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## NEW READINGS

*New Readings* is a collection of working papers presented by scholars from universities across Britain at the School of European Studies, University of Wales, Cardiff over the past academic year. The papers were given by postgraduates in the latter stages of their research and by lecturers at the beginning of their careers. The speakers were invited to give papers on a theme relating to European literature, culture and critical theory. As well as providing a forum for scholars, *New Readings* aims, therefore, at furthering the development of interdisciplinary approaches to literary and cultural studies. The editors hope that such a publication will contribute to the dialogue between researchers working on a wide range of European languages and literatures.

As the first volume in this annual series, the present collection of papers is intended to be introductory. It includes essays addressing a variety of themes. The first three papers are concerned with issues surrounding the city and civic identity. Claire Honess and Steven Milner focus on the construction of a collective self in medieval and Renaissance Italian societies respectively. Both papers attempt to define notions of inclusion and exclusion by looking at the uses of urban spaces and the evolution of a civic rhetoric. Sabine Jaccard continues to concentrate on urban spaces but focuses on the city as a locus of memory, particularly in relation to World War Two. In the last paper in this volume, Giuliana Adamo examines notions of rhetoric from Aristotle to Genette in order to define the elements which constitute the beginnings and the endings of the modern novel.

Claire Honess looks at the notion of the city that informs Dante's imagery and the ethical system he advocated in the *Divine Comedy*. The paper begins by setting out Dante's perception of the city as the essential unit of civilization to which all human beings naturally aspired. If the city was seen by Dante as the ideal human environment, then conversely that which lay beyond the city's walls was seen as the negation of the basic human need for community; to be exiled from the city was to be forced to occupy a barbarous locality and therefore to experience a diminution of one's very humanity.

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In the light of these reflections, the paper explores some of the implications of Dante's banishment from Florence and gives a reading of the opening canto of the *Commedia* where Dante the pilgrim finds himself alone in the dark wood. His journey through the three realms of the dead is seen as a symbolic return to the city from exile. Honess shows then how the *Inferno* is structured in a way that recalls a medieval Italian city, while at the same time constantly proving to be a grotesque parody of a civic entity. Dante's Hell disrupts the normal rules governing what is considered inside and outside; it is a walled wilderness whose inhabitants are characterized by their bestial behaviour. The paper concludes by looking at the garden, a space portrayed as idyllic in the *Commedia* but which, because it lies between the city and nature, is significantly a transitional locus.

Stephen Milner argues that language should be considered as a socio-historical phenomenon which plays an active part in the power relations of a given period. He suggests that all types of language carry within them indications of how societies function. Widening the definition of what constitutes the political to include all writings which address the reality of social interaction, he examines the orations pronounced in the *volgare* at civic occasions by officials in early fifteenth-century Florence. Milner charts the rise in the importance of rhetoric over the period and the key role that it played both in producing and confirming a civic ideology.

While acknowledging that life for the average Florentine in the Quattrocento consisted largely in protecting personal interests and in manipulating various spheres of influence, his paper shows how civic orations served to articulate ideal conceptualizations of social harmony. The conflation of the private and public proposed in the orations played a part in strengthening the city's republican ideology and keeping at bay the ever present threat of different factions competing violently for advantage. His paper goes on to explore more specific examples of this type of rhetorical practice. The notion of justice and social responsibility posited by these speeches is examined as is the manner in which they can be used to show how the Florentines of the period perceived themselves and sought to forge a collective identity.

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Sabine Jaccaud's paper, 'Urban Memory in Germany: The City as Trace of History in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* and Wim Wenders' *Der Himmel Über Berlin* is an exploration of the post-modern city as a locus of memory. It begins with a discussion of how modernist and post-modernist critics and architects have understood the relationship between architecture and history. Jaccaud then goes on to analyze the ways in which previously deleted and marginalized memories of a German past are reintroduced as central concerns within urban spaces in two German texts of the 1970s and 1980s.

Wolf's text focuses on the working process of memory as a female protagonist returns to her childhood town, triggering off wartime memories which cannot be accessed through rational means or documented sources. Confronting individual and collective memories of the past helps the narrator to accept her involvement in an historical continuum which culminated in Auschwitz. The process of remembering also helps her to reaffirm her commitment to opposing the potential repetition of such events in the present. Jaccaud's reading of Wenders' *Der Himmel Über Berlin* further develops the notion of the city as a repository of historical traces of the past. Using Wenders' own comments on his film and contextualizing his work within the artistic and political project of New German Cinema of the 1960s, Jaccaud discusses how *Der Himmel Über Berlin* presents Berlin in 1987 as an urban space which problematizes the absence of historical landmarks and the repression of past histories, both personal and collective. For Jaccaud, both Wolf and Wenders illustrate the importance of a quest for appropriate means of making the past present, and thereby countering any notion that history is out of reach or may never have happened.

The concluding paper of the collection is entitled 'Beginnings and Endings of Novels'. Giuliana Adamo begins by discussing the methodological difficulties she has encountered in defining those features embedded within the structure of the opening and the concluding sections of novels. The beginning of the text serves the important function of creating the reader's expectations of the forthcoming text. Yet the means by which it does so often elude definition. In order to codify the strategies upon which novels rely, Adamo looks at the rules established by classical theorists, such as

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Aristotle, for the initial and final parts of an extended piece of rhetoric. Working on such rules as these theorists supply, she looks at their development in the Middle Ages. The observations that she makes about the ways in which medieval rhetoricians considered openings and closures are substantiated by textual examinations of the openings of *Le Roman de Tristan* and Rabelais' *Gargantua*. Adamo sees classical and medieval theories on rhetoric as important anticipations of later formalist thinking on language. Further, she interprets the modern novel as a form which replicates structures present in texts written before the birth of the genre. In the final section of the paper, Adamo moves on from her examination of past theory to discuss current thinking on narratology. She develops her own model of the ways in which novels address the circumstances of narration and she proposes, in schematic form, the typologies for beginnings and endings of novels that she has identified.

Subsequent issues of *New Readings* will continue to focus upon themes or subjects central to current developments in European studies. The October 1996 edition will be devoted to questions of autobiography and subjectivity. The volume, 'Figures of the Self', will be comprised of papers by Julia Dobson (Wolverhampton) on Hélène Cixous, Eric Robertson (RHBNC) on Jean Arp, Duncan Large (Swansea) on Nietzsche, Ursula Tidd (Salford) on Simone de Beauvoir and Katia Pizzi (Kent) on writers from Trieste. The third volume of the series for publication in 1997 will be entitled 'Writers and War' and the editors invite abstracts for papers on this theme from postgraduates and recently appointed lecturers working on any area of European literature and culture.

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