

## REVIEWS

EDITOR: DAVID BROOKS

Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, London: Granta, 2001.

On 4 September 1607, one of the most famous voyages in Irish history began with the boarding of ninety-nine passengers onto a ship which sailed from Lough Swill, carrying the last of the Gaelic princes into exile. According to some romantic orthodoxies, this exile marked the end of two thousand years of Gaeldom in Ireland. In his new book, *Irish Classics*, Declan Kiberd takes the Flight of the Earls, led by Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, as the narrative starting point for a literary journey which spans the whole range of the literature of Ireland: from the Old Irish hero Cuchulain to Kate O'Brien's comedies of manners. And there are many pieces of ideological ballast which he joyfully discards on the way to make the going easier, not least in the opening chapter, "Gaelic Ireland: Apocalypse Now?", in which he rightfully recasts the Flight of 1607 as the end of an aristocratic order rather than the end of a Gaelic civilisation. The bardic order, which all but collapsed in the years which followed, had always been, in Ireland, unapologetically aristocratic, and Kiberd argues that it was the loss of income and leisure through the freeing of the Irish serfs, as much as the military losses or the coming plantation of settlers, which finally made the position of the old aristocracy, and their faithful praise poets, untenable. It is the changes which this social revolution brought to the lives, status and literary output of Ireland's professional poets, the *fili*, that is the true starting point of *Irish Classics*.

The other significant thing about the *fili* as a starting point of the book is, of course, that they did not write in English; and the fact that they wrote in Irish is at the heart of Kiberd's argument in this book. "There were two powerful cultures in constant contention in Ireland after 1600", he writes in the Introduction, and "neither was able to achieve absolute hegemony". Those two cultures, the two beating hearts of Ireland, are not political or religious, they are linguistic. In Ireland, as in countless countries around the world where English is spoken—indeed, as in England itself—the reality of daily life and of literary production and consumption, is that there are languages other than English which usually struggle to be heard in the scholarly narra-

rives of literary history. And where, as in Ireland or in Wales, that other language has a continuous literary history which is older than the literary history of English, there are many complexities waiting to be explored in a book such as this. So Kiberd writes of Muireadhach Albannach O Dálaigh and Mathghamhain O hIfeárnáin and Séamus Dall Mc Cuarta and Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill, and then of Swift and Maria Edgeworth and Yeats and Patrick Kavanagh, as if they are part of a single literary tradition—which they are. But it is not so common for such an idea to be taken seriously in literary histories written about Britain and Ireland, and the range of linguistic ability and scholarship which is needed for such an enterprise is not so common either, though in this book it is an idea which has found a champion who is well able to undertake the task, and the literary history of Ireland, and of literature in English, is the richer for it.

There are thirty five chapters in this 700-page book, mostly about single authors or texts, but some of a more general nature. The early chapters on seventeenth-century Ireland and the aftermath of English rule, and the final chapter, called "Irish Narrative: A Short History", give valuable historical context to many of the other chapters. Any single-author enthusiast, usually eager to read only the chapter on Yeats or Joyce, will find in these more general sections some challenging new contexts for those icons of "English literature". There are interesting Irish-centred insights in the individual chapters as well, such as the idea that Yeats, who wrote a poetry of praise and blame, saw a prophecy of his own fate in that of the *fili*, who had been extirpated three centuries earlier by the Anglo-Irish, of whom Swift was "a nominal representative" and to whose lower aristocracy Yeats felt himself to belong. The whole chapter is also a timely reminder that the bardic posturing of the "Celtic twilight" can only make sense if it is read in relation to literary traditions which occurred exclusively in the Celtic languages.

Other chapters about well-read, or at least well-known texts, are built on original readings which owe little to the Celtic context. "*Ulysses*, Newspapers and Modernism" is an entertaining reading of the greatest of all modernist novels as a pastiche of newspaper sub-editing: "Given that most inhabitants of cities read only newspapers by the time of its publication in 1922, it might even be considered as an artist's revenge, a reappropriation of newspaper methods by an exponent of the threatened novel form". In this reading, Joyce, who called himself "a scissors-and-paste man", was taking his revenge on the banality of publications such as George Russell's *The Irish Home-*

*stead*, in which "columns listing the weekly prices of manure appeared alongside the editor's mystical poems".

A basic idea on which the book is based is the difficult idea of "the classic", which Kiberd talks about briefly in the Introduction. But he is not so much interested in taking apart the notion of the classic, as in representing canonical classics in a new light and a new context. He does, however, offer a taxonomy of the Irish classic. There are three kinds, he says. Well, of course, it would have to be a triadic taxonomy, if it's truly Celtic. The first kind, he argues, are works of art "in which human energies are shaped to produce words and images of awesome beauty and internal rigour". Examples of this category include poems by Yeats, some of the Gaelic lyrics, some plays by Synge and, "of course, Joyce's *Ulysses* falls easily into this category". The second type is "a narrative which generates a myth so powerful as to obscure the individual writer and to unleash an almost superhuman force". Examples include the Cuchulain story and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. And the third is a text whose eloquence and insight cause it to have "a palpable influence upon the course of human action or the prosecution of public policy", Examples include the speeches of Edmund Burke and the *Drapier's Letters* of Swift. And, he explains, each of the "classics" which is given a chapter in this book has earned its place by satisfying at least one of these categories, although "some rare and brilliant instances may deserve mention under all three". It isn't clear which of the elite are counted among the rare and the brilliant, though that is not really the point of a book whose purpose, among other things, is to create, through a narrative of literary history, a sense of what it means and what it has meant to be Irish, to be of a land in which two languages live side by side, while only the successful writers in English are exported as cultural ambassadors.

