Christian Moraru 2005: *Memorious Discourse: Reprise and Representation in Postmodernism*. Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson UP. 282 pp. ISBN 0-8386-4086-9.

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As one of the contributors to Theo D'Haen and Hans Bertens's *Liminal Postmodernisms* points out, contemporary fiction, and we could safely apply this to other cultural productions, has become markedly 'belated', featuring intertextuality in all its guises: " . . . reworking, translation, adaptation, displacement, imitation, forgery, plagiarism, parody, pastiche" (Connor 1994: 79). Far from interpreting this phenomenon as a symptom of cultural exhaustion, in the last two decades literary critics have stressed literature's ability to replenish itself and revitalise literary tradition through retelling.

It is true that the notion of authorship underlying contemporary aesthetics still relies on the principles of "authority, authenticity and originality" (Randall 2001: 56-57). If the author were dead, Randall insists, plagiarism would not be a codified crime. However, the content of the attributes of authorship has proved to be culturally contingent. As the emergence of postcolonial and women's literature has shown, many authors have been granted the authority to be considered so. The notion of originality is now regarded as a Romantic utopia. Significantly, even Romantic proponents of the creative genius such as Coleridge have come under suspicion of plagiarism, their work being a constant source of dispute (52). Indeed, the fabric of culture is too closely-woven, its fibres too tangled, for the claim to originality to be legitimate and the search for origins to be successful.

T.S. Eliot's assertion that a poet may be at his best and most individual not when he shifts away from tradition, but precisely when "the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" in his work (1980: 14) is exceedingly relevant, given the current proliferation of texts that overtly rewrite previous works while preserving their autonomy. In fact, we may be witnessing a return to the Renaissance notion of "good imitation" (Randall 2001: 36). Both Medieval and Renaissance aesthetics relied on a restricted notion of authority, according to which the original inventors and hence the only repositories of truth and wisdom were the ancients. The difference between these two periods was that, whereas for Medieval arts copying, compiling or, at the most, commenting on the classics were the only tasks left to do, the Renaissance shifted the notion of copying to imitation. Good imitation, or non-slavish transformation of the model, which was enriched and surpassed, became the measure for creativity. In contemporary aesthetics, the creative genius may well amount to a gift for source transformation, rather than inspired invention.

The last two decades have witnessed the publication of a substantial number of scholarly works dealing with the prominence of fiction that engages past fiction in an overt manner. These works aim to explore the complex phenomenon of re-production

in literary production, which entails describing the types of connections established between texts, and, more importantly, what these connections reveal about the texts involved. David Cowart's *Literary Symbiosis:The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing* (1993) is emblematic of this scholarship. Cowart, a pathfinder in this field, distinguishes between symbiotic and parasitic attachments. In symbiotic relations, both the hypertext and the intertext benefit from the interaction, "enhance[ing] or modify[ing] each other" (9). The new text presents some kind of "thematic or formal evolution" (26). Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, an often quoted example of rewriting, is a perfect symbiont in Cowart's sense.

The editors of *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film* (Onega and Gutleben 2004) use an optical metaphor instead of a biological trope to describe the same writing practice. Onega and Gutleben argue for the need to abandon old paradigms of intertextuality because they rely on a "hierarchical" (9) notion of literary influence and insist on the mutuality of the exchange. Another ramification of their argument is their critique of reductive interpretations of rewriting as ideological revision or writing back. In his contribution to the volume, Hillis Miller elaborates on this idea by claiming that film remakes and rewritings of Victorian novels point to continuity between contemporary culture and the one represented in our literary heritage (135). The writing back approach is in fact the trend in works engaging with postcolonial rewrites, such as Judie Newman's *The Ballistic Bard:Postcolonial Fictions* (1995), which belongs to an early stage in the development of rewriting scholarship. More recent works, like *African Fiction and Joseph Conrad:Reading Postcolonial Intertextuality* (2005), are along the lines of Onega and Gutleben.

Current approaches to literary re-production tend to surpass the model that Harold Bloom articulated in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). Bloom's version of intertextuality is hierarchical, non-referential and relies on a very limited literary canon. Yet it is still applicable to alleged cases of unacknowledged influence. *Unflinching Gaze: Morrison and Faulkner Re-Envisioned* (Kolmerten, Ross and Wittenberg 1997) is a study of influence in the Bloomian vein. The contributors to this volume aim to uncover Faulknerian resonances in the work of Toni Morrison, despite and probably due to the latter's ambivalent denial of any indebtedness.

