,' structuralists, and semioticians. (ROY ARTHUR SWANSON, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE)

*EDGAR V. MCKNIGHT. *The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1985. Pp. 176. US\$8.95

This is a difficult book, and not primarily about the Bible: it is essentially a highly compressed guide to reader-response criticism from Russian Formalism on, with a few reflections on its possible application to the Bible. The author has produced studies of New Testament formalism and methodology; the present work clearly develops the formal critical interest in audience reception and the hermeneutic quest, how texts acquire significance.

A preface recounts the author's own pilgrimage, which he considers paradigmatic of the discipline of biblical studies, and the alternatives confronting its current practitioners. A naive allegorical understanding of the text was supplanted by historical and form-criticism; this ran aground of Güttingemann's *Offene Frage*, a powerful critique of historicism. biblical criticism can now either pretend nothing has happened, and continue to be historicist or fundamentalist; it can opt for a new reduction, such as linguistics or sociology; it can attempt a congeries of approaches, or seek a new haven in reader-orientated literary criticism. The latter is the subject of the book, whose thesis is that 'readers make sense' (p. 12), appropriate to their situation. It is rendered problematic, however, by the conflict between conventional and deconstructive criticism, that puts into question the notion of the subject as well as the text.

McKnight suggests that literary criticism differs from historical criticism in paying attention to style rather than content, universal truth as opposed to particular event (pp. 10-11). Later, he seems to identify literary with metaphorical reading (p. 93). Such characterisations have become commonplace in literary introductions to the Bible as a way of demarcating harmless territory or making inflated claims; and are out of place in a book of this sophistication. It is clear from subsequent chapters that it is the represented world in its particularity that is of interest to readers, and communicated through a work's rhetoric.

McKnight begins his critical survey with the Russian Formalists, whose attempt to account scientifically for all properties of the text led them to observe the audience's response to performance cues, genre and fashion. Mukařowski and Vodička, from the Czech Structuralist tradition, contributed a broader social and individual perspective; Ingarden, from a phenomenological point of view, stratifies the literary experience, and introduces the crucial concept of the indeterminacy of the represented world of the text; Lotman is both sensitive to the informational surplus of the artistic work, as generative of new mean-

ings, and fosters some valuable distinctions, such as those between reader and researcher, sensual and intellectual reading.

McKnight's next chapter examines European, primarily French and German, contributions to narratology and reader-response theory, from the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes established by Propp and Lévi-Strauss to the logical squares of Greimas and Barthes' layering of five interlinked codes (McKnight's analysis is based primarily on *S/Z*) and his refusal of any final closure. In contrast to this, the use of generative grammar as a universal instrument of analysis gave way to attempts to correlate text-structure and world-structure (Janos Petőfi) and separate text-reception and text-processing (G. Wienold): the reproduction of the text and the generation of new texts based on interpretation and criticism of it. The chapter concludes with a study of the Constance school: Jaus's attempted reconstitution of literary history as a history of aesthetics; Iser's attention to the response elicited by the text and the role of 'gaps' and 'blanks' in inviting the reader's reconstructive effort. This perception has recently been applied, with resounding success, to the Bible in Meir Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Indiana U.P. 1985). One of the strange features of McKnight's book is its lack of reference as to how reader-response theory has influenced actual biblical-critical practice. The gaps, in Iser's view, emanate from a negativity that is the work's frame; in engaging with that negativity, filling its empty spaces, the reader transcends the world of the text.

The fourth chapter takes us to the American literary landscape, to deconstruction and the reaction to it, and to the rhetorical and psychoanalytic criticism of Wayne Booth and Norman Holland. Deconstruction grants the reader-critic power to expose the illusions on which the literary enterprise is based, while putting into question the subject that reads; one consequence of its decentering is free play, another a recognition of the irreducible authority of language. E.D. Hirsch's defence of valid readings, based on the author's willed intentions, succumbs to a growing emphasis on the reader's interpretation. Holland examines the stages of expectation, defence, and fantasy in influencing students' readings; Wayne Booth traces the trajectory from real to implied readings. Extraordinary in this chapter devoted to reader-response theory are the omissions of Riffaterre and Harold Bloom. The last chapter turns to the function of literature, beginning with the perennial debate between aesthetics and utility, and the New Critical thesis that literature communicates a species of knowledge. A survey of various modern views (Poulet, Fish, Iser, Hartman, Culler and others) suggests a spectrum from self-transcendence to an infinite attempt to repair the breaches made by language with language, 'to word

