

RECHERCHE LITTÉRAIRE
LITERARY RESEARCH



Recherche littéraire / Literary Research

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Publié avec le concours de / Published with the support of:
l'AILC / the ICLA et / and the University of Georgia (USA)

En tant que publication de l'Association internationale de la littérature comparée, *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* a comme but de communiquer aux comparatistes du monde entier les développements récents de notre discipline. Dans ce but la revue publie les comptes rendus des livres notables sur les sujets comparatistes, les nouvelles des congrès professionnels et d'autres événements d'une importance significative pour nos membres, et de temps en temps les prises de position sur des problèmes qui pourraient apporter beaucoup d'intérêt. On devrait souligner que RL/LR ne publie pas de recherche littéraire comparée.

Les comptes rendus sont typiquement écrits ou en français ou en anglais, les deux langues officielles de l'AILC. Néanmoins, on pourrait faire quelques exceptions étant donné les limites des ressources à la disposition du rédacteur. En général, un compte rendu prendra une des formes suivantes: des annonces brèves de 500 à 800 mots pour les livres courts ou relativement spécialisés, des comptes rendus proprement dits de 1.200 à 1.500 mots pour les livres plus longs ou d'une portée plus ambitieuse, ou des essais de 2.000 à 3.000 mots portant ou sur un seul ouvrage d'un grand mérite ou sur plusieurs ouvrages qu'on pourrait traiter ensemble. En vue de l'importance des ouvrages collectifs pour accomplir une étude assez large de certains sujets comparatistes, RL/LR acceptera les comptes rendus de recueils d'essais bien organisés, y compris les numéros spéciaux des revues. Nous sommes prêts à publier les comptes rendus un peu plus longs de ces textes quand la situation le demande.

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As a publication of the International Comparative Literature Association, *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* has the mission of informing comparative literature scholars worldwide of recent contributions to the field. To that end it publishes reviews of noteworthy books on comparative topics, information about events of major significance for comparatists, and occasional position papers on issues of interest to the field. It should be emphasized that RL/LR does not publish comparative literary scholarship.

Reviews are normally written in French or English, the two official languages of the ICLA, though exceptions will be considered within the limits allowed by the editor's resources. Reviews generally fall into one of the following three categories: book notes of 500 to 800 words for short or relatively specialized works, reviews of 1,200 to 1,500 words for longer works of greater scope, and review essays of 2,000 to 3,000 words for a work of major significance for the field or for joint treatment of several related works. Given the importance of collaborative work in promoting broad-based comparative scholarship, RL/LR does review well-conceived edited volumes, including special issues of journals, and will publish somewhat longer reviews of such scholarship when the situation merits.

Couverture: / Cover art: "Studies after Kokoschka" courtesy of John Schweppe.

ISSN: 0849-0570 • © 2015 AILC / ICLA

Recherche littéraire Literary Research

Volume 31, Numbers 61–62 (Summer 2015)

TABLE DES MATIÈRES / TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRÉSENTATION DU RÉDACTEUR / EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Dorothy Figueira.....	1
-----------------------	---

ESSAIS / REVIEW ARTICLES

Brian Massumi. <i>What Animals Teach Us About Politics</i> .	
Ronald Bogue.....	3
Elena Gretchanaia, Alexandre Stroeve, Catherine Viollet, dir. <i>La francophonie européenne aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles: Perspectives littéraires, historiques et culturelles</i> .	
Fabrice Preyat.....	12
Jeff Fort. <i>The Imperative to Write: Destitutions of the Sublime in Kafka, Blanchot and Beckett</i> .	
Manorama Trikha.....	25
<i>Rocznik Komparatystyczny / Komparatistisches Jahrbuch. Rocznik komparatystyczny</i> .	
Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Krystyna Wierzbicka-Trwoga.....	33

ESSAIS / REVIEW ARTICLES

Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda, and Barbara Pezzotti, eds. <i>The Foreign in International Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations</i> .	
Péter Hajdu.....	41
Elena Gretchanaia. "Je vous parlerai la langue de l'Europe ...": <i>La francophonie en Russie (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles)</i> .	
John Burt Foster, Jr.....	45