One of the most original and challenging chapters is "Undead in the Nineties: Bram Stoker and *Dracula*", in which the parochial anxieties of the "Protestant ... middle-class Dublin" of Stoker's childhood find their perfect expression in a story which found a ready audience in a decade characterised by its "fondness for vampyric images". In Ireland, Kiberd argues, the idea of undead bodies in unfinished graves in a narrative suffused with the imagery of blood was particularly striking as many people still remembered, or had been reared on, stories of the terrible famines or the cholera of earlier decades. Stoker himself was born in "black '47", and his

mother, we are told, had clear memories of a cholera plague in Sligo, and wrote an account of it for Stoker in the 1870s. Stoker's Gothic impulse, argues Kiberd, is part of a widespread theme in Irish writing, in which the conventions of Gothic writing "encouraged a besieged Protestant elite to dramatise its fears and phobias in a climate of inexorable political decline".

Apart from texts already mentioned, there are chapters, among others, on Goldsmith's "Deserted Village", with another on his more famous *She Stoops to Conquer*; on Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*; Carleton's "Peasantry" stories; Shaw's *Arms and the Man*; the "Gaelic absurdism" of *At Swim-Two-Birds*; the Blasket islands autobiographies and on the poetry of Louis MacNeice. Parts of the book are about texts which will be familiar and about which readers will have formed opinions over time, while others, such as those about the beautiful Gaelic love songs of Connacht, or the sophisticated parodies of the eighteenth-century writer Brian Merriman, may be less familiar. But in all that he writes, Kiberd brings a wit and an accessible erudition which makes this book a joy to read and to dip into again and again. Readers looking for a fresh view of a much-loved field, or a new introduction to an unknown literature, will be equally well served by this enchanting and durable survey of the two languages and one literature of Ireland.

*Geraint Evans*

H. O. Mounce, *Tolstoy on Aesthetics: What is Art?*, Aldershot, Burlington USA, Singapore, Sydney: Ashgate, 2001.

Tolstoy's aesthetics has never been taken very seriously. The common view is that Tolstoy lost his judgment as a result of his religious conversion, and gave himself up to doctrines that are not only crude but absurd. Lawrence speaks of Tolstoy degrading himself. Orwell explains Tolstoy's mad view of Shakespeare as a bad writer by the influence of religious prejudice. H. O. Mounce has undertaken the task of rehabilitating Tolstoy's aesthetics, and "rehabilitation" is not too strong a word for what is necessary. The question is, can it be done? I have to say that I do not find Mounce's case at all convincing, but he makes as good a go of it as anyone could.

Mounce as a commentator has many virtues. He is diligent, moderate, careful, well-meaning and generous. And if one had not

read Tolstoy's *What is Art?* or the essay on Shakespeare, one might conclude from Mounce's account that Tolstoy was a reasonable man, if a little eccentric, who has been maligned because of his religious beliefs. Unfortunately, if one has read Tolstoy's essays in aesthetics, one will know that Tolstoy's "case" is far worse than Mounce presents it. Mounce, it seems to me, can only maintain his stance of the sober, fair-minded critic by turning a blind eye to the grosser horrors in Tolstoy's views. When reading Mounce's book, I kept thinking of an earnest clergyman who wants above all things to be charitable, and to bring a victim, unjustly cast out, back into communion with the rest of us. I'd like this to be a true picture of the real state of affairs, but it just isn't. Tolstoy's opinions in aesthetics really are as mad as they are commonly held to be. Nothing that Mounce or anyone else can do will alter this. For the essay on Shakespeare, Mounce falls back to a second line of defence: Tolstoy may be wrong-headed about Shakespeare, but taking Tolstoy's views seriously, and reflecting on why Tolstoy is wrong will lead us to valuable insights into the nature of Shakespeare's art. Well, this may be so. But the same could be said of Thomas Rymer. Shocked by Tolstoy or Rymer, we may read L. C. Knights or even G. Wilson Knight, with loving attention, but will we bother to go back to Tolstoy or Rymer? Why would we?

It would be nice to be able to say that Mounce's book, even if misguided in its judgment of Tolstoy's aesthetics, can nonetheless serve as a useful introduction to its subject. This is the sort of thing that reviewers will say, if they are kind-hearted, as I hope I am. The trouble is that, as Mounce himself indicates, Tolstoy is devastatingly clear as a writer. He must be one of the few famous writers on aesthetics who needs no introduction. He is not obscure, he is not involved. He is horrifyingly simple and intelligible. No one needs an introduction to Tolstoy's aesthetics. Anyone can just read and marvel.

I want to say quite sincerely (no irony) that Mounce's book is in some ways admirable. It is certainly worth reading. But when it has most to offer it is not about Tolstoy's aesthetics; and when it is about Tolstoy's aesthetics, it is not only unconvincing but misleading.

Where is Mounce admirable? Well, he persuades us to treat Tolstoy's religious beliefs with respect. With detailed proof from the Postface of the *Kreutzer Sonata* Mounce shows that Tolstoy had a reasoned and demanding view of Christian morality, and a serious challenge to pose to the Churches. Tolstoy argues that because Christ's injunctions in the Sermon on the Mount are unattainable by human flesh, the Churches

have tended to abandon them, and compromise by putting in their place the achievable goals of everyday morality. Tolstoy insists that the morality of the Sermon on the Mount must remain over us as counsels of perfection if we are not to lose even our capacity to abide by everyday morality. The counsel of perfection induces in us a proper humility and sense of dependence on God. Now, this is obviously not humanism, but it is a serious challenge to humanism, supported by the evidence of the lives of saints, and it deserves to be taken seriously—even if one does not finally accept it.