Christian Moraru is another pathfinder in the complex field of intertextuality. His *Rewriting* (2001) is an excellent companion to Cowart's *Literary Symbiosis*, although Moraru's examination of this practice is more comprehensive and systematic. Moraru pinpoints the notion of rewriting, which has so far been loosely formulated. He describes it as narratively "intensive", given its overtness, and ideologically "extensive" (xii), for it goes beyond literary territory into various cultural, ideological and political narratives and issues in the present. In this volume Moraru uses his intensive-extensive model of rewriting to examine a wide range of postmodern American writers including E. L. Doctorow, Robert Coover, Ismael Reed, Kathy Acker, Mark Leyner and Bharati Mukherjee, to cite some. Moraru highlights their engagement in a revision of the myth-laden nineteenth century works of Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Alger, Stowe, Thoreau, Twain and others. *Rewriting* has been followed, somewhat belatedly, by the publication of *Memorious Discourse* (2005). In his latest volume to date, Moraru brings the notion of postmodern representation to the foreground. The author acknowledges in his

Prologue that the new work "backtracks" (19), having a less precise focus than *Rewriting*, which centred on specific acts of re-presentation. In this introductory chapter Moraru analyses the conflicting paradigms of origination and reprise, taking issue with the Romantic notion of the author as "originating genius", and adhering instead to a Barthian aesthetics of relatedness in which authors become nonchalant scriptors: " . . . what the scriptor does to his or her precursors, to the textual archive generally, his precursors have done to theirs, and so on, ad infinitum" (16). Moraru uses the metaphor of *memorious discourse* to highlight the logic of relatedness inherent in postmodern aesthetics. He acknowledges his debt to Borges's story 'Funes el memorioso', which features a character with a prodigiously sprawling memory (21-22). This trope shapes the volume, which otherwise has a rather loose structure. Elsewhere in the Prologue, Moraru takes up arguments introduced in *Rewriting*, namely the critical relevance of postmodern representation, its creative potential, or the dichotomy modern/postmodern. Regarding the latter, Moraru draws a sharp contrast between both periods, arguing that the moderns, "heirs" to the romantics, live in a "culture of originals" (16). Even if it is true that relatedness is not as central to modernist aesthetics as to postmodernism, the theory of literary relationships that Eliot develops in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' prefigures poststructuralist theories of intertextuality.

In *Memorious Discourse* Moraru discuses contemporary writers and thinkers from Vladimir Nabokov, Eva Hoffman and Toni Morrison to Emmanuel Lévinas and Derrida, among others. The volume charts five areas in recent theory and fiction through which issues of representation are explored: lifewriting, onomastics, the posthuman, reality versus fiction, and the sublime. The volume consists of five chapters revolving around the Borgesian trope of memorious discourse. Moraru seldom discusses novelists at great length or engages in close readings; he gives breadth preference over depth in his literary analysis, dealing with a wide array of authors and works. His literary criticism has encyclopaedic proportions and establishes a constant dialogue with literary theory. Such theoretical propensity is in keeping with the author's extensive background in theory and comparative literature.

Chapter I 'Time, Representation and Postmodern Memory' puts forward the hypothesis of the 'postmemoir': recollection in life narratives is analogous to intertextuality. Postmemoirs are not only "memorial", as may be expected, but "memorious", too (31). Moraru illustrates this idea through an analysis of Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* and Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*. In these postmemoirs the authors represent themselves through the life narratives of others, which causes a breach of autobiography's self-referential expectations. In her narrative Hoffman echoes Mary Antin's autobiography *The Promised Land* (1912) and Henry Adams's *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), both narratives of Americanization, but at the same time transcends her predecessors, who lived in a less complex America (74). Nabokov, Moraru claims, writes his life through Proust's autobiographical novel *Remembrance of Things Past* and draws on Proust's aesthetic treatment of time (46). This chapter closes with an exploration of David Antin's poetry, namely *Talking at the Boundaries* (1976) and *What it Means to be Avant-garde* (1991). Antin's "multi-genre strategy of

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recollecting intertextually" (76) in his poems fits Moraru's argument insofar as the poet constructs his poetic self through recourse to the stories of others.

Chapter II, 'Naming, Representing: Postmodern Onomastics' focuses on what Moraru considers a neglected area of criticism, the importance of names and naming in postmodern fiction. Moraru claims that postmoderns exploit the intertextual potential of names more fully and inventively than other writers. In the hands of authors like DeLillo, Acker or Morrison, names become intertexts that speak of other "fictions, fables, texts" (103). In his 'onomastic tour de force', *Ratner's Star*, DeLillo foregrounds the arbitrariness of names due to their constant deferral of meaning. His scientists and scholars ponder on the "unspeakability" of names and numbers, which endlessly lead to other names and numbers (111). Whereas the signified of DeLillean names remains irretrievable, authors like Acker and Morrison put onomastics to the service of their specific gender and race agendas. Both authors give voice to those who have always been the object of naming, yet never the naming subjects. Acker appropriates literary names in order to interrogate the power relations and gender ideologies inherent in those intertexts. Moraru analyses her onomastic practice in *Don Quixote, Which Was a Dream*, as well as the onomastic theory she develops in the essays 'Seeing Gender' and 'On Delany the Magician' from her anthology *Bodies of Work*. That Morrison takes issue with onomastics in her fiction is not surprising, given the importance of naming in the history of African-Americans. Naming is a central issue in *Song of Solomon*, where characters reflect on the histories of oppression underlying slave naming, choose certain names because they find them empowering, or try to piece together the histories hidden behind place names. The discussions of literary texts in this chapter are interwoven with allusions to theoretical works by thinkers who have pondered on similar issues, such as Foucault's *The Order of Things* (103), Lévinas *Proper Names* (92), Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* (92) and *On the Name* (88), or Plato's *Cratylus* (119).

