

making an effort to strike out in new directions. The time surely has come to break the hold of thematic and cultural-historical approaches on critical explorations of responses to the First World War.

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Robert Kiely. *Reverse Tradition: Postmodern Fictions and the Nineteenth Century Novel*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. pp. x, 320. \$34.95.

Yogi Berra's advice, "when you come to a fork in the road take it," applies readily to the literary historian as postmodernist for whom intertextuality is multidirectional and simultaneous and for whom all reading is re-reading. (Berra's "it's *déjà vu* all over again" works pretty well, too.) In Robert Kiely's re-readings, however, what may look like a theoretical move that occludes history turns out to be a strategy for its uncovering. And what seems like a common-sense notion—that literary history is always linear—is revealed as largely a fiction, and one, moreover, that itself defies common sense. We can't help but read backwards; we are always here first: "However hard we may try to apply historical hindsight, we cannot truly read the texts of the past unless we make them our own" (18). It is on this Bloomian/Borgesian foundation ("every writer creates his own precursors"—which B said that?) that Kiely elaborates his intricate, often-brilliant edifice out of what Hans Jauss calls "consciously anachronistic readings" (5).

The readings are a pleasure, each enormously rich in its own unfolding, at the same time gaining density and suggestiveness from the juxtapositions and "times trans-shiftings" in which it is embedded. The argument that generates the pairings and contrasts is very carefully laid out. It is flexible and accommodating, heuristic rather than probative. Indeed, one can still hold on to a more positivist model of chronology and influence (they are not discarded here, rather set aside and deprived of neutrality and transparency) and yet learn a great deal from the readings themselves, for Kiely is an exceptionally deft reader, attuned to text and subtext, to formal details and a text's historical situatedness and allusiveness. What I miss in the theoretical model, however, is sufficient pull from a counter-position, where estrangement and defamiliarization are the operative concepts, which might make problematic so ready an assimilation of the past.

Kiely employs a strategy of reading aimed at discovering the "ideological 'latencies'" in earlier texts in so far as these can be activated by later ones (5). Postmodern fiction becomes a lens through which one can see more clearly the features of certain nineteenth-century texts, especially those that most resisted interpretation within the expectations and assumptions of their own period. The model of intertextuality he proposes privileges reader over writer. It depends on a temporal reversal: the present is prologue to the past. Thus influence has less to do with the writer's relation to her/his materials than with

the reader's access to the text as s/he moves backwards from the subjectivity of the present.

The case studies are exemplary and illustrative, but do not foreclose other pairings. To a degree one could even shuffle the pairs he proposes, using Borges to illuminate Melville as readily as Twain. In the longer first section, "The Old Masters of Postmodernism," Beckett and Borges and Nabokov open up Melville's *Benito Cereno*, Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger*, and Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*. Thus, for example, Borges's "Anglo-Argentinean prisms help release Twain's most dated regional yarns from provincialism"; or, after Beckett, Melville's prose seems "haunted by bleak humors and linguistic self-consciousness that appear contemporary" (35); or, after Nabokov, one can see that for Hawthorne, "the pleasure of the text may lie not in finding solutions but in the freedom to entertain possibilities" (168). Each of the twentieth-century writers in this section is given a chapter that is relatively independent of the argument of retrospective influence that the next chapter will lay out; the Nabokov chapter, for example, sets up an argument in which Nabokov's writing can be seen as a repudiation of Bakhtin. Kiely argues that the interaction of languages for Nabokov is not dialogic but rather a process of mutual interference. What is of interest in the next chapter follows from this, but the discussion there is more precisely focused on the ways in which interpretation is a problem and a game for both readers and characters in Nabokov's fiction and Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*.

As elegant and convincing as the individual discussions are, however, a tension remains between the more general claims and the specific instances. Indeed, as Kiely himself points out, our more attentive/attuned rereading of *Benito Cereno* has as much to do with our post-Civil Rights movement, post-Vietnam positioning as with a newly made literary sensibility. Nonetheless, he does demonstrate how the specific "strategies of resistance" that Beckett explores in *The Unnamable* or *Malone Dies* "exploit impotence by resisting interpretation" (63) and thus provide an access to a similar configuration in *Benito Cereno*. Beckett's territory, "the space between word and thing, despair and detachment" (54), is shown to be Melville's as well.

What makes these "old masters" postmodernists rather than modernists? Chiefly their relation to history: they "seem unintimidated by the nineteenth century"; they display their ahistoricism (20). Yet for all their vaunted indifference to event or occasion, history leaves its trace throughout their writing. For the "New Women Writers Refiguring the Past" addressed in the second section, however, getting at a past that has escaped official histories is a primary preoccupation. Like other postmodern fiction, theirs is concerned with representing representation, but "representations with historical claims and pretensions" (192). This part of the book is more compressed and singly focused: Brontë's *Villette* via Morrison's *Beloved*, Hardy's *The Woodlanders*

through Erdrich's *Tracks*, and Eliot's *Romola* by way of Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. In each instance, the recent text clarifies something essential in its precursor: Erdrich's novel, for example, making it "impossible to ignore [*The Woodlander's*] importance as a political and historical outcry" (242); or Hong Kingston's forcing a reconsideration of the historical importance of Eliot's novel, revealing "a hidden history amid the pomp" (270); and in the subtlest of the three pairings, ghostly discourse that interrupts real history providing the link between *Villette* and *Beloved*, texts that connect as well through the motif of invisibility.

There are many fine and nuanced readings in this section, but overall the retrospective illumination is less sustained here than in the first part, the linkages more a *tour de force* than an inevitable outcome of the argument or the examples. Still, they return one to the texts with a heightened alertness to their formal and ideological features. One starts constructing forking paths of one's own in the vast Borgesian library of possibilities, for it is a truth universally acknowledged—when you come to a fork in the road, take it.

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Patrick D. Morrow. *Katherine Mansfield's Fiction*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Popular Press, 1993. pp. ii, 158. \$29.95, \$10.95 pb.

In *Dreams of Speech and Violence: The Art of the Short Story in Canada and New Zealand* (1987), W. H. New argues that "the problem, in writing a history of New Zealand fiction, is Katherine Mansfield" (113): should one regard her as a British writer or as a New Zealand writer, and where does she fit in a study of postcolonial literature? Many critics, he suggests, are severely limited by their "ignorance of colonial literary practice" (130) and by their tendency instead to rely on fashionable critical approaches. Moreover, in their attempts to underscore certain aspects of her work, these critics often blur the ambiguities of Mansfield's puzzling self-definitions. New, along with others such as Andrew Gurr and Linda Hardy, thinks of Mansfield as an expatriate writer, ambivalent about her New Zealand roots.

Patrick Morrow, in *Katherine Mansfield's Fiction*, initially appears to share New's frustration with current Mansfield criticism, and particularly with the scarcity of "exact and in depth" readings of her stories (2). Morrow's own approach emphasizes "precision rather than generalisation" (135) and a refusal to iron out internal contradictions as they emerge in individual stories. This strategy is evident in the shifting focus of the book—Morrow does not seek overall patterns or forced conclusions—and in the variety of labels Morrow uses for the writer herself (Mansfield, KM, Kass, Katherine). His aim, he states, is instead to "give the reader an idea and a feeling for the kinds of textures and issues that KM stories have" (2). This declared strategy will