Ignacio Infante. <i>After Translation: The Transfer and Circulation of Modern Poetics across the Atlantic</i> .	
Corina Beleaua.....	47
Dominick LaCapra. <i>History, Literature, Critical Theory</i> .	
Jean Bessière.....	50
Leonardo F. Lisi. <i>Marginal Modernity: The Aesthetics of Dependency from Kierkegaard to Joyce</i> .	
Benjamin Boysen.....	55
Micaela Maftai. <i>The Fiction of Autobiography: Reading and Writing Identity</i> .	
Márcio Seligmann-Silva.....	60
Forest Pyle. <i>Art's Undoing: In the Wake of a Radical Aestheticism</i> .	
Audrey Louckx.....	63
Caroline Rupprecht. <i>Womb Fantasies: Subjective Architectures in Post-modern Literature, Cinema, and Art</i> .	
Kristina Sutherland.....	68
Mihaela Ursa. <i>Identitate și excentricitate: Comparatismul românesc între specific local și globalizare</i> .	
Cătălin Constantinescu.....	73
Iain Bailey. <i>Samuel Beckett and the Bible</i> .	
Carolyn Medine.....	76
Jean Bessière. <i>Inactualité et originalité de la littérature française contemporaine: 1970–2013</i> .	
Amaury Dehoux.....	78
Maurizia Boscagli. <i>Stuff Theory: Everyday Objects, Radical Materialism</i> .	
Massimo Fusillo.....	80
Birgit Däwes and Marc Maufort, eds. <i>Enacting Nature: Ecocritical Perspectives on Indigenous Performance</i> .	
Charles Adron Farris, III.....	83
Wiebke Denecke. <i>Classical World Literatures. Sino-Japanese and Greco-Roman Comparisons</i> .	
Achim Hölter.....	87
Massimo Fusillo. <i>L'object-fétiche: littérature, cinéma, visualité</i> .	
Mounawar Abbouchi.....	90

Michael Mack. <i>Philosophy & Literature in Times of Crisis: Challenging our Infatuation with Numbers.</i>	
Hans Bertens.....	93
Lynn T. Ramey. <i>Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages.</i>	
S. Satish Kumar.....	97
Walter L. Reed. <i>Romantic Literature in Light of Bakhtin.</i>	
E. V. Ramakrishnan.....	100
Yang Huilin. <i>China, Christianity, and the Question of Culture.</i>	
Lee M. Roberts.....	103
Théocharoula Niftanidou. <i>Georges Perec et Nikos-Gabriel Pentzikis: une poétique du minimal.</i>	
Jean Bessière.....	106
Dorothy M. Figueira. <i>Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity.</i>	
Shraddha A. Singh.....	109
Chris Danta. <i>Literature Suspends Death: Sacrifice and Storytelling in Kierkegaard, Kafka and Blanchot.</i>	
Theresa Flemming.....	112
Susannah B. Mintz. <i>Hurt and Pain: Literature and the Suffering Body.</i>	
Jenny Webb.....	115
John Burt Foster, Jr. <i>Transnational Tolstoy: Between the West and the World.</i>	
Charles Byrd.....	120

COMPTES RENDUS DE CONGRÈS / CONFERENCE REPORTS

“Promoting Polish Literature Abroad”	
Amanda C. Fisher.....	123
“Developments in Indian Comparative Literature”	
Sabnam Ghosh.....	128

NOUVELLES DES COMITÉS D’ÉTUDES ET DE RECHERCHE / RESEARCH COMMITTEE UPDATES.....131

NOUVELLES DES COMITÉS / COMMITTEE UPDATES.....143

APPEL À COMMUNICATIONS / CALL FOR PAPERS.....	149
IN MEMORIAM.....	155
PRIX BALAKIAN / BALAKIAN PRIZE.....	156

Here again, she confirms that this book has creative writing students as its ideal readers rather than autobiography scholars. In a kind of public statement, commenting on her own familial quarrels, she affirms: “There is no way to return to the past, and both our understandings of it are necessarily colored by the period between then and now. Even in the present, this present where I am writing, the experience influences the past and is influenced by the past, and how I view it keeps changing. To spend too much energy trying to determine which version is closer to ‘what really happened’ is like a dog chasing its tail: exhausting, pointless, comical” (153).