Mounce also has an interesting discussion of Wagner. He gives a sketch of Wagner's life and musical aims, and situates Wagner's art in the philosophical context of Fichte and Schopenhauer. He then offers a subtle critique of Wagner's method of combining the arts, defending the hierarchy of voice and orchestra, and of aria and recitative in eighteenth-century opera against Wagner's conception of the integration of music and drama such that the two arts remain the equal of each other. I am not enough of a musicologist to give an opinion on Mounce's critique, but it seems to me to be worthy of respectful consideration. Unfortunately, Mounce's case is not Tolstoy's. Tolstoy objects to music and drama being combined at all, and his insistence on their segregation would abolish all opera, and not just Wagner's.

Mounce makes a persuasive Leavisite case against the spirit of Wagner's opera. Like Leavis criticising Romantic poetry, Mounce condemns Wagner for arousing emotional excitement while suppressing the critical intelligence. For Mounce, emotion in art must be refined by reason. Art must promote understanding, and critical awareness, and so on. All this is quite impressive, and makes a strong case against Wagner. But, this case is Mounce's. All that Tolstoy provides is the idea that Wagner is guilty of hypnotism. Indeed, so far from being an emotional wallow, Wagner's music is, according to Tolstoy, "all an affair of the intellect" (*What is Art?*, trans. Aylmer Maude ('World's Classics' Series, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), pp. 215-216).

The other impressive section in the book is the chapter on "Alternative Theories". Here, with some arbitrariness, Mounce finally settles on Clive Bell and R. G. Collingwood. His explanation for his choice of these is that Bell's kind of aestheticism and Collingwood's kind of romantic theory were the main rivals of Tolstoy's type of communication theory in the nineteenth century. Mounce seems to

be insinuating that if Bell and Collingwood are respectable theorists, then *a fortiori* Tolstoy ought to be considered respectable as well, insofar as Tolstoy's communication theory is superior to the theories of Bell and Collingwood. But it is not just the communication theory in general that is at stake here. It is what precisely Tolstoy does with it.

Mounce expounds the doctrines of Bell and Collingwood fully, and criticises them incisively. It is a pity he does not apply as sharp an edge to Tolstoy. With Bell, Mounce subtly distinguishes amongst different kinds of art, and as a Wittgensteinian refuses to look for a single, common essence of all art, as Bell wishes to do. This pluralism pays off, in that Mounce can distinguish between art that derives value from representation and art that does not. Bell, by contrast, condemns himself to banish representation from the sphere of artistic value, no matter how implausibly, for example with Rembrandt. With Collingwood, Mounce teases out all the contradictions inherent in Collingwood's one-sided emphases on art as against craft, and on expression as against representation. For Collingwood, the work of art is both only in the artist's head, and also in the artistic medium of expression; the audience is both only an eavesdropper, and also a collaborator. Mounce shows how the spontaneity that Collingwood wants to restrict to art spills over into craft, and how the boundaries between art and craft inevitably become blurred. All these contradictions are tied down to Collingwood's Romantic privileging of art over craft, and this prejudice is shown to have arisen under the influence of the Industrial Revolution. All this is splendidly done, but it does not help Tolstoy.

And so we come to Mounce's account of Tolstoy. Basically, Mounce misrepresents Tolstoy. It is a well-meaning and generous-spirited misrepresentation, but it is a misrepresentation for all that. Mounce constructs an idealised figure who owes something to the concern with language-games of the later Wittgenstein, the moral passion of F. R. Leavis, and the classicism of T. S. Eliot. But this fictional character bears little resemblance to Tolstoy. To support this claim I will focus on four topics: definition, form and content, art and life, and theory and practice.

Definition: Mounce claims that Tolstoy does not offer us a definition of art in terms of the common properties of all art. Instead, Tolstoy follows a procedure like that of the later Wittgenstein: art is to be described as a language-game, or collection of activities amongst which only relations of family resemblance hold. The inquirer will

collect examples of what is called art, distinguish between central and peripheral features, add supplementary features as new examples of varying kind come along, and so on. This sounds like a sensible procedure, but it isn't Tolstoy's. So far from collecting examples upon which to construct one's concept, Tolstoy insists on moving in the opposite direction: concept first, then examples—which are to be tested for legitimacy against the concept. Lamenting that writers on aesthetics generally proceed in the wrong way, Tolstoy says:

Instead of giving a definition of true art and then deciding what is and what is not good art by judging whether a work conforms or does not conform to this definition, a certain class of works which for some reason pleases a certain circle of people is accepted as being art, and a definition of art is then devised to cover all these productions. (*What is Art?*, p. 115)

What Tolstoy desiderates is not only a real (and not nominal) definition, but a normative definition! The business of definition is then to be carried out in the usual way of genus and differentia. Art belongs to the genus of human communication. This genus has two species: speech transmits thoughts; art transmits feelings (*What is Art?*, pp. 120-21). All this is crystal clear, and is the sort of definition that the later Wittgenstein wanted to eschew.

Form and content: Mounce argues that Tolstoy has been misrepresented for being willing to separate form and content. The misrepresentation is all Mounce's. It is true that Tolstoy can say intelligent things about the unity of form and content. But over and over again Tolstoy happily discusses form and content separately. He has to, because of how he sees the situation of modern art. Tolstoy makes two sets of distinctions—between genuine art and fake art, and between art as transmission and the feelings that it transmits. Genuine art transmits a feeling, fake art only pretends to. Whether there is real transmission or not is, for Tolstoy, a question of form. Good art transmits good feelings, bad (but genuine) art transmits bad feelings. The moral quality of the feelings transmitted is for Tolstoy a matter of content. Tolstoy thinks that whether a work of art is genuine or not, *and* whether it transmits good or bad feelings, are matters of the highest importance. But they are separate issues. Tolstoy wants to be able to judge one work adversely for being fake, and another work adversely for being evil, that is, for transmitting evil feelings. For him, these are real but separate social problems. They both have to be recognised. So Tolstoy has to be free to discuss



form and content separately, *in these specific contexts*. This is not an oversight on his part, it is a function of the system of his aesthetics.