a wound words have made' (Hartman). For Fish, interpretation negates the kinetic value of literature; his careful retracing of the reader's progress recalls but also covers over the original journey. Interpretation, McKnight concludes, is never a final synthesis: the interpretation is true for a particular universe of humankind. A 'transhistorical and transhuman expression of truth', according to McKnight, could not touch us (p. 131). Here he seems to me to go astray. For the Bible surely claims precisely to communicate transhistorical and transhuman truth; that is the source of its authority. Moreover, all literature is transhistorical and transhuman. I read Aranda dream-songs with a sense of common humanity and transcendent reality despite the immense cultural estrangement. In discussing validation, McKnight states that 'An interpretation is valid when a group of readers and interpreters agree that it is valid' (p. 132). This sounds remarkably like Skinner's proposition that truth is what the majority of people affirm to be true. Hence McKnight cites Augustine's view that any interpretation, even a mistaken one, that leads us to the love of God is valid.

This is a difficult book to review: it renders accessible to biblical scholars a great quantity of critical literature with which they may not otherwise be familiar; nevertheless, it is frequently muddled, repetitive, and banal. A statement such as 'The thesis of this book is that readers make sense,' repeated in the conclusion, is surely not worth making. Further, it suffers from a dissociation from actual biblical-critical practice, despite the fact that many of the critics on whom McKnight comments or inexplicably ignores have written on biblical themes (e.g. Barthes, Derrida, Bloom, Hartman). The book could have profited immeasurably from these examples. Finally, it seems to me to have been oddly selective and patchy in its readings. (FRANCIS LANDY, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA)

*PIERRE V. ZIMA. *Manuel de sociocritique*. Collection 'Connaissance des Langues.' Paris: Picard 1985. Pp. 252. FF220.00

Ce nouvel ouvrage d'un auteur prolifique et d'un rénovateur de la sociologie de la création littéraire qui a pu mettre en avant la possibilité et la nécessité d'une 'sociologie du texte' ne manque pas de rendre compte de trois au moins de ses précédents travaux. *Textsoziologie: Eine kritische Einführung* (Stuttgart: Metzler 1980), *L'Ambivalence romanesque: Proust, Kafka, Musil* (Paris: Sycomore 1980), *L'Indifférence romanesque:*

Sartre, *Moravia, Camus* (Paris: Sycomore 1982), mais son titre n'est pas pertinent. On aurait pu peut-être appeler son livre actuel une *nouvelle* sociocritique, mais encore sous réserve. Son auteur se passe des recherches de Claude Duchet et d'Edmond Cros, les deux initiateurs d'une étude marxiste non-léniniste du texte littéraire, attentive aux structures formelles, qu'ils avaient nommée sociocritique. Zima ignore également les travaux canadiens, nombreux, qui répondent à une définition bien plus large de la recherche sociocritique, 'toute critique littéraire centrée sur les aspects sociaux d'un texte en général ...' – comme nous l'avons formulé dans le *Dictionnaire historique, thématique et technique des littératures: Littératures, française et étrangères, anciennes et modernes* ([Paris: Larousse 1985-6] T. II, p. 1537). Il ignore jusqu'à leurs noms Régine Robin, Marc Angenot, Darko Suvin, M. Gomez-Moriana, C. Thomson, P. Gobin, Robert Major, Gilles Marcotte, le regretté André Belleau, et j'en passe. Zima ne prend pas note non plus des efforts parallèles au sien qui, au cours des années quatre-vingts, tendent à concilier les acquis de la sémiotique avec des intérêts sociologiques (H. Mitterand, J.-J. Thomas).

Zima se réclame de l'œuvre de Theodor Adorno, du cercle bakhtinien, dont il résume certains travaux, comme il le fait avec plusieurs textes de Walter Benjamin, György Lukács, Lucien Goldmann, Jan Mukařovský, Felix Vodička, Jacques Leenhardt, Hans-Robert Jauss et Joseph Jurt. Mais il le fait d'une plume critique, et seulement dans la mesure où ils servent sa *théorie personnelle*. Le terme 'manuel' dans le titre de son livre ne désigne donc nullement une synthèse pédagogique, ni même une mise au point en sociologie contemporaine de la littérature.

