Raymond Olderman's "The New Consciousness and the Old System," reminds us of *Gravity's Rainbow's* debt to the sixties, the conflict between freaks and straights, authoritative systems of explanation vie with revelation, outside pieces of information. Freed from bondage to a single perspective, freak consciousness shoots light through the threats of totalitarian control. Olderman notes that this "light of revelation" is present from the very first pages and bears the tidings of a new planetary consciousness that may yet have time to flower.

It is by now clear that the text of *Gravity's Rainbow* is itself a zone of intertextuality made possible by war, and by wars for information, which reveal that man has constructed systems of development and destruction far more terrifying than the chaos of the world before human civilization. The menace of this "ordering" is studied in Charles Russell's "Pynchon's Language: Signs, Systems and Subversion." Russell makes the point that, "The initial step toward freedom is to view all institutions and behavior as concealed languages, as systems of signification. It is necessary, in effect, to discover the ideology of everyday life, to recognize the patterns of control that we live by" (p. 265). The danger, of course, is that this attention itself becomes routinized in the pressing need to trace all the connections before it is too late.

The apparent agreement we have made with society regarding the conventional reality display is brought into question during any reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*. As these essays demonstrate, Pynchon takes writing out of the academy, away from literature itself as we have known it. He calls attention to that which is intended to disappear in the consumption of products and values. This is the knowledge that we are signs among others. We can perhaps never know who controls the system, but that is because power is everywhere, that is to say in the sign, whether it be the formulae of science or the codes in the street. William S. Burroughs, to whom Pynchon owes so much, evoked this paranoid alertness to everything by: "So I am a public agent and don't know who I work for, get my instructions from street signs, newspapers and pieces of conversation I snap out of the air the way a vulture will tear entrails from other mouths" (William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, [New York: Evergreen, 1967], p. 31).

Knowing in time has become a grotesque computability, finally the countdown to launch, and the dreaded desire for the convulsive beauty of the spasm war. Absolute violence and absolute security merge and are, in fact, death itself. The yearning felt in *Gravity's Rainbow* is the need to break out of the murderous man-made fascination with our ability to self-destruct, which separates us from union with the world. Order, frozen in eternity, or the tuning in and dropping out of the freak both avoid the pulse of inscription and erasure, the palimpsest testifying not to our debt to nature, but rather to the signifying activity without which there is no green world or "crippled keeper." Outside of the academies and museums of values to be expressed is writing itself. Pynchon's "encyclopedia" is one of writings, the graffiti of the systems which produce human consciousness and upon which our collective memory depends.

Ten years have seen everywhere the effort to rationalize and catalog the scandal of Pynchon's "Zone," his clearing a space in literature, in the tight weave of meanings, which exposes frayed ropes, a net full of holes, and fantastic possibilities. He makes us look at, and knot into, the graphic precondition of human life and death. *Gravity's Rainbow* has changed the way we look at the world, putting into question the progress of our institutions, history and technology. Charles Clerc and his colleagues remind us of Pynchon's most timely warning: not to accept a reality which promotes as literature that which it excludes, but to pay attention to the fictions we live, lest the end of the story be that of the world as well.

Gabriel Josipovici
WRITING AND THE BODY
Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982. Pp. 142. $
Reviewed by: Harold E. Lusher

In his preface, Mr. Josipovici informs us that his book is fundamentally a printing of the four Lord Northcliffe Lectures which he delivered at University College in London during the

1980-81 session. Each chapter or lecture focuses mainly on the technique and contribution of a particular writer as that writer relates to the larger issue that Mr. Josipovici is examining. In the first lecture, for example ("The Body in the Library"), Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is the centerpiece; in the second ("Everything and Nothing"), Shakespeare's *Othello* is the main object of scrutiny; the third ("Non Ego Sed Democritus Dixit"), is based on Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* and also relies on Dante's *Divine Comedy;* and the final lecture ("A Bird Was in the Room") is a brilliant exposition of the otherwise often cryptic notes that Kafka committed to paper during his final illness at the sanatorium in Kierling. Nor are these the only artists whom the author draws on to illustrate and support his line of argument. Where they have something apt and significant to contribute to his line of thought, he also cites related ideas that crop up in the work of such widely disparate writers as Proust, Henry James, Borges, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens. From music he draws on the examples of Mozart, Schönberg, and Stravinsky; from the visual arts, the work of Picasso; and from psychology, the speculations of Freud. What we have here, in short, is a rich and illuminating work, powerfully stimulating in its suggestions and in its cross-references among the arts. It is probably worthwhile to note in passing that Mr. Josipovici, presently a Reader in English at the University of Sussex, is also a playwright, a drama critic, and a novelist. This active, personal involvement in literature likely accounts for a kind and quality of insight that is often denied the mere academic.