MÁRCIO SELIGMANN-SILVA

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Forest Pyle. *Art's Undoing: In the Wake of a Radical Aestheticism*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. Pp. 328. ISBN: 9780823251117.

As I took my first steps in the academic world of English language literature, I could not keep myself from thinking that reading, the scholar's ultimate experience, would reveal an inspiring (and uplifting) imaginative journey of understanding. My first encounter with Romantic poetry, however, forced me to reconsider my fervent ingenuousness. Far from endorsing Mark Twain's definition of classics—the praised ones that one never reads—I had to admit that, when faced with texts whose aesthetic nature had been acclaimed for centuries, the sought-after experience of reading somehow unravelled. In some compelling instances, the delicate art of writing became undone, leaving me to ponder the meaning of the aesthetic experience itself. It is just such “crucial moments” (xi) in a scholar's reading experience that Forest Pyle seeks to expose and resolve in *Art's Undoing: In the Wake of a Radical Aestheticism*.

Pyle's major conceptual construct consists in a juxtaposition that might at first seem redundant. Most often associated with nineteenth-century movements praising *l'art pour l'art*, aestheticism in its strictest definition implies a form of sweeping artistic endeavour “result[ing] in the celebration of the judgment or the sensation” (2). Aestheticism, as in other instances when this suffix is used, involves a form of militant devotion. In that sense, aestheticism is radical by nature. Although the ‘avant-garde’ meaning of “radical” emerged at the same period as romanticism, it is not

this sense either that is emphasized by the concept. Instead, Pyle's clever use of the term forcefully serves his deconstructive and performative approach toward aesthetic textual weaving. Moments of radical aestheticism, he argues, prove themselves "extreme enough to *deliver us to the roots* of the aesthetic, its constitutive elements reduced to ashes or to sighs" (xii, emphasis added).

The term "radical"—the act of unearthing roots—might as well describe the organization of the corpus discussed in this monograph. As in a Foucauldian genealogy of what Oscar Wilde called "Our Romantic Movement" (11), Pyle approaches six figures who stand as essential precursors of aestheticism. He finds in Wilde's description of "The English Renaissance of Art" the "historical contours" (11) of the British strain of Romanticism that he considers: Percy Shelley, John Keats, Dante Rossetti, and Wilde himself. To them, he adds Gerard Manley Hopkins and, surprisingly, Emily Dickinson—whose poems, because of their concerns, workings and outcomes, may claim a significant place in the British Romantic Movement. The radical aestheticism of these canonical authors, whom critics praise but might not read (or read well), constitutes for Pyle extreme literary moments "from which one turns away" (19).

The repulsion that radical aestheticism produces affects both readers and critics. It refers "not only to the act of aversion that takes place in response to a textual event," to the "critical *disregard*" with which many critics welcome such events, but also to the "interpretive 'turning'" some other critics might mobilize to "rescue, or redeem the text" (20). Although I am not convinced by the "unique and heroic" nature of the "position of being the one who did not turn away," (19) Pyle's analysis of the functioning and features of radical aestheticism offers a convincing and well-developed theoretical model for a renewed and original understanding of the effects at work in these classical texts.

Although Pyle argues that there is no master rhetorical trope that might define radical aestheticism, he sees in *lyricization* the potentially most precise way of describing its formal and generic dimensions. To this formal characterization, he appends a series of quintessential conditions that have to be met for a text to display radical aestheticism in its content. First, and most importantly, the text must adopt a reflective stance in the form of ekphrastic or meta-artistic discourse. Reflection must bear upon art's interconnection with history or knowledge and upon the "relationship between art's sensuous aspects and its ethical, political or theological responsibilities" (3). Such a meta-discursive approach does not however

constitute radical aestheticism in itself, for in instances of radical aestheticism the “*performance* of [the] aesthetic reflection” *dissociates* art and knowledge by “subsuming the latter to the former” (4). Finally, the text may be said to “*succumb*[...]” to a radical aestheticism when it “*experiences* ‘aestheticization’ as the undoing of any claim to an aesthetic autonomy” (4). Radical aestheticism does not then constitute a positive stance or experience. Pyle’s approach involves radical deconstruction: by uncovering the roots of aesthetics, and such aestheticism invalidates all claims—either common or authorial—usually made in the name of the aesthetic. In Pyle’s colorful style, radical aestheticism corresponds to pseudo-moments in which the text turns into an artistic black hole destroying any possible hope for aesthetic illumination.