Zima lui-même nous guide vers une différente appellation de son entreprise: le terme 'sociolinguistique' revient sous sa plume avec insistance. S'agirait-il donc d'une sociolinguistique *textuelle*? Ce qui nous fait hésiter pour adopter une telle appellation c'est encore le manque de références aux noms des maîtres connus: Labov, Halliday, R. LaFont, Gardin, Marcellesi, Mackaye, etc.

Tout compte fait, le titre qui situerait proprement son texte serait 'Sociosémantique du texte littéraire.' Le *genre* dont le code assure la lisibilité est peut-être 'traité' ou plus certainement 'essai.' Nous en sommes venu à cette proposition, car nous avons dû identifier la source intellectuelle *principale* de l'auteur: la sémantique textuelle de A.J. Greimas, dont il accentue et amplifie les virtualités sociales. Ce ne sont pas les chapitres trop courts, qui suivant l'impératif parisien des années quatre-vingts, ébauchent une conciliation avec la critique psychanalytique d'une part, la sociologie de la lecture d'autre part qui changent à cette ascendance essentielle.

L'avantage de l'essai de Zima est qu'il s'efforce d'établir le rapport entre le discours littéraire, analysé selon des critères narratologiques consistants et la situation sociolinguistique de leur genèse.

Grâce à ce travail on tient la maille manquante dans la chaîne 'œuvre littéraire – société': la *langue*, telle qu'elle se manifeste dans des situations spatio-temporellement et socialement différenciées, sous forme de *sociolectes*. Les idéologies et les intérêts économiques, c'est-à-dire l'emprise du pouvoir et de l'argent sur l'art littéraire, passent par le langage: '*Le sociolecte est le lien unissant le roman et ses structures à la situation sociolinguistique*' – écrit Zima dans la phrase-clé de son travail (p. 147). Le discours littéraire consigne même l'ambivalence – nous dirions: la viscosité sémique – des sociolectes et la réaction d'indifférence qui s'en suit. Cette dialectique du discours littéraire – dans un cas optimal – peut finir par 'exprimer la nature muette' selon l'exquise formule du poète Francis Ponge (cité par Zima, p. 145).

La limitation de l'orientation de Zima vient de la séparation qu'il opère entre 'sociologie du texte' (et il entend par 'texte' les morceaux concrets, produits du travail d'écriture littéraire) et 'sociologie de la communication littéraire.' Notre culture est celle des masses en pleine révolution scientifique et technologique. Est décisive la dépendance de tout écrit, qu'il soit 'hautement' littéraire, des moyens, modes et conditions matériels de communication. Ceci risque de réduire la portée du travail de Zima à l'étude de la littérature d'avant-garde du *passé récent*. L'impureté historique que Pierre Zima – dans la foulée de Theodor Adorno – semble traquer ne 'souille' pas seulement la parole, le discours social et littéraire. Les cheneaux de diffusion par exemple sont les voies privilégiées de filtrage, de censure et de promotion, d'une dynamique, pratique, culturelle dans le sens le plus large, mental et matériel du terme.

De notre part, nous avons tenté d'opposer à toute orientation unilatéralement sémantique des recherches d'un fondement épistémologique différent (Cf. entre autres récemment: *Forme, socialité et processus d'information*... [Lille-Paris (SBS): 1982-4], ainsi que 'Mémoires d'outre-écriture,' *Communication et Langues* 69 «1986» pp. 39-55) et nous persistons à proposer une approche socio-culturelle de la littérature qui tienne compte d'une théorie de la communication écrite liée à celle de l'information, articulée sur une théorie historique de la culture, et qui reconnaisse, en outre, l'indéfectible nécessité d'une opération pour une ontologie de l'être social, bien élaborée.