Art and life: Mounce is right that Tolstoy rejects aestheticism, and finds that the importance of art depends on its connection with life. But Tolstoy is much more specific: for Tolstoy the value of art is measured by the religious consciousness of the age, and not just in the past but now. Mounce knows that, in the present, Tolstoy distinguishes between two kinds of good art: the higher-level art that transmits religious feelings, and the lower-level art that transmits the simple feelings of common life. Mounce rather ignores the religious art, and concentrates on that of the lower level, which Tolstoy calls "universal" art. Here Mounce again misrepresents Tolstoy by identifying the "universal" art with the "ideal of classical art": with all that "transcends passing fashion and local significance and gives lasting expression to what is of permanent value in human life". These are Mounce's words (p. 73). What Tolstoy says of universal art in the modern era is that it transmits "the simplest feelings, such as a softened or a merry mood caused by a song or an amusing jest intelligible to every one, or by a touching story, or a drawing, or a little doll" (*What is Art?*, p. 240). It's pretty obvious that Tolstoy is thinking of something on the level of one of the simpler poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*, but Mounce's classicist conception would cover everything from the *Aeneid* to *The Waste Land*. In this way, the issue of the difference between art of very wide appeal, like Dickens's novels, and art of very narrow appeal, like Henry James's novels, gets occluded. Another problem is that Mounce's classicism glosses over a major difficulty in what is really Tolstoy's romantic historicism. Tolstoy is happy to recognise that in every era the best art has been religious art, but he does not notice that this might produce some problems for appreciation across cultures, where two religions not only differ but conflict. Could the Israelites appreciate the religious art of the Canaanites? Could Tolstoy appreciate the erotic sculpture of Hindu religious art? Mounce's bland notion of "permanent value" renders this problem invisible.

Theory and practice: Mounce wants to say that Tolstoy is a respectable theorist even if he sometimes chooses his examples unwisely. The unwisdom of the examples does not implicate the theory. Theory and practice are only contingently related. This also unfortunately isn't true, as the notorious cases of Beethoven and Shakespeare prove. Tolstoy claims that Beethoven's Ninth Symphony cannot be either a work of the highest, religious art, or even a good

work of the second rank, that is, of universal art. It cannot be a great religious work because *music in general cannot transmit the highest religious feelings!* It cannot be a good work of universal art because it must be incomprehensible to most people (*What is Art?*, p. 249). This is doctrinaire absurdity. (Mounce does not even mention this atrocity.) Shakespeare's art cannot even be considered genuine art, since, by Tolstoy's standards of realism and sincerity, it must be condemned as an extravaganza of artificiality. Here a comparison with Dr Johnson is illuminating. Tolstoy's complaints against Shakespeare are much the same as Johnson's. The difference is that despite his neo-classical prejudice, Johnson could feel Shakespeare's greatness. But Tolstoy feels nothing. His criticism is so doctrinaire that his principles have destroyed his sensibility, at least for the appreciation of anything other than simple realism. The horrible truth is that Tolstoy is a bad critic on principle.

Tolstoy's general theory can only be defended at a level of generality that transcends everything peculiar to Tolstoy's version of it. The model of the work of art as the communication of valuable experience can be of service, but we owe this to the whole Romantic tradition from Schleiermacher to I. A. Richards. In Tolstoy the doctrine is so narrowed in its meaning as to produce absurdity and grotesqueness. For Tolstoy, if communication is to be valid, it must be for all; and, by "all", Tolstoy means the peasant masses of pre-capitalist society, whose mentality is supposedly "natural". This criterion excludes all art that is not immediately intelligible to the un-educated mind. Moreover, Tolstoy thinks of what is transmitted by art as *feeling* rather than as experience. This leads to an extreme Romantic notion of sincerity, on the basis of which Tolstoy condemns Shakespeare's expression for the same faults that Johnson finds in Metaphysical Poetry. This stress on sincerity of feeling means a lacuna in the doctrine concerning convention and stylisation, so that any artistic representation that is not straightforwardly realistic is condemned as unnatural. Finally, Tolstoy will not recognise in art any content that goes beyond his own narrow moralism. So Shakespeare is condemned as a snob and a reactionary; most of European art for the last five hundred years is denounced as either fake or evil; and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is declared to be great art. Tolstoy indeed thinks that Dostoyevsky's works are also great art, but his doctrine will not allow him to discriminate between Dostoyevsky and the Dickens of *A Tale of Two Cities*. For Mounce to try to defend the position that produces all this

monstrosity is just perverse. Mounce's real qualities of intelligence and character deserve a better cause.

Tolstoy can not unreasonably be described as an anarchist, pacifist, and even a sort of communist. Presumably, this had something to do with his peasant-based aesthetics. This topic is not explored in Mounce's book.

David Brooks

Grazia Marchianò ed., *Aesthetics and Chaos: Investigating a Creative Complicity*, Turin: Trauben, 2002.

