

## Abstracts

### Violent Fathers and Runaway Sons: Colonial Relationships in *Une vie de boy* and *Mission terminée*

Laurie Corbin

This study examines familial relationships in two novels published by Ferdinand Oyono and Mongo Beti shortly before Cameroon's independence in 1960, making use of three levels of analysis. The first shows the impact of colonization on familial and social structures, in particular the ways in which the weakening of the traditional hierarchy leads to the flight of young men from their families and villages. The second looks at the two novels as showing the relationship of France (who was often represented as a kindly parent to its colonies), the colonized countries, and their citizens: the unpredictable and brutal father can be seen as representing the French, the helpless and brutalized mother the colonized country, and the protagonist the colonized person "orphaned" by colonialism. The third level of analysis makes use of Lacanian theory, in particular Lacan's theorization of the accession to the Symbolic order, to examine the place of language and what could be described as the Law of the Father in these texts. These different levels of analysis show the ways in which these writers were addressing the problems of colonies moving toward independence after having been crippled—socially, economically, politically, and psychologically—by years of foreign domination. (LC)

### The Literal and the Literary: A Note on the Historical References in Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus*

Scott Macdonald Frame

Stripped of much of its individuality as a piece of literature and relegated to the niche set aside for women's writing, Isabel Allende's *La casa de los espíritus* has sometimes wrongfully been critically condemned as a mere facsimile of García Márquez's seminal Latin American novel. However, if critics were to re-

examine *La casa de los espíritus* as a work of fiction in which its writer attempts to give voice to, and achieve personal closure of, historical events so tragically real for her, its comparisons with that “other” Latin American novel might be less frequent. This article contends that Allende uses a mixture of traceable historical facts, unsubstantiated personal accounts, and urban myths perpetuated by popular hearsay to present a plausible version of what could have happened during the events surrounding the fall of Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973. The crux of the argument presented will be that by superimposing unsubstantiated or distorted fact and local myth, Allende calls into play an understanding of traceable historical referents and creates a sense of associative identification between the reader and the text and the characters within. This reconstituted image provides a reinterpretation of what happened, a plausible scenario by means of which one can negotiate or interpret the varying shades of “truth” associated with the events as they may have occurred. This article further argues that through the use of familiar and identifiable images of a closer-to-the-fact fictionalization of real historical incidences, Allende is able to create a more credible characterization and historicity in the novel as well as sensitise her target reader to the resultant social and political changes of what many of her countrymen consider the single most fateful day in their nation’s history. (SMF)

### The Construction of the Other and the Self in André Gide’s *Travels in the Congo* and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*

Raphaël Lambert

Reportedly, André Gide’s *Travels in the Congo* (1929) had fostered reforms of the colonial policy in French Africa. In *Travels*, Gide reports cases of economic exploitation, abuses of power, use of terror, torture, and even homicidal raids against recalcitrant villagers and, at least in one case, Gide takes it upon himself to have a man prosecuted. Yet his account, through the lens of post-colonial thinking, betrays reactionary and biased views of Africans. Gide does not object to the colonial system *per se*, but rather blames its malfunction on both a lack of infrastructures and administrative involvement. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon denounces colonialism, focusing on its dehumanizing effects. If Fanon believes that it is the responsibility of those oppressed to regain their freedom, he is also aware that colonized people have internalized racial stereotypes to the point of self-loathing. Hence *Black Skin* can be

read as a rebuttal to *Travels*. While *Travels*, published only twenty years earlier, clings to values of past centuries—supporting France’s “civilizing” mission in Africa, *Black Skin* looks toward the future as it condemns the ideology of colonialism. Both liberals, communist sympathizers and social activists, Gide and Fanon represent the two opposite poles of the colonial issue. (RL)

### “Playing a Game of Worlds”: Postmodern Time and the Search for Individual Autonomy in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*

Jill LeRoy-Frazier

This article enters the ongoing critical debate surrounding *Pale Fire*, as to whether the apparent structure of the novel can be taken at face value. Do the central characters, John Shade and Charles Kinbote, constitute separate voices within the novel, as poet and commentator respectively, or is one in fact the fictional creation of the other? Arguing that the dispute arises out of a set of critical assumptions that negate at least some of the possible implications of Nabokov’s own views of art’s purpose and function, the essay asserts that Nabokov’s disbelief in objective reality renders the entire Shade/Kinbote debate irrelevant. By focusing upon the consequent challenges presented by radical subjectivity and linguistic indeterminacy in an always-fictional world, the essay suggests that Nabokov’s art, rather than being diminished by an exploration of its relationships to post-structuralism, is in fact reaffirmed as a transcendent act of the human spirit. (JL-F)