Cela dit, les mérites du *Manuel de sociocritique* de Pierre Zima sont incontestables: on n'explique jamais assez aux sociologues l'inséparabi-

lié des valeurs esthétiques, des structures narratives et de la socialité du texte, ni aux littéraires que la probité critique exige la prise en considération de la socialité profonde des *textes* mêmes. Tout au plus aurions nous souhaité que ce livre fût écrit avec moins de hâte. Sa consistance intellectuelle aurait mérité un travail d'écriture que Pierre Zima n'a pas accompli. (STEPHANE SARKANY, CARLETON UNIVERSITY)

*CHRISTOPHER NORRIS. *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy*. New York: Methuen 1984. Pp. 201. \$11.95

The danger to a powerful new theory of interpretation is not that it will be rejected, but that it will be normalized through its entrance into institutional practice. Deconstruction has achieved a status within academia that allows those who were once disturbed by its practice to dismiss it as a tedious exercise in unveiling, one of those troublesome initiations graduate students must endure, and get over. Christopher Norris' book is an important counter to this tendency. It is in part an apology for deconstruction, an attempt to demonstrate that it develops from within the tradition we all already employ. It is also a useful and enlightening example of how the deconstructive practice can transform our readings of major philosophic writers.

Norris' announced purpose is to subject traditionally philosophical texts to 'that particular practice of textual close-reading which goes under the name of deconstruction' (p. 1). It is a 'revenge of literary theory' against philosophy that achieves its ends by taking philosophy literally, pushing the metaphors that necessarily underlie philosophy's claims of logic until logic and language, reason and rhetoric reveal their 'disjunct relationship'. At the same time, Norris wants to show that despite the oppositions between Anglo-American linguistic philosophy and deconstruction, there are 'points of contact' between the two enterprises. The opening chapters in particular take up these points of contact with chapters on 'ordinary language', Wittgenstein, and Austin.

The first chapter contains the most genial treatment of analytic philosophy. The most general point of contact arises from the realization that language is a central problem in any question of knowledge. This problem can be met in profoundly deluded ways, such as Austin's 'belief that the perennial problems of philosophy could be conjured away by meticulous attention to the unnoticed subtleties of everyday usage'

(p. 18). Ryle, by contrast, shares with Derrida, de Man, and Nietzsche a desire to demystify the blindnesses and paradoxes of language. Ryle is a 'deconstructor' in the sense that he presses 'the hidden assumptions' of language 'to a point where they visibly buckle under the strain of their own (hitherto unnoticed) ambiguities' (pp. 20-1). His scepticism about the 'metaphysical' origins of knowledge and about the possibility of gaining access to 'the self-present consciousness of thought' have, likewise, Derridean affinities. But Norris then turns deconstruction back on Ryle, on the metaphors of speech and writing he uses in an essay on Plato. This turn, departing from the common sense of Ryle's argument to focus on the letter of the text, is what characterizes Norris' plotting. Ryle's attempt to cling to his metaphor, which sees meaning inspired by the breath of speech (Norris' playing out of Derrida's insight), forces him to argue what Plato 'must be interpreted to mean' rather than what he says. Deconstruction turns metaphors into turn-coats.

A clearer example of the turn is in the ruthless chapter on Austin and his defender Searle. Norris notes that Austin's students had lamented the fact that their master's method, depending on his performative power, could not be fully captured in writing. Norris then ties this idea of performance to Austin's notion of performative speech-acts, 'illocutionary' acts that are both conventional and authentic. The problem lies in the metaphor of 'acting.' For Austin the value of a performative utterance lies in the sincerity of the speaker, but the metaphor he employs makes it impossible to tell whether the speaker, voicing an 'iterable' speech, is acting sincerely or merely acting. Were Austin's performances gifts of authentic genius and authority or staged shows intended to enhance his reputation among his students? When Derrida suggested that Austin's authority depends on fiction, Searle protested that Derrida's concern with marginal aspects of Austin's writing was perverse. But it is precisely on these margins, Norris points out, where philosophy depends on literature, 'ordinary language' on fiction, that deconstruction turns against intention. The effect, in the case of Austin, is to reveal the narcissism at the heart of Austin's philosophy.

More respectful chapters on Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard display a similar consequence of a reading that insists on the letter rather than the spirit of the text. Wittgenstein's 'language-games', which are intended to guarantee the intelligibility of language by acknowledging its conventionality, betray the limits of intelligibility in the profound arbitrariness of language. Once language is accepted to be a game, it becomes impossible to distinguish a social game from a private game,

social meanings from personal. Similarly, Kierkegaard's 'Fictions of Authority,' his perpetually shifting points of narrative perspective, seem to evade any charge that Kierkegaard has deluded himself by attempting to establish a fixed point of truth. At the same time, Norris argues, Kierkegaard insists that his readers read with 'good faith,' trusting in an ultimately reliable authority to his texts. But once the fictionality of authority has been established as a premise to reading particular texts, it becomes impossible to distinguish between the fictive and the genuine.

