
Introduction

Contributions to the second volume of *New Readings* are centred on the theme of 'Figures of the Self' and as such deal primarily with autobiographical writings and the construction of the authorial self. Studies on identity, narrative and autobiography have been at the forefront of much innovative work in European literary criticism in recent years as critics have reviewed the generic conventions governing representations of the self. Developments in postmodernist theory and practise and the influence of critics, such as Philippe Lejeune, have led to a more complex concept of the self in writing as a site intersected by discourses of race, gender, class and sexuality. Papers in this collection deal with some of the issues which arise from such re-evaluations of the figure of the self.

Firstly, all the papers in this volume make it clear how writing the self takes place across a variety of forms; from Jean Arp's poetry and sculpture to Hélène Cixous' theatre and Stelio Mattioni's novels. This generic cross over relates to another important thematic running through the papers which is the notion of borders and the impact of geographic, linguistic and cultural meetings in the creation of a narrative self. A number of the papers are also concerned to theorise such cross overs in terms of the relationship between the self and Other; the dialogue between the reader/spectator and an authorial persona. Finally, all the papers deal, to varying degrees, with the ethical implications of writing the self and the ways in which questions of form mould or determine the political and historical dimensions of texts.

The first paper, '*Telling the Truth in Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiography*', discusses Beauvoir's relationship to living and writing the self in her many autobiographical texts. Ursula Tidd explores Beauvoir's concern to 'tell all', to record the details of her life, as she attempts to make her experiences intelligible both to herself and others. By looking closely at Beauvoir's statements of narrative intent, Tidd develops a reading

of Beauvoir's autobiographical project based on a concept of testimony.

Tidd elaborates a reading of testimony centred on a notion of a juridical pledge of truth. Her theoretical framework leads her to focus on the ethical dimension of the writing project. From this point of departure, Tidd examines the confessional mode in Beauvoir's writing which she sees as bound up in Western androcentric models of autobiography, often hostile to women writers.

Yet Tidd is always aware of the mediated nature of the autobiographical form and the evolution in Beauvoir's attitude towards her texts. In the last section of her article, she focuses on the changes in Beauvoir's autobiographical project; from the writer's desire for self totalisation to her awareness that she could only ever produce an account of her life, abandoning a chronological approach in her later works in favour of a more overtly thematic presentation of the self. For Tidd, Beauvoir's narratives end by not 'telling all' in terms of a mimetic reality but rather producing a narrative of experience committed to an ethical model of living and writing about the self.

Julia Dobson's *The Staging of the Self: the Theatre of Hélène Cixous* is an exploration of the representation of subjectivity and the figure of the authorial self in the theatre of Cixous. The article begins by analysing Cixous' critique of Western cultural practices and the ways in which notions of alterity and difference are suppressed in favour of hierarchised binary oppositions. Drawing on Cixous' contributions to *The Newly Born Woman* and other theoretical essays, Dobson discusses Cixous' interest in theatre as a medium for investigating notions of plurality and otherness, allowing for the representation of a suppressed female subject.

Dobson focuses particularly on Cixous' later plays, such as *The Indiad or the India of dreams* and *The terrible but unfinished story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia*, as attempts to reformulate intersubjective relationships and as a progressive move from the self towards the Other. However, she sees that Cixous' use of recent historical narratives, such as the partition of India, as allegories about the danger of

the intolerance and repression of the Other result in a discourse which irons out difference and does not address political and historical specifics. For Dobson, Cixous fails to represent alterity successfully in these plays because the Other is recuperated by a homogenising authorial presence.

The tensions between Cixous' use of the theatre as a privileged site for the Other and the dominance of an authorial self is investigated more fully in one of Cixous' latest plays, *The Story (that we will never know)*. Focusing on a thirteenth-century Icelandic poet and his quest to write a narrative of vengeance and murder for the gods, the play presents the staging of the scene of writing itself and the dramaticisation of the writing self. Dobson analyses this play to see how Cixous' theatre has moved away from asserting the importance of a narrative of alterity towards a representation of the Other as a means of exploring and redefining the authorial self.

The third paper, Eric Robertson's '*Hans Jean Arp: Text and Image*', focuses on the creative plurality which informs not only Arp's work but also his identity as a 'strasbourgeois' with cultural and linguistic ties to both France and Germany. Robertson examines the ways in which Arp's texts, sculpture and poetry combine to form a literary and artistic aesthetic which has its roots in the border town status of Strasbourg.