These black holes also have the power annihilate the authorial projects at work in these Romantic masterpieces. With the by now customary reference to Barthes, Pyle describes how, in a work of art, crucial moments involving radical aestheticism do undermine an author’s “vocational” or “cultural agency” (17). Such projects do not correspond so much to the author’s intentions as they do to a textual “*animating principle*” (17). While Pyle acknowledges his two main theoretical debts to Marxism and Deconstruction, he proposes a *performative* approach where it is the poem and not the poet who enacts radical aestheticism. Pyle thus outlines the author’s diverse projects to better hasten their downfall through the analysis of a “fundamental crisis” (18) constituted by radical aestheticism. This fundamental crisis is in each chapter enacted through the pairing of the great romantic poets with at least equally classic post-modern and post-structural theoreticians.

In the first chapter, Pyle—borrowing Shelley’s own words—describes Shelley’s project as “wholly political” (29). Shelley’s weaving of aestheticism presents a directed and partisan impulse in which the spirit of aesthetics generates the binding force of universal human love. In instances where such radical aestheticism appears, this universal love takes the form of Benjamin’s aura. As an expression of the work of art’s authenticity, the experience of the aura is always recorded as a “vanishing [...] registered with the shock of something shattered” (43). Pyle describes Shelley’s reliance on radical aestheticism as a double yet open-ended activity: “a rhetorical demystification or dispelling [...] that is accompanied by the image of an incalculable opening” (45) that might well end-up being a total confinement, leaving readers gazing in an “ever-shifting mirror” (57) with no promise of redemption.

The second chapter focuses on the limitations of Keats's poetry as an ethical project. Keats faces conflict between irreconcilables expressed in a performative double bind. Pyle posits that the poet's "turn to the ethical is not represented as an overcoming of the seductions of the aesthetic, but as a succumbing to a radically aestheticized version of the ethical" (69). It is in this vital tendency to sacrifice to aesthetics that one discovers Keats's capital weakness and Pyle draws a parallel to the aesthetic disposition he sees in Barthes's *Paresse*. Keats's ethical impulses may also be mirrored in Barthes's understanding of the artist's morality, which he defines as the inability to access morale. Barthes resolves this inability by devising a "third way," a deconstructive moral stance where one once again is unable to find hope for ethical recovery. According to Pyle, Keats's ethical turn expresses through the reader's encounter with radical aestheticism, "the gift of an all-consuming poetry that bestows us nothing at all" (102).

Chapter 3 focuses on Dickinson's poetry and opens on a most unexpected yet incredibly sensible and well-appointed image. As in the case a computer's binary code, Dickinson's radical aestheticism presents the opposition (and interconnectedness) between zeros and ones, events and machines—"occurrence and structure" (107). The chapter's subtitle "Emily Dickinson, Event-Machine," can be read as the unexpected—almost antinomic—marriage of the New-England poet with French theoretician Jacques Derrida. Pyle's subtitle makes sense given that Pyle interprets Dickinson's project as poetics itself, which, he argues, is exemplified by the abundance of her poetic production and her inordinate number of strong opening lines. Pyle claims that these practices represent a poetics of "eruption and negation" (108) that relies on the event-status of her intriguing opening lines (that Pyle connect with Agamben's "events of language) and the machine-status of the subsequent deflation of mood that characterizes a majority of her poems. This engine powers her poetics—a poetics of absenting, of noughts and zeros. Dickinson's machinery is one that produces events, instances of aesthetic experiences, which "can only be *supposed by*, but not *realized in*, poetry" (142).

Chapter 4, on Hopkins's theological vocation, opens with a challenging rhetorical question regarding the poetics of the sigh. Hopkins's reliance on aesthetic experience is directed toward divine revelation. It is this theological necessity however, Pyle argues, that makes the aesthetic "always bear [...] for Hopkins a burden and a risk" (146). Revealed through stress and strain, the aesthetic—genuine inspiration—"gives rise to a non-fit between the said and the saying" (147). This strain between human intuition and

language is mirrored in the tension between theology and aesthetics. It results, as Pyle explains, in the “emission of a sigh and in the ‘ringing’ of [...] radical aestheticism” (148). Because a sigh is the dangling counterpart of a speech act, Hopkins’s poetry enters the performative, enacting a revelation in which grammar and syntax are suspended. Hopkins, in Pyle’s model, appears to be the poet most strongly opposed to radical aestheticism, since it stands at the exact antipode of what the poet seeks to achieve. If radical aestheticism means that in some textual moments truth is subsumed by art, then Hopkins’s theological vocation of using art as a sensory manifestation of God’s grace becomes void.