Norris is at his most interesting in the later chapters when the deconstructive turn is less a betrayal of those apparent allies than an attempt to find some point of agreement between deconstruction and the interests of contemporary Marxism. Walter Benjamin, particularly as interpreted by Terry Eagleton, provides the major example. He is a sort of rope-walker, avoiding the abstract scientism of Althusser without abandoning his critical sense. His approach to history is never totalizing; rather, 'Tradition for Benjamin can only be redeemed through moments of wholly unprecedented insight where the past takes on a transfigured significance *despite* and *against* the historical stream of events' (p. 111). The texts of history, produced always by the conquerors, must be subjected to a deconstructive analysis. But for Benjamin this is never an easy turn, for it taints what has been comforting in the past and casts suspicion on any program for the future. Norris refers to Benjamin's 'mixture of messianic craving and a melancholy knowledge of the oppression ... borne down by history' (p. 111). His 'commitment to Marxist-materialist themes' appears beside his 'brooding awareness of the sacrifice involved in yielding up tradition to the pressing demands of the moment' (p. 115). He is torn between his desire for a world in which 'aura' is possible and a 'preference for allegory over symbol,' between 'truth' (self-evident) and 'knowledge' (system). Benjamin's significance for Eagleton, and for Norris, is in his ability to 'disconcert more rigid or positivist conceptions of Marxist criticism' without falling into the 'political evasion promoted by the Yale deconstructors.'

With this discussion of Benjamin, a defensiveness enters the book that is not present in the slyly combative earlier chapters. Benjamin is not subjected to the deconstructive turn, but remains a still centre around which Eagleton, Jameson, Wittgenstein, the Yale critics and others contend. It is as if Norris begins to worry that the charge of irrelevance brought by the Marxists on the one hand and critics like Denis Donoghue on the other might discount the insights deconstruction can provide. Consequently, he is looking for a hero to stand between the

camp. This is even more apparent in a chapter focusing on Saul Kripke, a third term intended to defuse the tensions between the analytic philosophers and the deconstructors. As revolutionary as Kripke may be in philosophical circles, Norris' representation of his position reveals a striking retreat from the possibilities presented by deconstruction. Kripke attempts to reestablish the referential function of language, supposedly denying the arbitrary nature of language. He argues that in everyday pragmatic uses of language, powerful social conventions provide words with clear references that are not subject to the slippery pages a semiotic theory would see. Norris presents this as a challenge to the positions of both the Anglo-American philosophers and deconstruction, asking them both to reexamine their assumptions about how language might work. But Norris himself notes that Saussure had already acknowledged that communities fix the referential possibilities of language, although he then goes on to invert chronology to claim that 'Saussure has to make room for the basic Kripkean contention' (p. 160). As Norris represents it, Kripke's challenge has long since been a part of the semiotic enterprise.

Norris' unnecessary turning to Kripke accentuates what is the most problematic element of this book. Clearly there are currently debates among the various camps Norris has identified, but Norris himself remains clear of any direct engagement with them. Rather, he sets various authorities into action while he referees, looking for the happy compromise. He notes the 'paradox' at one point of the fact that 'linguistic scepticism can only elaborate its case by preserving intact, within its own conceptual structure, the very notions it seeks to discredit' (p. 161). The terminology of 'scepticism,' of 'discredit,' indeed of 'paradox' belongs to those wishing to preserve a world of creditable, straightforward language who are questioning Derrida and deconstruction. To be aware of the fact that all authority is constituted socially and is not metaphysically ordained is not necessarily to discredit it: that is what authority is. If Norris means that we are always willing to invest anew in figures of authority, he is certainly right, and I cannot imagine a way out of this 'paradox.' What disturbs me here is that at this late point in the book Norris is granting a wholesale, unquestioned authority to a raft of writers when the earlier parts of the book have shown him to be a subtle analyst of generally much better writers than Eagleton or Kripke.

