

Abstracts

My American Uncle, America Cries Uncle, and Other Fantastic Tales from France: Iegor Gran's *Jeanne d'Arc fait tic-tac*

Carolyn A. Durham

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's proposal that beliefs about nations often crystallize in the form of stories could serve as both summary and generative matrix for *Jeanne d'Arc fait tic-tac*. In keeping with a number of recent fictional works united by the attempt to understand French and American cultures in a comparative context, the first part of Iegor Gran's clever 2005 novel consists of eleven stories whose common focus on the danger represented by American culture for French national identity makes the second part of the novel, in which France declares war and invades the United States, almost inevitable. In the opening section of *Jeanne d'Arc*, Gran both rewrites the traditional folktale for a self-reflective postmodern age and revises and satirizes the conventions of fantastic literature. The primary comic strategy of the second half of the novel, constructed as a parody of the current American conflict in Iraq, pays homage to the most recent source of tension between the United States and France. Throughout the novel Gran caricatures French chauvinism and insularity as much as he mocks American arrogance and consumerism, and the metaphorical demise of the "oncle d'Amérique," the specifically French version of the American dream, continually reminds us of the sheer power and pleasure of narrative.

Narcissism, Abjection and the Reader(e) of Simone de Beauvoir's *Les Belles Images*

Margaret E. Gray

Discussions of Simone de Beauvoir's last novel, *Les Belles Images* (1966), tend to be in the mode of apology. The characters are shallow—runs the typical claim—the plot (essentially, Laurence's gradual awakening to her own "belle image" identity of feminine clichés as fulfilled wife, devoted mother, successful professional) flimsy and predictable. Yet, in studying a specular dynamic of narcissism and abjection within the novel, we become aware of the discomfiting ways in which our own scorn for Laurence and her world is anticipated by the text. As we attend upon the dismantling of Laurence's "belles images," we are made to witness the undoing of our own narcissism. Along the way, we acquire new understanding of an important aspect of this specular relationship: the novel's slippery use of the pronouns "I" and "she" to refer to Laurence, in an unstable grammar that has confounded critics. These pronouns and their imbrication are only too pertinent, I argue, for the reader's relationship to Laurence, and for the ways in which the reader's "I" sets itself loftily apart from Laurence's "she." Yet, in dismantling the reader's assumptions along with those of Laurence, the text offers each a new way forward, beyond the crippling confines of narcissism and abjection.

Displaced Identities and Traveling Texts in Luisa Valenzuela's *Black Novel (With Argentines)*

Laura R. Loustau

In Luisa Valenzuela's *Black Novel (With Argentines)* Roberta and Agustín, the main characters, cross geographic, physical, psychological, sexual and textual borders in order to regain their own writing space,

one which would allow them to narrate their own past. Themes that include exile, memory, and literary and artistic creations are presented from a theatrical and deterritorialized space. In *Black Novel* the city of New York is the stage where the characters/actors create and mix together space and time coordinates. The intention is to (re)construct the individual memory of the characters, and in a more ample perspective, the collective memory of a society that lived under institutionalized repression. In the processes of (re)constructing memory, the limits of human behavior and the mechanisms of knowledge are questioned.

Rewriting the Writing Mother in Marie Darrieussecq's *Le Bébé*

Claire Marrone

This article studies the innovative maternal portrait in Marie Darrieussecq's *Le Bébé* (2002), the autobiographical story of a mother's first nine months with her newborn son. It also examines how Darrieussecq engages in the riveting debate surrounding maternal creativity. On the one hand, *Le Bébé* is a "success story," one that attests to the victories of the feminist movement. On the other hand, the text examines the new challenges of today's writing mothers. Throughout the work, the "mother as scientist" analyzes her developing child while the nurturing "mom" pens her joys, discoveries, and difficulties. The article concludes that because the researcher is also the mother, and because this marriage of roles in relation to one's own child is somewhat jarring, Darrieussecq achieves a striking and truly contemporary maternal portrait.

Bellmer's Argentine Doll: Alejandra Pizarnik and the Disarticulation of the Self

Melanie Nicholson

This essay argues that Alejandra Pizarnik (Buenos Aires, 1936–72), widely recognized as one of the most important figures of twentieth-century Spanish-American poetry, constructs a poetic self that bears a remarkable resemblance to the dolls of German surrealist sculptor and photographer Hans Bellmer. Both poet and artist portray the doll as a passive and melancholy figure, an object that is often dismembered and otherwise stripped of agency. I examine the distinct implications of such a figure for a male surrealist photographer and a female post-surrealist writer. By means of this comparison—admittedly complicated by vast differences in artistic medium and historical context—I hope to elucidate Pizarnik's construction of the poetic self, in particular her allusions to loss of selfhood through the tropes of doubling, deformation, and fragmentation. The essay concludes that while the doll/mannequin—or more broadly the representation of the immobilized, sometimes disarticulated female body—served for male surrealists like Bellmer as a site for the projection of desire, for Pizarnik it served as a site for the obsessive representation of damaged selfhood.