The book reaches its climax in Chapter 5. As Pyle himself explains “no artists appears more appropriate than Dante Gabriel Rossetti for inclusion in a study of the aestheticism that emerged in the wake of Romanticism” (171). However, as if enclosed in a deconstructing performativity himself, Pyle rapidly contradicts his claim and argues that Rossetti’s aestheticism might appear too conspicuous to be considered radical. However, it is this conspicuousness, this superficiality—a fact that, according to Pyle, might explain the reason why Rossetti failed to elicit much criticism—which determines Rossetti’s radical aestheticism. Rossetti’s superficiality (his obsession with surfaces) supports his project of turning art, “an escape from temporality and a reminder of death,” (173) into love’s counterpart. Pyle finds in Michael Fried’s concepts of absorption and theatricality a useful critical approach to illuminate Rossetti’s aesthetic radicalism. By seeking to resist theatricality and trigger the reader’s absorption in self-conscious art forms, Rossetti’s depictions appear theatrical, inauthentic, superficial, opposed in essence to love, a notion Pyle further correlates with Žižek’s appropriation of the Lacanian definition of courtly love as the “fundamentally narcissistic” (188) truth of desire.

The book concludes with Wilde, the figure who started it all with his description of the “British Renaissance of Art.” Wilde’s vital tendency, his project, spells out a meta-aestheticism. Pyle explains that his reading of the dandy’s works examines aestheticism “from the point of view of *its point of view*” (210). Indeed, Wilde’s complete dedication to the aesthetic can be described as a point of view that unfolds as an imperative, both a rhetorical position and a pedagogical mission, that Wilde sought to live as his own “extravagance” (210). The term “position” acquires a significant sense in Pyle’s analysis as he considers that Wilde’s extravagance may be described as a “game of over and under” (211). Forever seeking the superior position of art, the poet will always sit under the scope of aestheticism. It is in

Georges Bataille's theory of *dépense* or expenditure that Pyle finds the most felicitous pairing for Wilde's extravagance. Bataille's *dépense* in its aesthetic application glorifies art for art's sake because it has no end beyond itself. An artistic *dépense* rejects the classical principle of utility: it is essentially a "non-productive expenditure" (213), a performative speech act forever associated with extravagance.

More than anything, Forest Pyle's monograph provides an enriching addition to the already large critical literature on Romanticism. Although it is centred on issues that have been subject to significant debate, as shown in his well-informed review of the literature, Pyle's analysis offers a fresh and challenging reading of dense poetic works. His well-structured and accurate engagement with deconstruction and performativity provides sound arguments for a post-modern examination of texts that have too often been relegated to more classical critical frameworks. Pyle's colorful style offers agreeable reading and sustains his central aesthetic theme. As a scholar, Pyle has no cause to envy the poets' witty eloquence, his weaving of arguments sometimes borders on poetry. The volume's lavish illustrations frame the texts' discussion in a multi-media perspective and offer possibilities for further comparative research. And Pyle himself recognizes that radical aestheticism is not limited to poetry and that instances could be found in other genres (written or otherwise). *Art's Undoing* provides a strong piece of criticism backed up by solid theoretical scholarship. It offers a novel approach to poetic works that appeal to all readers' aesthetic sensitivities and hermeneutic judgments. By examining classical texts devoted to the art of beauty with the tools of deconstruction and post-modernism, Pyle shows how art and history, imagination and understanding, do indeed come full circle by the performative magic of hermeneutics.

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Caroline Rupprecht. *Womb Fantasies: Subjective Architectures in Postmodern Literature, Cinema, and Art*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 132. ISBN: 9780810129139.

In *Womb Fantasies*, Caroline Rupprecht examines the use of pregnancy, motherhood, and womb-like spaces in postmodernist art, film, and

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