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Front matter, vol. 13, issue 2

Abstract

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Modernist Aesthetics and Familial Textuality: Gide's *Strait is the Gate*

Roddey Reid..... 155

Abstract. The essay explores different links drawn by Edward Said and Jean Borie between early modernist fiction and what they call bachelor literature or discourse. The latter attempted to break free from the bourgeois ideology of the family as constituted in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Modernist fiction is anti-bourgeois and anti-familial in some of its deepest impulses.

In *Strait is the Gate* Jerome's narrative is a tale of failed courtship that has as its setting bourgeois family life in a stage of dissolution. Out of the overwrought family drama emerges an aesthetic problematic: Jerome's account of a fragmented narrative that eschews the traditional orderings of the *récit*. Moving beyond traditional Freudian interpretations with their Oedipal infrastructure (the death of Jerome's father, etc.) the present work analyzes how the narrative of the genesis of the modernist writer is decisively mediated by stories about women and by feminine writing. In a sense, a mother's story—that of Aunt Lucile—and her daughters'—that of Alissa—are two poles of the novel's trajectory that traverses Jerome and constitutes him as a complexly gendered writing subject. Like Jerome, the novel is divided against itself on the question of the feminine. Indeed, the narrative's simultaneous, contradictory appropriation and negation of the feminine (the incorporation of Alissa's correspondence and the progressive elimination of all female characters except for Juliette) defines its fundamental structure as hysterical. This structure is the vehicle for the deployment of a complex fictional strategy by Gide whereby he constructs a presentation of familialism's radical other: the bachelor writer whose possible homosexuality is approached asymptotically and negatively by the text through what are ultimately paranoiac figurations of other familial outcasts. These narrative figurations restore a discursive continuity to an otherwise fragmented modernist text, a continuity that is paradoxically none other than that of familial discourse. (RR)

Art and Androgyny: The Aerialist

Naomi Ritter. 173

Abstract. Among the many circus performers who have fascinated writers and artists since Romanticism, the clown and the aerialist predominate. In the nineteenth century, the tightrope artiste inspired comparisons with the (self-styled) equally daring and equally craftsmanlike poet. The vertical metaphor suggested a vision of transcendent art that Romantics and their heirs claimed for themselves. In the twentieth century, vestiges of the same identification and transcendence remain, but a new sexual focus appears also. Two important texts by Cocteau and Thomas Mann, "Le Numéro de Barbette" (1926) and Chapter I in Book III of *Felix Krull* (1951), show the aerial artiste as sexually ambivalent. An intertextual discussion of these two works highlights unnoted similarities in the seemingly opposed aesthetics of the two writers. (NR)

Retracing the Text: Francisco Brines' *Poemas excluidos*

Judith Nantell. 195

Abstract. In 1985 Francisco Brines published *Poemas excluidos* [*Excluded Poems*]. In this work he included, ironically and paradoxically (considering the title), various poems that had been excluded from his previously published collections of poetry. This essay investigates the critical activity of reconstructing the text within the included-excluded intertextual context of Brines' poetic production. In particular, as will be shown, *Poemas excluidos* demonstrates the play of texts and play of meaning that constitute the complex object the literary critic seeks to describe. One aspect of the play of texts evident in this work is that the poem is a symbiont not only of other poems of the collection but also of earlier and later poems of Brines' other collections. From this symbiosis arises the interplay of texts and the indeterminacy of meaning of *Poemas excluidos*. Textual reconstruction yields yet another important result. As critics attempt to untangle the tangle of texts, they become more and more caught up in the snarl of texts, and the play of meaning of the object scrutinized. Critical commentary, then, itself becomes yet one more thread in the intricate intertextual web of *Poemas excluidos*. (JN)

Jewish Writers in Contemporary Germany: The Dead Author Speaks

Sander L. Gilman 215

Abstract. The question I wish to address in this essay is really quite simple: Given the fact that there are “Jews” who seem to play a major role in contemporary German “Kultur” (at least that narrower definition of culture, meaning the production of cultural artifacts, such as books—a field which, at least for Englemann, was one of the certain indicators of a Jewish component in prewar German culture)—what happened to these “Jews” (or at least the category of the “Jewish writer”) in postwar discussions of culture? Or more simply: who killed the remaining Jews in contemporary German culture and why? Why is it not possible to speak about “German-Jews” in the contemporary criticism about German culture? And, more to the point, what is the impact of this denial on those who (quite often ambivalently) see (or have been forced to see) themselves as “Germans” and “Jews,” but not as both simultaneously. (SLG)

Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto*: A Secret Rivalry

Peter T. Hoffer 245

Abstract. Critics of the 1960s and 1970s have focused their attention on Klaus Mann’s use of his former brother-in-law, Gustaf Gründgens, as the model for the hero of his controversial novel, *Mephisto*, while more recent critics have emphasized its significance as a work of anti-Fascist literature.

This essay seeks to resolve some of the apparent contradictions in Klaus Mann’s motivation for writing *Mephisto* by viewing the novel primarily in the context of his life and career. Although *Mephisto* is the only political satire that Klaus Mann wrote, it is consistent with his life-long tendency to use autobiographical material as the basis for much of his plot and characterization. Mann transformed his ambivalent feelings about Gründgens, which long antedated the writing of *Mephisto*, into a unique work of fiction which simultaneously expresses his indignation over the moral bankruptcy of the Third Reich and reveals his envy of Gründgens’s career successes. (PTH)

In Search of a Synthesis: Reflections on Two Interpretations of Edvard Radzinskii's *Lunin* or *the Death of Jacques, Recorded in the Presence of the Master*

Maia Kipp..... 259

Abstract. This article examines the contemporary Soviet dramatist Edward Radzinskii's *Lunin*, the second play in the author's "historical-philosophical trilogy" [*Conversations with Socrates* (1969), *Lunin* (1979), and *Theater at the Time of Nero and Seneca* (1981)]. All three dramas address the relationship between the intellectual and authority. As a philosophical play and as part of the trilogy, *Lunin* raises universal ethical questions: the banality of power, the paranoia of ideological dogmatists, the fate of the individual who refuses to compromise in the face of a system which will not tolerate any denial of its authority. As an historical play, *Lunin* is set in a specific historical context. Its protagonist, the Decembrist M.S. Lunin, confronts the Russian autocracy, a tyranny that seeks its legitimacy not in custom or law but in rationality itself and is unchecked by God or man. The composition of this drama and its imagery make it unusually theatrical. The article examines the interpretations of this drama presented in both Soviet and American productions of the play and considers the tension between the philosophical and historical dimensions of the drama evident in these productions. The author concludes that in seeking to exploit the theatrical potential of this play, a production, while taking into account the nature of its audience, should not lose sight of either its philosophical or historical meaning. (MK)

Moral Dilemmas in the Work of Yuri Trifonov

Richard Chapple 283

Abstract. The work of soviet novelist and playwright Yuri Trifonov displayed throughout a concern with moral dilemmas and ethical choice. What distinguished the writing after 1969 from the earlier production was a shift away from facile platitudes of socialist dogma to a vision that would account more fully for the moral ambiguity with which modern life confronts the individual. (RC)