As the meridian of the volume is reached by Chapter III, 'Remembering the Posthuman: Intimations of Heterogeneity', the sense of focus begins to falter. This is probably inevitable, given the breadth of the concept that holds the chapters together – postmodern representation. Moraru links the new chapter to the previous one by contextualizing the crisis of naming within the discourse of posthumanism, which is markedly intertextual. The chapter begins with an analysis of Pynchon's technological dystopia, *Gravity's Rainbow*, read alongside Derrida's nuclear criticism and Heidegger. While alluding briefly to the memoriousness of the Zone as megatext (138), Moraru focuses on the status of ethics in a society dehumanised by technology, concluding that the openness and unreadability of Pynchon's text functions as a redeeming *poiesis* in the Heideggerian sense (144). In the next section, Moraru discusses three "posthuman fables" (145) which depict posthuman transformations through intertextuality with previous texts, also preoccupied with the crisis of the human. Roth rewrites Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in *The Breast*, McElroy rewrites Beckett's *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* in *Plus*. In *Et Tu, Babe*, 'text-building' becomes 'body-building'. Leyner turns his writer protagonist into a 'hypermale' with grafted muscles and tattooed organs in order to show how consumerism and celebrity culture dehumanize authorship (155).

This chapter closes with a rather irrelevant comparison between DeLillo's *White Noise* and Gibson's *Neuromancer*, through which Moraru aims to highlight the

overlapping concerns of mainstream postmodern fiction and less established genres like cyberpunk. This contrast proves more useful as an introduction to Chapter IV "'The Collapse of Distance': Ontological Frameworks and Enframing Games for a Disenchanted World' in which Moraru takes a closer look at the ontology underlying the postmodern model of reality. The author adheres to Brian McHale's claim that postmodernism effects an ontological turn away from modernism's epistemological concerns. Having established this, Moraru goes on to reinforce his thesis about the political potential of postmodern representation through a scrutiny of Baudrillard's and Lyotard's classical texts. In keeping with his penchant for linking writers and theoreticians, Moraru locates this ontological break in Nabokov's story 'The Assistant Producer' (1943), where real life plagiarizes fiction (182). Moraru credits Nabokov with eroding the boundary between fiction and reality more conspicuously than before, and insightfully links this writer with Borges, whose Funes story was written around the same time as Nabokov's. Moraru comments briefly on other Borgesian stories which pose similar ontological questions – 'Tlön', 'Death and the Compass', 'The Theme of the Traitor' (193). The memorious character of postmodern representation therefore, lies not only in texts that speak of other texts, but of life as well.

Chapter V 'Representation, Unreadability, Intertextuality: Reading the Postmodern Sublime' contrasts the traditional definition of the sublime as non-referential, pure presentation or presentation of the unpresentable, with the postmodern sublime epitomized by the aesthetic of DeLillo and others. The postmodern sublime, Moraru argues, thrives on the logic of relatedness, which, far from precluding meaning, "brings the represented world closer and dis-closes it to us" (200). The 'sublimity' of the postmodern resides precisely in its attempt to "communicate the uncommunicable". This results in a challenge to readers and, Moraru suggests, "a new literacy altogether" (205). In the 'Epilogue: Authors in Debt', Moraru takes up the notion of the author introduced in the Prologue, which closely links authorship with indebtedness. More importantly, here Moraru qualifies and updates the notion of relatedness, claiming that cultural exchange is not only growing at an unprecedented rate in our global age, but is becoming increasingly cross-cultural (225). This tendency is illustrated by the work of Lee Siegel, an author keen on portraying dialogues between the East and West by means of intermingling narratives. Siegel's second novel, *Love in a Death Language* (1995) reprises *Lolita*, Philip Roth's novels and the *Kamasutra*. Moraru ends his volume on a congratulatory note, praising authors like Siegel and most postmoderns for helping "sew the world together", not as homogenizing agents, but as "testimonies of otherness, of textual and cultural difference" (234). The book's final section encourages a postcolonial approach to intertextuality, linking relatedness and otherness.

As I pointed out above, the volume's main pitfall is its miscellaneous nature. The indefiniteness of its main focus, the logic of relatedness inherent in postmodern aesthetics, allows the author to raise a wide array of topics ranging from autobiography to onomastics and the sublime. Moraru's writing style often mirrors his subject matter, for he tends to juxtapose and coordinate sentences in a cumbersome manner. The repetition of the French idiom *à la* – *à la* Eco, *à la* Derrida – throughout the volume is idiosyncratic. It is true that the author's linguistic creativity, by which the term

intertextuality becomes the more evocative 'memoriousness', spices up the reading, yet this trait sometimes verges on self-indulgence.

Memorious Discourse is intended for readers concerned with poststructuralist literary theory, postmodern American fiction, and with the current debate over authorship. The book is a welcome contribution to the study of literature as a discourse which can no longer be viewed as either inspirational or imitative.

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