### *Malone Dies* and the Beckettian Mimesis of Inexistence

Eric P. Levy

In the novel, it is not so much that Malone dies as that a mimetic convention concerning the representation of life is terminated or, more precisely, terminally minimalized. Through this reduction of life, Beckettian mimesis is enabled to represent a mode of existence unencumbered by antecedent associations or presuppositions. As the “axioms” (MD 187) and conventions regarding the significance of life are debunked or decomposed, the mimesis of inexistence emerges. But as this state of inexistence is riddled with paradoxes, an intellectual device is required to facilitate analysis of it. The device in question concerns what metaphysics terms “transcendentals,” which determine how we experience what we experience, and thus con-

strain the boundaries and possibilities of subjectivity. But far from mimicking the method of transcendental phenomenology to uncover the functions by which structure is constituted or filled in, Beckettian mimesis, as exemplified in *Malone Dies*, seeks instead to represent the process by which structure and order are drained. The hallmark of Beckettian mimesis is the representation of the process by which consciousness is emptied of the content which inexists in it. The deeper implications of this remarkable evacuation can be explored by reference to the doctrine of the *kenosis* or *evacuatio* (self-emptying). (EPL)

### Restaging Hysteria: Mary Wigman as Writer and Dancer

Laura A. McLary

Mary Wigman was not only a leading proponent of the early twentieth-century Expressionist dance movement, but also a writer of poetry and short poetic prose. Despite her assertion that dance was beyond language, she wrote often about dance in an attempt to articulate the kinesthetic experience of dance through languages. This interdisciplinary study explores the intersection of dance and writing for Wigman, focusing on gender coding in writing and dance within the context of early twentieth-century dialogues. Despite the pervasive equation of (feminine) hysteria with dance and (masculine) subjectivity with authorship, Wigman engaged in both activities. I argue that Wigman is able to reclaim and redefine the "hysteria" of the dance experience through writing about dance. In her dance poetry, the act of looking at herself in a mirror as she dances allows Wigman to circumvent the traditional objectification through the male gaze experienced by the female dancer. Through the act of writing, Wigman asserts her subjectivity, taking control of the out-of-body experience of dance creation. (LAM)

### The Violence of Merging: Unica Zürn's Writing (on) the Body

Caroline Rupprecht

This article is about the work of German Surrealist Unica Zürn (1916-1970), known for her autobiographical text about madness, *Der Mann im Jasmin: Eindrücke einer Geisteskrankheit* (1977). The problem with Zürn's text, as this article demonstrates, is that it becomes nearly impossible to be distinguished from the author's life. Unlike conventional autobiographies, this text raises doubt over the sanity of the author who was not

only diagnosed with schizophrenia but also made madness the subject of her writing. Zürn's companion, the artist Hans Bellmer, accused her of indulging in madness for the sake of being able to write about it; she herself wrote that it was the act of writing that drove her insane. Looking closely at the text, which plays with the differentiation between author, narrator, and character, and with the reader's expectations about the difference between reality and representation, it is not a symptom of mental illness but rather a carefully constructed work of art. Designed to convey the impression that its author is mentally ill, it explores the connection between madness and artistic production to raise questions of interpretation: How true to life is the work of art? How does art mediate or even create our understanding of life?—As this article concludes, Zürn contradicts the postmodern assumption that everything is a text by making extra-textual reality part of her writing, yet she also suggests that texts may become disturbingly real. (CR)

### Surreal and Canny Selves: Photographic Figures in Claude Cahun Gayle Zachmann

In her 1975 essay, *Le Rire de la méduse*, Hélène Cixous enthusiastically announced that it was high time for women to enter into discourse. A full half-century earlier, Claude Cahun (1894-1954), a powerful writer and a haunting photographer and artist, was already inscribing herself, Woman, and a woman's voice in visual and verbal self-portraits, photomontages, prose texts, poetry, and aesthetic and political treatises. Cahun's uncanny interventions in both verbal and visual discourse cannily interrogate conventions of literary and pictorial representation and the constructions of self, gender and culture that they exhibit. Insistently asking readers and spectators, "What's wrong with this picture?," her carnivalesque play with the doxa and the politics of identity, destabilizes not only gender and genre norms, but the boundaries and distinctions between visual and verbal representation. *Surreal and Canny Selves* explores the aesthetic frameworks of writer/artist Claude Cahun. Elucidating how Cahun's questioning of her self and Surrealist representations of woman were part of a much more expansive adventure that questioned more than femininity—the manuscript moves on to trace how and what Cahun's foregrounding of figuration and, more specifically, photographic figuration, might signify for the uncanny aesthetic practices deployed in the hybrid text *Aveux non avenue*. (GZ)