If Norris is correct to see deconstruction as 'practice' – and his early readings demonstrate clearly how that practice might be enacted – then deconstruction is not 'against' authority or interpretation. It always works within existing forms of authority – whether political, aca-

demic, philosophical, or literary – as a resistance to an unquestioning acceptance of ‘authorities’ we may nevertheless follow. Consequently, Norris’ attempts to defend his practice against Eagleton or Gasché, or to find an alternative in Kripke seems an odd retreat from the premises and implications of deconstruction. The very act of defense raises deconstruction into Deconstruction, something easily absorbed by academic institutions, something easily, even justifiably, ignored. But this is how authority always returns, and why Norris’ practice ends too soon. Because philosophy tends toward paradox and ‘literature,’ the literary practice of deconstructive reading turns its betrayal into the source of new thought. Norris’ book should remind people of its possibilities. (DENNIS A. FOSTER, SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY)

*TORU MOI. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London and New York: Methuen 1985. Pp. 206. £11.95

This recent addition to the Methuen ‘New Accents’ series refers back specifically to several previous volumes (Catherine Belsey’s *Critical Practice* [1980], Christopher Norris’ *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* [1982] and Elizabeth Wright’s *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* [1984]) as well as to Terry Eagleton’s *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983). Toril Moi’s aim is to provide an overview of the background to feminist literary theory and criticism, while simultaneously attempting to add her own critique of current trends. This critique, like that of Eagleton and Belsey, is based on the assumption, which most would now share, that theory and criticism cannot be a-political or non-ideological. Specific objections to the approaches considered consist primarily of condemnation of the ideology they wittingly or unwittingly uphold, or of the naïveté shown by otherwise sophisticated critics who fail to be aware of their own biases.

Moi begins in her preface by stating her own ‘position,’ performing a gesture she elsewhere claims as typical of female critics (pp. 43-4). As a Norwegian teaching French at Oxford, she benefits from a certain ‘marginality’ (not to be confused with ‘objectivity’) in her discussion of Anglo-American and French feminist theory. In fact, her allegiance is nevertheless clearly to the British school of left-wing political thought for whom the ultimate sign of approval is usually the adjective ‘radical.’ North American and French readers may find her adoption of this ‘better’ point of view (as the place from which to judge

others) somewhat problematic. The inevitable paradox at the heart of this approach is that it lays the critic of other critics open to criticism on the same grounds that the latter are found wanting. In spite of this, Moi’s succinct summaries and judicious comments are on the whole very successful, and manage to go beyond the ‘reader’s digest’ effect of some such ‘handbook’-type works of useful vulgarisation.

The main feature of her presentation of major trends is the constant comparison between the American pragmatic approach and the French idealist one. American feminist critics have focussed on images of women in male literature, on lesser-known women writers, on the question of a ‘feminine’ style and sexism in language. French theorists, on the other hand, have been more influenced not only by Marx and Freud but by Derrida and Lacan. They have worked more at the intersection of theory and ‘creative’ writing. Their goal is the suppression of the binary opposition masculine/feminine, rather than access for women to realms previously dominated by men.

The study is divided into two main sections, dealing first with Anglo-American critics, then with major French ones. A recurring topic in the first part is the difficulty faced by some American feminist critics when dealing with modernist work by women. The first chapter, on Virginia Woolf, is a lucid discussion of why *A Room of One’s Own* is Woolf’s only work to receive approval, and even that is qualified by uneasiness at the humour and irony of the essay. Moi points out that the bantering tone is a strategy deployed by other women writers to good effect, from Jane Austen to Mary Ellmann’s *Thinking About Women* (1968). The latter’s project is termed ‘deconstructive’ in opposition to Kate Millet’s anger, which appears by comparison destructive (albeit constructively?). The modernist or deconstructive approach to writing is shown to be more revolutionary than a reactionary redeployment of traditional techniques based on patriarchal values, which are attacked but not abolished in much American criticism. The latter is still imbued with nineteenth-century positivist liberal humanism. Moi concludes that ‘The radically new impact of [American] feminist criticism is to be found not at the level of theory or methodology,’ but at the level of politics’ (p. 87). Yet it is as an impediment to political efficacy that she finally finds American theoretical practice lacking, because it tends to be ‘depoliticising.’

Simone de Beauvoir serves as a bridge between political Anglo-American feminist thought and its philosophical contemporary French counterpart. Moi admits that it is mainly in Scandinavia and Britain (her own home ground) that de Beauvoir’s concern to reconcile socialism and feminism has remained a central preoccupation. Her work has,

however, been more readily accessible to feminist critics outside France than that of more recent French theorists, whose 'uncompromising intellectualism' may prove 'exasperating!' (p. 96). Further obstacles to wider dissemination for writers such as Cixous and Irigaray are that they are not primarily literary critics and that their 'poetic' (and increasingly mystical) style does not translate convincingly into English (several subsequent quotations illustrate this phenomenon).

