However, this volume does not seek to present a reassessment or even a reading of the novel: the format precludes that. Rather it seeks to explore the central points of difficulty as they occur, page by page, chapter by chapter. As such, the notes are lucid, well documented, and amazingly erudite. Ranging from the Upanishads to Tin Pan Alley, from Marcel Proust to Peter Rabbit, they plumb the depths of the trivial and often of the quadrivial. It is difficult to tell how far much of this is related to a genuine reading experience of the novel (how many children had Lady Macbeth?), but the scholarship is impressive.

Occasionally, the insistence upon symbolic depths takes the eye from the other-worldly reality of Mexico, the tones, colors, moods, and poetry of place. Early in Chapter II of the novel there is an evocative image of an old woman playing dominoes in the early-morning shadows as a chicken pecks about the table. "Clearly a figure of fate" write Ackerley and Clipper. "The word 'domino,' originally signifying a cloak or half-mask, suggests the black death-mask invariably worn by Mixcoatl, the Aztec god of death, and by various Mayan deities whose presence boded ill . . . while the chicken, pecking among the dominoes, suggests the Roman *tripudium* or the art of divination according to the way the food fell from the mouths of the sacred chickens." Well, perhaps. But the imagery functions more suggestively and more significantly in less precisely etymological terms. The old woman is part of the Consul's world, she inhabits those Dantesque regions in which he dwells with his familiars. She is part of the iconography of his despair—and his hope—but by exploring so exclusively the symbolism, the poetry of the surface is forgotten.

The Cabbala is an exegete's arcanum: all manner of wonders are hidden therein. Ackerley and Clipper unravel the mysteries with half an eye on the fact that the Cabbalistic details were added at a late stage and may not be as central as some critics assert. As a reference book, *A Companion to* Under the Volcano will be welcomed by academics and by those readers who return to the novel after an initial reading, searching for further meanings in Lowry's masterpiece. Still, chickens is chickens.

Ronald Sukenick
IN FORM: DIGRESSIONS ON THE ACT OF FICTION
Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985. Pp. xxii + 247. $16.95
Reviewed by Jerry A. Varsava

In Form is a motley compilation of "digressions," critical essays, book reviews, and interviews that have, for the most part, appeared elsewhere over the last fifteen years. However, the common thematic thrust of the material (old and new) and Sukenick's importance as an experimental fictionist justify the collection. Sukenick wears many hats here—those of critic, cultural historian, apologist for the American avant-garde, and, after a fashion, aesthetician—though not that of the literary theorist. In his introduction, Sukenick makes a pitch for authorial vision and intention as privileged criteria in interpreting literary works, though the general implications of genetic criticism go unexamined. In his view, we should think about art "based on the way it is composed rather than on the way it is interpreted" (p. xix). Until the former strategy is realized, the artist, "who knows the most about his work," will always be viewed by the "analytic interpreter" as a poor expositor of his own work (pp. xix-xx). Though implying the novelty of genetic criticism, Sukenick pleads here for a return to a long entrenched critical position—the Romantic cult of genius. The point seems to be that interpretive truth will come to the reader who attends long enough to the author, who carefully culls the latter's letters, memoirs, and essays. In confirmation of his *traditional* romantic leanings, Sukenick appeals to the views of Emerson and Wallace Stevens on artistic genius and literary composition. Predictably enough, the author is presented as the moral superior of an oracle to the rest of the race (pp. xviii-xxi).

The claim that authors "know the most" about their work is no more valid than Dilthey's that interpreters do. Authors and interpreters know different things, when they know at all. This is borne out in Sukenick's lengthy essay on Stevens in which he points out, very perceptively, that inconsistencies exist in Stevens's poetry and essays that the author does not

himself acknowledge (p. 187). Sukenick's understanding of Stevens is determined ultimately not by what Stevens says but by what *Sukenick* thinks his work means. Clearly, given the frequent unreliability of self-explication and divergences of interest between author and reader, the author's explanation of his or her work is simply one explanation among many and often not a superior one.

In other respects too, the views of Sukenick are, like those of Stevens, inconsistent. Though by admission not a formalist, Sukenick's radical rhetoric often inadvertently suggests as much. He asserts, for example, variously, that language is "self-contained" (p. 11), the primacy of the "nonrepresentational novel" (p. 211), and the importance of "essential form" (p. 95). Such commentary contradicts his notion of art as experience, experience that takes place in the world. In continually straining to discredit the mimetic theory behind nineteenth-century realism, he often obscures the referential bias of his own theory of representation. While one admits the difficulty, indeed impossibility of dealing with literary aesthetics in a systematic, "consistent" way, metacritical awareness of self-contradiction would have made various of the essays of *In Form* more persuasive and established the "order in disorder" Stevens talks about.

Perhaps *In Form* is most interesting as an apology for the radical cultural politics of the sixties and seventies. Sukenick reiterates tirelessly the virtues of originality and formal experimentation. But the world is, as he says, "changing" and "there are new circumstances that demand new paradigms" (p. 113). We no longer live in the sixties. The eighties, so far, have indicated nothing so clearly as the cyclical nature of politics and culture. Many avantgarde initiatives of the recent past appear to us now as idle, even desperate—"one-shot insights" (as Sukenick says, however appropriately, of the *nouveau roman*) (p. 77). Much of the shrill rhetoric and many of the metaphors of *In Form* seem dated. We no longer think of the novel (or much of anything else) as "energy." The future of literature no longer seems to depend on adapting the tape recorder to literary production (p. 143), on typographical manipulation (pp. 99-103), on substituting adding machine tape for bond paper (p. 206). While several of the brightest writers of the sixties and seventies found it necessary, philosophically and artistically, to break with the past, many gifted authors today—the likes of Handke, Coover, Sorrentino, Abish, and Calvino—move freely between traditional and experimental modes of fictional narrative. For better or worse, aesthetic compromise and pragmatism rule the eighties. We have realized, as Sukenick concedes at one point, that "novelty does not guarantee quality" (p. 243). *In Form* is an articulate evocation not only of its author's views but also of the countercultural aesthetics of the recent past. Students of the period and, of course, those interested particularly in Sukenick and other Fiction Collective writers will find it most illuminating. Its value, however, as critical prescription is less certain.

Janice Hubbard Harris
THE SHORT FICTION OF D. H. LAWRENCE
Rutgers: State University Press, 1984. Pp. 333. $25.00
Reviewed by Judith Ruderman

Janice Harris's recent book on D. H. Lawrence's short fiction is only the second full-length study of all of Lawrence's stories, and the first in the more than twenty years since Kingsley Widmer's *The Art of Perversity*. Considering that many readers prefer this Lawrence "in miniature" to the full-blown and often windy author of the novels, that paucity of wide-ranging critical evaluation is unfortunate. Given the large number of stories that Lawrence produced in his short career (over 60) in comparison to the number of novels (7), and given the acknowledged importance of those novels, the gap is understandable, perhaps, but also a bit surprising. With Harris's major work, a critic, teacher, or student of Lawrence now has a comprehensive, chronological, and readable assessment of the entire gamut of Lawrence's short fiction.

D. H. Lawrence made his debut as a published story writer in 1907, when the local newspaper printed "A Prelude," one of three stories that he submitted to a contest sponsored by the paper. He was 22 years old, living at home in a small town in the English midlands, and planning to be an elementary school teacher. The last story that Lawrence wrote was