Robertson begins by looking at Arp's anti-rationalism and his connections to the Surrealist movement in Paris and the Zurich Dada group. Arp's desire to play down or conceal the personal in his work, as well as any unmediated reference to the outside world, is linked by Robertson to Arp's interests in the 'the law of chance'. Experimenting with different materials for his painting and sculptures, Arp foregrounds the creative possibilities of external forces in moulding his work.

Robertson charts the development of such thinking in Arp's poems and prose texts which undermine stylistic and syntactic norms with their random word association and a personal mythology of icons which are recycled in his visual, as well as textual output. For Robertson, such links show that Arp is experimenting with the rewritable quality of his literary and artistic work, giving precedence to the process of creation rather

than the notion of a definitive and superior version. Arp's later work would develop this emphasis on the process of creation by privileging not only the production but also the decomposition of his work; the death of the picture.

Robertson ends by looking at the cross over between the visual and the textual as Arp's pictures use text to produce works which hover between painting and writing, while his poems use the polarities of black and white to explore the despair he felt as a native of Alsace during World War Two. Caught between cultures, Arp's creative self oscillates between geographic, linguistic and generic borders.

In her paper Katia Pizzi begins by looking at the peculiar geography of the Italian city of Trieste. The city is at a crossroads between Italy, the former Yugoslavia and the German speaking world. A knowledge of the precariousness of borders pervades Triestine identity and is central to the work of the many writers that the city has produced. Pizzi looks at the way in which the notion of *Triestinità* (belonging to Trieste) translates into autobiographical writing. She alludes to early twentieth-century writers such as Gianni Stuparich and Scipio Slataper and examines the autobiographical elements within the works of the internationally famous Italo Svevo. She traces the journeys that Svevo's figurations undertake through the physical locality and the society of Trieste as they attempt to resolve obsessive existential problems.

Having presented a tradition of writing about the self and the city, Pizzi then discusses the novel, *Il richiamo di Alma (Alma's Call)*, by the contemporary writer Stelio Mattioni. She looks at the autobiographical protagonist's search for the mysterious female figure of the title. She shows how a notion of personal identity is inseparable from an idea of place by revealing how the protagonist's search through the streets of Trieste leads him to undertake a parallel metaphysical journey through his own mind and obsessions. To find an elusive centre to Trieste is to reach an understanding of the curious construction of a Triestian literary self.

Duncan Large begins his paper by looking at the way in which different philosophers, from Heidegger to Derrida, have raised the question of the

identities Nietzsche assumes in his writings. Large points both to the plurality of masks that Nietzsche has professed to wear and refers to his creation of a 'fantastic genealogy'. The main focus of the paper is on the importance of one of Nietzsche's most important alter-egos, Copernicus.

Attention is drawn to the significant emphasis that Nietzsche places on certain features of Copernicus's biography; his rebellion against the prevalent theocratic order, the iconoclastic nature of his findings and the resistance which greeted his discoveries. The degree and complexity of the self-projection that underlies Nietzsche's admiration for Copernicus is made clear. Above all, however, Large explores Nietzsche's contention that the radical implications of Copernicus's discoveries were ignored by natural scientists and that he alone was prepared to confront the nihilism to which Copernicus's discoveries pointed. It is at this stage that the paper introduces another figure with whom Nietzsche identified as a thinker determined to deconstruct what appears as self-evident, Roger Joseph Bosovich.

The paper ends by discussing how, beyond the nature of their intellectual achievements, Copernicus and Bosovich were important to Nietzsche as examples of a highly subjective notion of Polish national identity. The way in which a claimed Polish ancestry enables Nietzsche to situate himself outside a German intellectual tradition is explored, as are the racist implications of his anti-German polemics. It is on the tensions between the competing nationalities of Nietzsche's figures of the self that the paper concludes.

The third volume of *New Readings* will examine the issue of writers and war. Contributions will include papers by Terry Bradford (University of Leeds) on peace and love in the work of Raymond Jean, Joanna Stevens (University College, Dublin) on Calvino and the war years, Helen Jones (University of Central Lancashire) on conflict in the work of East German writers, Helmut Schmitz (University of Warwick) on the presence of the past in the novels of Hanns Josef Orteil and Rainer Emig (University of Cardiff) on post/modernist writers and war. Subsequent volumes of *New Readings* will focus on diaries and letters and a conference on such a theme will take place in April 1997.

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