In this handsomely bound and beautifully presented book dedicated to Elémire Zolla, Grazia Marchianò presents eleven expert and challenging essays from a diverse and international set of aestheticians, including Ben-Ami Scharfstein, Véronique Fóti, Akiko Tsukamoto, Kiyohiko and Tomoyuki Kitamura, Kenneth Inada, Brian Bruya, Yves Millet, Pranab Das, Alexander Voloshinov, Masaru Yoneyama, and Melita Cataldi. At first glance, the contents might appear to be an example of chaos, since they range from "The Early Chinese Aesthetic of Spontaneity" (Bruya) to "Chaos as Multiplicity: Examples in Medieval Ireland" (Cataldi) to "In Our Age of Artistic Chaos Can Art Be Judged as Fairly as Possible?" (Scharfstein). Despite the arrangement into three subsections—*Art and Chaos: A Need to Agitate Form*, *Chaotisation at the Source of Aesthetic Experience*, and *The Hidden Laws of Chaocosmic Permutation*—the feeling of the whole is one of loose structure and incidentally overlapping associations. This apparent chaos, however, is what gives the book both charm and fluidic substance. *Aesthetics and Chaos* is not, like so many other books in aesthetics these days, a dull, professionalistic clone of familiar tropes and narrow thinking. It is an expansive, cooperative, and ultimately enlightening book that dares to explore aesthetic ideas differently and creatively. It is, as the editor describes it, "an act of faith toward unlimited and exciting frontiers of knowledge" (p. 9).

The first section of the book, *Art and Chaos*, is primarily about the concrete works and organic productions that constitute art. Even though the articles in this section describe material that is essentially cultural (twentieth-century Western art, abstract painting, Japanese calligraphy, Taoist aesthetics) they do not essentially involve culture or a cultural frame; instead they focus on the involvement of chaos in

the art itself. Ben-Ami Sharfstein explores the difficulty involved in resolving the apparent cacophony of concurrent superdiverse presentations found in contemporary art, and proposes to gain a clearer understanding by looking at art through three semantic fields: exact science, everyday life, and imagination. It would be interesting to ponder whether these three fields map onto the architecture of structure, the dynamics of performance, and the creativity of literature respectively. While Scharfstein's exploration takes us through all the arts, Véronique Fóti focuses exclusively on painting. She argues that painting can offer "an opening unto chaos" (p. 62) through its refusal to be readily legible, its resistance to theory, its egolessness, and the coalescence of mind, sight, and gesture. Akiko Tsukamoto provides a startling synthesis for the conceptions of the first two papers, through examination of calligraphy, an art-form that combines the semantic concerns of Sharfstein, with the "illegibility" and creative coalescence of Fóti. Tsukamoto's basic concern is "the combination of a very abstract and indirect expression of an idea with a direct conveying [of] rhythm, force, intonation and bodily movement" (p. 82). Section I is completed by an interesting little article on the aesthetics of matter. Kiyohiko Kitamura and Tomoyuki Kitamura argue that art is essentially and inevitably found in matter (as opposed to form). In particular, they employ Gaston Bachelard's notion of "material imagination" to explain the generation of art. Material as opposed to formal imagination is unhindered by epistemological obstacles like unity, generality and substantiality. It is in matter itself, argue Kitamura and Kitamura, that artistic strength and intensity lie, and it is material imagination that we find the chaos that gives rise to artistic creation: "in terms of 'material imagination' the chaotic force is synonymous with nature and life" (p. 100).

Section II, *Chaotisation at the Source*, is about the very nature of chaos itself—about nothingness, pure spontaneous motion, and absolute ambiguity. The selections here are more metaphysical than those in Section I; instead of showing us the role of chaos in art, they use art to take us into the chasm of reality. Kenneth Inada, whose works on nothingness have helped to transform our understanding of Buddhist aesthetics, redirects us from the destructive and alienating tendency to partialise human nature in science to the "basic aesthetic element that has kept human beings in touch with nature itself" (p. 105). Whereas Inada describes how aesthetics can bring us "face to face with the dynamics of the primal cosmo-onto

forces" (p. 113), Brian Bunya tries to show how this experience of essential *dunamis* or pure spontaneity can have a positive influence on us, as it "arises out of a complex interaction with our environment" (p. 133). Though Bunya describes this experience of spontaneity in terms of early Chinese aesthetics, it is interesting to note how closely it resembles the dynamic burst of kallic vision that dominates the aesthetic initiate in Plato's *Symposium* (pp. 211-212) and makes him a centre for creativity and the birth of virtue. This is the link to Yves Millet's essay, "Les plis du vent" ("The Folds of the Wind"), which concerns "*les liens probables entre le vent et la vertu.*" (the probable ties between the wind and virtue", p. 146). Millet shows how the creative experience of chaos first buffets us like a wind of sensation, and then draws out from us a nimbic respiration of art.

The final section, *The Hidden Laws*, follows Millet's "respiration of chaos" back into creative productions, now transformed by cosmos, order and science. It is thus the most integrative section of the book, looking at chaos from the point of view of order and reason, and looking back at reason from the point of view of chaos. There is an aesthetic sub-theme running through most of these final essays: beauty. Only the first essay in this section fails to treat of this aesthetic theme. Pranab K. Das writes about chaos theory and free action from the point of view of nonlinear dynamics. It is from the study of chaos in that field that Das draws conclusions about free will and free action. Das hovers over one aesthetic question in asking: if we are free, what is the *appropriate* freedom to exercise? But unfortunately, the answer to that question is unavailable: "there are no rules by which freedom *must* be exercised" (p. 159). The other three essays in this section all deal with beauty as a result of "chaoscosmic" interaction. Alexander Voloshinov explores the broken but self-similar patterns of fractal geometry and surmises: "*beauty is a fractal or beauty is a harmony between Cosmos and Chaos*" (p. 176). Masaru Yoneyama urges us to bring beauty back into the discussion of the sciences. He compares Leibniz' arguments about pre-established harmony to the science of complex systems and surmises: "we have found a clue to study the spiritual order as rivalry between chaos and cosmos" (p. 185). Finally, Melita Cataldi shows us "chaoticness" in Medieval illuminated manuscripts (bringing us full circle from Section I, wherein calligraphy is discussed). Cataldi argues that Medieval Irish Christianity "contemplates ... the great theme of chaos and form and their inter-relation." The text is accompanied by reproductions from the *Book of Kells*.