Corpses and Capital: Narratives of Gendered Violence in Two Costa Rican Novels

Laura Barbas Rhoden

In a region prone to violence and political corruption, Costa Rica has been touted as an ecological paradise, a stable democracy, and an egalitarian society. However, Costa Rican fiction from the late twentieth century contests this idyllic image and presents instead a world of intrigue, violence, and

criminality. *El año del laberinto* (2000) by Tatiana Lobo and *Cruz de olvido* (1999) by Carlos Cortés are two novels that serve as an excellent introduction to developments in postwar fiction and scholarship from Central America. In my analysis, I first situate the novels in the context of Central American cultural and political developments in recent decades and then consider the linking of narrative, gender, and violence in the novels. My study centers on the authors' use of crime to challenge national myths and to deconstruct narratives that have been instrumental in constructing cherished national identities. Of particular importance is the depiction of gendered bodies and the violence practiced upon them, as well as the politics surrounding bodies and violence in national narratives and in the authors' contemporary stories.

Urban Pastoral: Tradition and Innovation in Apollinaire's "Zone" and Rilke's "Zehnte Duineser Elegie"

Eleanor E. ter Horst

Two early twentieth-century poets, Rainer Maria Rilke and Guillaume Apollinaire, create new relationships to literary traditions and thus reconfigure the meanings of modernity. In Apollinaire's "Zone" and Rilke's "Tenth Duino Elegy," the city represents what is most distinctively modern and revolutionary about poetic practice, yet it also provides a link to the literary and historical past. The city in these poems is a site of poetic potentiality, where time is no longer characterized by the rigid separation between past and present, and where space is not geographically delineated. Through the poets' use of metaphor and apostrophe, which create a suspension of time and space, the city becomes a vehicle for the exploration of aesthetic issues, such as the relationship between tradition and innovation in poetic practice.

The modern, urban setting of these poems suggests a break with the past, while their repeated ref-

erences to classical elegy and the pastoral contradict this conception of the modern. Neither rejecting the past nor situating themselves in a linear tradition of poetic descent, both poems point to new models of literary creation, which redefine the poets' relationships with their literary antecedents.

The Realization of a Virtual Past in Günter Grass's *Crabwalk* Paul A. Youngman

In his 1999 Nobel lecture, Günter Grass declares narration to be “a form of survival as well as a form of art.” He sets out to demonstrate this declaration in his latest novella *Crabwalk* (2002), in which he echoes Walter Benjamin's concerns regarding war and information. The twist for Grass, the author who writes exclusively on his Olivetti typewriter, is that he analyzes the Internet as a narrative medium in his most recent work. This paper analyzes *Crabwalk* as a look at various forms of media—oral memories, historical monographs, film, and a website—through which humans narrate the past, in this case the 1945 sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a German KdF (Strength Through Joy) ship, by a Russian U-boat. The last medium, the Internet, is the focus of this paper as it serves as the central means of narrative development, as well as the single medium that inextricably intertwines Grass's “historical reality,” the sinking of the *Gustloff*, with his “fictional reality,” the murder of a “virtual” Jew by an apparently “virtual” Neo-Nazi.

On the Dark Side: Conrad's “The Secret Sharer” and Valenzuela's “La palabra asesino”

Donald L. Shaw

Conrad's famous “The Secret Sharer” and the short story “La palabra asesino” [“The Word ‘Killer’” in its

English translation] by the Argentine Luisa Valenzuela both concern psychological self-exploration and self-discovery, through contact with a killer, a situation which challenges conventional moral standards. It is suggested that a comparison between the two stories may throw reciprocal light on both of them. In each story an act or acts of murder becomes a trigger which sets off a train of psychological events, somewhat different in the two cases. Discussion of the differences highlights the authors' priorities and the significance they attach to the darker side of the human personality. Both stories are highly ambiguous; but the ambiguity serves a different purpose in each case. Conrad is concerned with psychological "doubling"; Valenzuela with exploration of aspects of the human personality which in turn may be related to aspects of Argentina's collective personality as it expressed itself during the "Dirty War." An examination of the different forces in play in the two stories improves our understanding of both.