In spite of the perceptiveness of the mind at work in the book, however, in spite of the density of allusive material, the general reader comes to the end of this inquiry with curiously mixed feelings. On one hand, it is impossible not to admire the subtlety of mind and the range of erudition in these chapters. On the other hand, in the midst of so much to admire, the general reader is also surprised and not a little disconcerted to discover echoes of disappointment reverberating in his mind. Disappointment, of course, stands in direct proportion to the expectation aroused; and the title of the present work tempts one to believe either that the author has something essentially new to say about the interaction of the creative mind and the body it dwells in, or that known facts are seen in a wholly new perspective, bathed, as it were, in a new light. These expectations are regrettably not always as fully met as one might wish. At the beginning of his first lecture, the author defines his purpose for us: ". . . to examine the role which language, writing and books play in our lives, the lives we live with our bodies" (p. 1). He mentions the paradox of the relationship we have with our bodies, how they are simultaneously familiar and yet forever mysterious to us, and claims a desire to explore such paradoxes. He is fully aware of the difficulty of the topic that he has chosen, and hopes to clarify the issue by speaking of *writing* and the body, rather than *literature* and the body, on the grounds that literature is an abstract idea, whereas *writing* concentrates on a living process. The thin line of argument that he proposes to lay down—and he concedes that he will be relying more on story and example rather than on rigorous abstract argument—he describes as "partly historical and partly what could be called phenomenological," and is content to hope that "it will emerge as these lectures proceed" (p. 2). These are the channels in which the reader's expectations are led; and while one's curiosity is at least partly satisfied by the historical markers, the phenomenological are less distinct and to that extent less satisfying. If, when we have finished reading this book, we are persistent enough to ask ourselves what the links between writing and the body are, we are surprised to realize that they are still as tenuous and difficult to trace as they were, when we first asked the question. On our journey through these pages, however, we learn much that is valuable and of absorbing interest about the writers and the works examined, even if the answer to the basic question continues to escape us.

Part of the difficulty here is the essentially elusive nature of the topic itself. That writing affects, reflects, and sometimes governs the body is a widely acknowledged fact, but it is a point of information that we start out with rather than something that has to be established or illustrated. A greater part of the difficulty is that the focus of attention shifts, and the reader is actually invited to consider writing and the *mind,* particularly the emotions generated by the mind in response to a given set of circumstances, real or imagined. That feelings are infinitely subtle and practically incommunicable, and that the very act of writing is therefore doomed to a degree of frustration is one of the valuable reminders of the third lecture, although many writers, as that lecture itself makes abundantly clear, have arrived at that insight independently.

The most rewarding parts of this book are the first and fourth lectures, which stay closest to the title and the author's declared intention. The title of the first lecture is based on a story by Borges, which Mr. Josipovici briefly recounts for us. The lecture's value lies in its historical perspective, in its reminders of the psychological origins of novel-writing (it stimulates a degree

of curiosity which is fundamentally sexual), and of the close links between the novel and pornography, and in how Sterne implements a variety of techniques to arouse, defer, and finally satisfy the curiosity he has excited. The fourth lecture, "A Bird Was in the Room," is devoted mainly to the enigmatic work of Franz Kafka, whose attitude to life and literature was so pathologically hesitant, so utterly lacking in self-confidence, that he left a significant part of his work unfinished. Although Mr. Josipovici also discusses such central documents as *The Metamorphosis* and the famous *Letter To My Father,* the chapter is chiefly concerned with the random notes and jottings that Kafka committed to paper during the final weeks of his life in a sanatorium. (According to Max Brod, he had developed tuberculosis of the larynx and was not supposed to speak at all.) In this lecture, the body moves into a particular prominence, not only because it is a source of intense and constant pain and is approaching its own extinction, but also because the imminence of death confers a special authority on whatever is said in one's last moments—or, in Kafka's case, on whatever is written down.

Quite apart from the degree of disappointment that the general reader may feel over the possibility of ever coming in terms with so impenetrable a topic, *Writing and the Body* is nevertheless a valiant and fascinating effort to widen our understanding and sharpen our awareness of how close the relationship is between the process and the organism. If that relationship is ultimately inexplicable, one must nevertheless give high marks to a writer who addresses the question anew with such courage and intelligence.

A final note: the Princeton University Press is too prestigious a publisher to have to content itself with careless proofreading.

Curtis White
HERETICAL SONGS
New York: George Braziller, 1981. Pp. 122. $4.95
Reviewed by: Donald Wolff

Heretical Songs is composed of four short stories and a novella, each set in a different cultural milieu but all focused on the same subject—an ironic treatment of the romantic sensibilities of Gustav Mahler, William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Claude Debussy, and the sixteenth-century heretic Pietro Carnesecchi. Mr. White employs historical circumstances, literary figures, and the theme of love to explore the way language shuttles back and forth promiscuously between fact and fiction.

The third story, "Rossetti's Blessed Lady," is a good example. Here the author uses several voices to study the interpenetration of idealized love and common sexual desire "revealed" in the domestic vicissitudes of Rossetti's life. The story opens with some of the loveliest prose in the book as Rossetti attempts to weld the image of his girlfriend Nora Guggums to the ephemeral idea of love he seeks to maintain in the face of the abyss: "She stood outside God's house on a rampart built over the giddying depth where space begins. Leaning out, she peered into the deep, holding some lilies in her hand, keeping God's gold railing between herself and a gulf into which, should even the moon fall, it would curl and flutter like a little feather. She ungirt her robe from clasp to hem. Yes, her bosom bared, next in brightness to God's own unbearable eye! She must have made that bar against which she leaned warm. The little lilies lay there as if asleep or nursing along her bent arm. A nice place" (p. 22).

The passage is ironic, but nonetheless delicate for that. And the story makes room for another theory of love, less ephemeral and more heretical than Rossetti's. This theory is furnished by Rossetti's friend Swinburne, who attacks the former's idealizations of love and art: "A love of love as an absolute, unrelated to human conditions, is a lovė of death. If in place of this love I seem to suggest something mad, let madness stand for us as a code word for life. And as for art, art is well when it suckles with piglets on one day, and admires a beautiful woman briefly on the next. And then moves on!" (p. 45).