The editor of *Aesthetics and Chaos*, Grazia Marchianò, is one of the world's leading forces in aesthetics. She is a staunch advocate of transcultural aesthetics and a true, courageous pioneer for the arts. It is a pleasure to see her creative energies directing and shaping the new face of aesthetics in the twenty-first century.

Eugenio Benitez

Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*  
London: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2002.

Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*  
London: Routledge, 3rd edn, 2002.

When the *New Accents* series first started appearing under the general editorship of Terence Hawkes in the late 1970s, it heralded, or so it was claimed, a new era of rapid institutional and academic change. There's no denying there has been plenty of the latter, no doubt fuelled by the former, and from a global perspective the various changes that have occurred in the last quarter-century are even more marked: the collapse of the capitalist/communist dichotomy, the emergence of new technologies, diseases and various crises centred on a supposed clash of civilisations, to name only a few. It is surprising, given this dynamic global context, that academic change seems to have consisted of a gradual evisceration of the tertiary education sector, and that the sort of theory initially championed by the *New Accents* series is somewhat on the wane. Perhaps it is the case that what was once the bogey of the academic establishment, demonised as irresponsible relativism or an anarchic assault on common sense (think here of Catherine Belsey's appalling *Critical Practice* or Hawkes' *Structuralism and Semiotics*), has become part of the rhetorical furniture, so to speak; or perhaps, as William Christie has suggested (see his review of Richard Harland's "Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes" in *Literature and Aesthetics*, 11, (November 2001)) the rise of historicist theories has rendered "literary theory" as a phenomenon particularly susceptible to historicisation itself. Whatever may be the case, it is interesting that this series has been re-issued in what is the middle of its third decade of persistence, a third edition in the case of *Deconstruction* and a second in the case of *Dialogism*.

Of the two books under consideration here, it is Holquist's *Dialogism* which appears to have better weathered the storms in the

teacup of time. Neither author appears to have altered the main body of his text, although the second edition of *Dialogism* contains an unaccountably large number of typographic errors absent in the first: Locke has become "Locker" (p. 4); the general rules of language "land" themselves to systematisation (p. 45); and the "simultaneity of the said and unsaid" has become a "simultancity" (p. 61). Rather, the strategy adopted by Norris and Holquist (and presumably the other authors of the series) has been to supplement the original text with the sort of afterthoughts one would expect from experts familiar with developments in their respective fields over a decade or so. As each author confesses at different times, the temptation must have been there to rewrite entire chapters which, with the passing of twenty-odd years, must appear to have become quaint at the very least. In one sense it is fortunate that they haven't: the original text accompanied by additional chapters, afterwords and postscripts affords the reader a sense of the development of the reception of each thinker's work over time.

Holquist's attempt in this direction is particularly discerning. In a new final chapter ("This Heteroglossia Called Bakhtin"), he subsumes the various approaches to Bakhtin that have emerged over the last decade under the broad Bakhtinian categories of the centripetal and centrifugal. Of the former, intrinsic Bakhtinians are concerned with the Bakhtin corpus, and include the *Collected Works* project currently underway simultaneously between Russkie Slovarei, University of Texas Press and The Bakhtin Centre at Sheffield University. Holquist identifies the central preoccupation of the intrinsic Bakhtinians as a concern with the dilemma of coming up with a single definition for Bakhtin while retaining a diffuse sense of his achievements. Particularly interesting here was the revelation by Brian Poole that whole pages of *Rabelais and His World* are copied word for word from Ernst Cassirer, which is perhaps not all that surprising given Bakhtin's championing of carnival and carnivalised genres such as parody and Menippean satire, but Bakhtin's suppression or playing down of the names of several important classical scholars, such as Georg Misch, from whom he derived many of his ideas on genre and the ancient Greek romance, is harder to explain. A real sense of the difficulty of Bakhtin emerges from this book: not so much the difficulty of a complex thinker, although Bakhtin is undoubtedly a very great thinker, but the difficulty of an author who adopted masks and (possibly) comic textual strategies very much like the carnival of

which he wrote so penetratingly. Of the centrifugal tendency, the extrinsic Bakhtinians are less interested in Bakhtin than they are in exploiting dialogism as a tool for their own research. Naturally, this latter tendency is far more bewilderingly heterogeneous than the former: Bakhtin has been taken up by "musicologists, anthropologists, classicists, historians, political scientists, theologians and a congeries of professions seeking to assimilate 'carnival', 'heteroglossia', and 'novelness' to their previously un-dialogized occupations" (p. 191). Of these, the most important strands are, according to Holquist, various feminisms, sociolinguistics, the visual arts and cultural criticism, with British specialists in particular overtly concerned with the political aspects of dialogism. From my perspective, this is a pretty accurate summary, although there was a spike in the mid-1990s with regard to books and articles on Menippean satire and literary carnival which Holquist doesn't mention. In general, the literary Bakhtinians get fairly short shrift in this book, in favour of the philosophical Bakhtinians who have a social and cultural slant.

Despite this preference, where Holquist is most inspired in this book is when he tries to come up with a label that best describes Bakhtin: his suggestion in the last, supplementary chapter is that Bakhtin should be considered a philologist. On the surface, this is rather perverse, not the least because it is a description which Bakhtin repeatedly rejected during his lifetime in favour of being considered a philosopher. But there is much merit in the idea. As Holquist argues:

The philologist is an orphan, moving out of his parent language into often exotic other languages ... perceiving the underlying patterns that are hidden in the apparent spontaneity of our speech requires an element of alienation, or, as Bakhtin would say, of outsideness (p. 195).