The chapters devoted to Cixous and Irigaray are preceded by a useful summary of Lacan's influence. While evidently admiring Cixous' utopian vision of a non-sexist society, and sympathetic to her attempts to write the 'physical *jouissance* of the female body' (p. 121), Moi is obviously embarrassed by Cixous' adamant preference for the poetic over the political, and her defiant wearing of elegant fur coats (unlike some American critics of Cixous she does not choose to focus on her high heels).

Irigaray's reinterpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis is also presented ambivalently. Although her originality and influence are acclaimed, she is found guilty of 'mimicry' of patriarchal stereotypes (e.g. woman's relationship to fluids). Moi repeats Shoshana Felman's questioning of the position adopted by Irigaray in her pronouncements on 'woman,' and finds her concept of 'le parler féminin' less than convincing (the translation 'womanspeak' certainly sounds derogatory).

These two major figures of French feminist theory are endorsed less whole-heartedly than a third, whose name is usually associated more automatically with semiotics and psychoanalysis than with feminism: Julia Kristeva. The latter's work is seen as flawed only by her abandonment of Maoism for an 'alarming fascination with the libertarian possibilities of American-style late capitalism' (p. 168). Kristeva is condemned because her work is ultimately 'unable to account for the relations between the subject and society,' and her theory is therefore 'politically unsatisfactory' (pp. 170-1). However, Moi somewhat grudgingly admits that 'Kristeva's politics should not be allowed to overshadow the positive aspects of her work' (p. 172).

This remark sums up the tone and the problems of Moi's book. The author wants to bring out the achievements of outstanding women theorists, yet finds herself constantly obliged to reject them on political grounds. Her analyses are always intelligent and provocative, but the 'better' approach which is desired is nebulous. She admits that 'it is ... an indictment of this book that its basic structure does not represent a more radical challenge to the current dominance of the Anglo-American and the French critical perspectives' (p. 93). Her book remains, nevertheless, probably the best overview of the essential questions

raised by feminist theory, and is bound to be required reading for any survey course. It can be profitably combined with Methuen's complementary anthology, *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism* (Gayle Greene and Coppélia Hahn, eds. [1985]). (VALERIE RAOUL, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA)

*LEONORE HOFFMAN and MARGO CULLEY, eds. *Women's Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy*. New York: Modern Languages Association 1985. Pp. 245. US\$24.50 hardcover, US\$17.50 paper

Current adventurous scholarship congratulates itself on opening the canon, or breaking the boundaries of genre, or interrogating margins. It seems odd then that the editors of *Women's Personal Narratives* assert that '[w]e do not wish to collapse the distinctions between belles lettres and the forms of "language arts" practiced more widely' (p. 1). Yet the declared aim of the volume is 'to suggest the possibilities for approaching these materials as literature' (p. 1). In this collection of essays writing usually considered unliterary (letters, diaries, and transcripts of oral testimonies) by writers who never expected their words to be public is analysed in critical essays (in part one) or discussed in pedagogical terms (in part two). But the absence of a clear editorial position on the literary or the ideological values the editors wish to embody, and a concomitant lack of self-consciousness about the values they actually do espouse, give this collection a muddled feeling. The selection of literary essays exposes that muddledness in the disparate quality of the criticism.

The best of the seven is Annette Kolodny's 'Captives in Paradise: Women on the Early American Frontier.' Kolodny makes a nice comparison of textual and ideological issues in male and female versions of 'captivity narratives,' in which the captive is almost always a woman. The most disturbing essay (in its attitude as well as its absence of theoretical framing) is the analysis by Virginia Walcott Beauchamp of the letters and diaries of a nineteenth-century 'upper-middle-class Baltimore woman.' Beauchamp learns from the diaries that Madge Peston is 'struck across the face with an umbrella ... knocked to the floor ... [and during the period of mourning for President Lincoln] lies prostrate in her bed at home suffering with a concussion brought on by severe beatings to her face and head' (p. 43). Beauchamp has what might be thought of as an excess of fair-mindedness: 'Madge may some-