One strength of such a definition is that it follows logically from what Holquist wrote of Bakhtin a decade earlier. One of Holquist's repeated concerns about Bakhtin's reception in the West is that "those who have been deceived by dialogism's appearance of ease have always paid a price in analytical rigour" (p. 108). That is, Bakhtin is often read at face value in his various texts rather than being read with a degree of "outsideness", which can mean that various of his texts are read against each other or that they are read against the context in which they were written. As a result, many extrinsic



approaches to Bakhtin oversimplify key concepts such as heteroglossia, carnival and even "dialogism" itself. This is certainly true of the area with which I am most familiar, which is writing on carnival, carnivalisation and Menippean satire: John Docker's "Antipodean Literature: A World Upside-Down" (*Overland*, 1986, p. 104) is a particularly egregious example.

I'm not sure whether Holquist is familiar with W. Scott Blanchard's book *Scholar's Bedlam* (London: Bucknell University Press, 1995), but the example Holquist uses to illustrate the radical potential of the philologist, the Renaissance humanist Lorenzo Valla, is the same example Blanchard uses to launch a discussion of Menippean satire in Renaissance humanism. The interesting thing here is that neither in this instance, nor at any other point in the book, does Holquist refer to Menippean satire. It is unlikely that this is an oversight, although it does point to a polemical preoccupation of Holquist, that the darker vision of the dialogue we get in *Gatsby* may serve as well to remind us that the emphasis on an "orgiastic future" which has been so much a feature of Bakhtin's reception in the West, is only part of the story (p. 181).

Undoubtedly this is true, and this preoccupation with denying or heavily qualifying the optimistic Bakhtin is shared by many, including Michael André Bernstein's equally polemical *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). Presumably, Holquist feels that most approaches to Menippean satire that draw on Bakhtin tend to focus on its capacity for festive disruption and liberation, and in the main this is true. Most scholars who refer to Menippean satire, as understood by Bakhtin, usually invoke the authority of the relevant section of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (pp.106-113) and leave it at that. Or those that refer to carnival usually refer to the overly optimistic portrayal it receives in *Rabelais and His World*, and don't bother to read this account against the chapter on genre in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. In other words, Holquist's fears that Bakhtin's ideas have been largely over-simplified and, consequently, misrepresented when applied in a centrifugal sense, are justified. While *Dialogism* is ultimately concerned with the systematicity of Bakhtin's thought, and succeeds very well in giving the new-comer to Bakhtin's thought an adequate grounding in the key concepts, it is nonetheless difficult for me to understand why one of Bakhtin's key preoccupations, Menippean satire, is left out of the book entirely, particularly when the evidence we have of a certain

licence with the concept of authorship (the "plagiarism" of Cassirer and the well-known controversy regarding the Volosinov and Medvedev books), as well as the complexity of the corpus when read in its entirety, suggests that the Menippean mask may well be one Bakhtin wore at several crucial stages in his career.

Strangely enough, one of the more obvious ways in which the work of Jacques Derrida can be connected with that of Bakhtin is precisely in terms of this grotesque and "obscure" genre. I once asked Derrida at a conference about the generic affiliations of his writing and I think it's worth providing a transcript of the exchange for the purpose of this review:

Q: Professor Derrida, you once described a generic affiliation your work *Glau* has with Menippean satire, citing Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

Derrida: (*cupping ear*) What? ... Who? ... What? ... Who?

Q: You also refer to other well known Menippean satires in "Ulysses Gramophone" and elsewhere. To what extent would you say that Menippean satire informs much of your work?

Derrida: Alan [Cholodenko, who asked the question on my behalf], there is a word I didn't hear ... what is the word before satire? Money pun?

Q: To what extent would you say that Menippean satire informs much of your work?

Derrida: Ah! ... Menippean satire, hmm? For me it's at the same time a great historical model with resources we have not exhausted yet, but at the same time it's a circumscribed figure of the past. So I play in the mode of Menippean satire but I play with it too. That is, I situate it as a historical and past possibility. So on the one hand I think this possibility is not exhausted yet so I draw from it as much as I can but at the same time I try to analyse it and to situate it as a given and past possibility. So I play with it, I quote it, in a certain way, I use it, I draw from it and I quote it, sometimes very seriously, sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly (*bursts out laughing*). The most Menippean satirical texts of mine are not the ones which are identifiable as such. Sometimes they are ... they belong to this tradition in the most serious and academic texts I have written

("One Hundred Years of Cruelty—Artaud Conference", Sydney, Artspace, 1996).

But it is precisely this aspect of Derrida with which Norris struggles in *Deconstruction*, particularly in his contortionistic afterword to the second (1991) edition and the “somewhat dyspeptic” (p. 176) postscript to the third (2002) edition: not so much the “textualist” aspects of deconstruction, which are dismissed out of hand, but the formal qualities and generic affinities of Derrida’s writing and of deconstruction in general. I once heard Christopher Norris speak at a seminar in Sydney in the mid-1990s where he talked on the question of whether Derrida should be considered primarily as a philosopher, or as an exemplar of a literary kind of writing of philosophy—“textualism”, as he preferred to call it. As I recall, this position was neatly taken apart by a postgraduate student from Macquarie University, who asked Norris how the form of Derrida’s work informed Norris’s understanding of Derrida as a philosopher and how the “form” of his writing could be considered apart from the philosophical arguments contained therein. To my mind, Norris struggled to answer this question adequately at the time and on the evidence of his most recent postscript, has been struggling ever since.

Like Holquist’s book, *Deconstruction* is intended as a primer for students who are new to the work of Derrida, de Man *et al.*, and, like *Dialogism*, Norris’ book skews discussion of its subject matter away from the area of rhetoric and plumps it firmly in the lap of philosophy. This is a curious tendency in each author, not least because it indicates a lingering unease with the age-old battle between logic and rhetoric, and the fear that the latter may undeservedly gain the upper hand over the former. While Holquist at least gestures, in his supplementary final chapter, towards philology, Norris appears to bind himself ever tighter in argumentative knots of an eminently philosophical, anti-rhetorical nature. For example, Norris chides any reader who may be tempted to stray from the philosophical fold, and insists in the 1991 afterword on the importance of:

respecting the distinctive philosophical valencies of Derrida’s work, and not going along with the pseudo-deconstructive, pan-textualist or levelling view of philosophy as just another ‘kind of writing’, one where interpretation goes all the way down, where concepts invariably prove to be metaphors in disguise, and where rhetoric at last wins out in its age-old quarrel with the truth claims of philosophic reason (p. 138).

While the thrust of this argument is directed against Richard Rorty's argument (or the "Rortian-textualist line", as Norris prefers to call it) that philosophy is "just another kind of writing", Norris here seems to be having his cake and eating it too: it is perfectly acceptable for deconstruction to dance its ludic, playful dance, but not at the expense of philosophical rigour, and certainly not if it is considered to belong primarily to a literary and not a philosophical genre. Fair enough: there is a small pyramid's worth of bad deconstructive books and articles out there which fail to engage with the texts they purport to deconstruct with the kind of rigour which Derrida admirably exhibits. But so too there is a rigour of a rhetorical kind, the kind which bears close argument and analysis, the kind of close reading upon which Derrida bases much of his most important work (and which undoubtedly displays Menippean qualities) and the kind which demands understanding on the level of form, genre and to use Derrida's words the "given and past possibility" of a tradition. While Norris finds unjustified Habermas's charge against Derrida, that he "has betrayed the Enlightenment project by indulging in a kind of mixed-mode discourse, a 'poetico-metaphorical' perversion of reason that wilfully subverts the genre-distinction between philosophy and literature" (p. 173), he is forced to admit that Habermas's attack strikes "uncomfortably close to some of the ideas that have lately been advanced in Derrida's name" (p. 195) (read: "textualist") with which he evidently, but not enthusiastically, disagrees. Norris' problem is that while he has a very clear idea of the philosophical import of Derrida's work, he is deeply uneasy about its literary qualities. When he writes of Derrida that "... this is a 'kind of writing' which cannot be consigned (as Rorty would have it) to some hybrid post-modern genre that has at last come out on the far side of all that pointless 'philosophical' talk" (p. 176), he betrays a limited understanding of the deep implication of rhetoric in the Western philosophic tradition—and here I am 'talking' about those rhetorical aspects which are distinct from mere metaphors of the visual or the spatial but which ultimately come down to questions of form. It is worthwhile pointing out the generic affiliations of Derrida's work with Plato: "Plato himself—or perhaps Socrates—had some Menippean blood in his veins, despite the transcendental and comprehensive nature of Plato's full-blown philosophical system" (Blanchard, p. 67). The debt of philosophy to Menippean satire is of course reciprocal, as Relihan observes in his *Ancient Menippean Satire* (Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins University Press, 1993): "had Plato written like Aristotle, Menippean satire may never have gotten off the ground" (p. 180). In fact, it is possible to sketch out a genealogy of philosophical Menippean satire from Menippus and Plato, through Varro, Julian the Apostate, Athenaeus, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, Fulgentius, Boethius, Vergilius, Saxo Grammaticus, Bernardus Sylvestris, the Italian humanists such as Urceo, Valla, Pontano, Alberti, Calcagnini, and later Erasmus and More, Cornelius Agrippa, Pico della Mirandola, Bruno, Burton, Godwin, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Barthes, Baudrillard and Derrida. An interesting and eccentric philosophical genealogy no doubt, but not so far-fetched when one mentions Derrida and Kierkegaard, Derrida and Nietzsche and, dare I say it, Derrida and Coleridge in the same breath. This is not to deny the central importance of Derrida's rigorous readings of Plato, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Austin and so on; but identifying the genre and tradition to which his work belongs goes a long way towards being able to ground Derrida's work historically and generically. In fact, much of the exhilaration and intellectual excitement of deconstruction stems from the realisation of its generic possibilities: the grotesque mode is often a means of discovery, bringing together as it does a radical heterogeneity of typographical conventions, concepts, styles, different rhetorical figures and outlandish verbal play.

It is inevitable that the third edition of a primer intended initially to introduce students to a fairly new thinker some quarter of a century ago will appear radically different today. Unlike Holquist's, however, Norris' book appears in part to be ridiculously out of date, particularly the sections on de Man (which, Norris admits graciously enough in his postscript, could well have done with revision) and on Bloom, who has lately become an absurd parody of himself (see *The Western Canon*, London: Papermac, 1996). The decision to reprint without revision, and with merely addition, was brave on the part of Hawkes and Norris, but it would surely have been better if the book had been allowed to die a quiet, dusty death in the research stacks of university libraries the world over. Even Norris seems aware of this, finally narrowing down, after much qualification and hedging, the justification for the book's continued existence in terms of Derrida's "genius" (p. 177). And while that appellation actually rings true to me, it does so because over time deconstruction has become more and more synonymous with Derrida himself. A return to the primary

texts is always preferable, especially now that Spivak's faulty translation of *Of Grammatology* has now been corrected. But for the beginner there are other, more recent, introductions to Derrida, that have the advantage of being more in tune with contemporary debates and less of an historical document.

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