

forest for the trees.” Waldemar Zacharasiewicz’s essay on Jack Hodgins, “The Development of Jack Hodgins’ Narrative Art in His Short Fiction,” on the other hand, compels the reader steadily forward as it links analysis of narrative techniques with persuasive readings of the various stories in *Spit Delaney’s Island* and *The Barclay Family Theatre*. [In fact the only quibble one might have with Zacharasiewicz’s essay is the overabundant use of footnotes—there are 38 of them!]

Overall, *Encounters and Explorations* makes a valuable contribution to the study of contemporary Canadian literature. With the poems and stories deleted, it provides a useful model for future European studies of creative writing in Canada.

Mexico in 1992 or *Cristóbal Nonato*, Carlos Fuentes’s Latest Novel

ALFONSO GONZÁLEZ, *California State University*

Cristóbal Nonato (1987), Carlos Fuentes’s last novel, is a commentary on what Mexico might be like in five years if its leaders do not change their present policies. The main narrator of the novel is Cristóbal, an unborn fetus who, like Christopher Columbus five hundred years earlier, is discovering a new world, the world outside of his mother’s womb. Through satire and clever linguistic play, an image of Mexico in 1992 begins to unfold: grotesquely deformed in its culture, language, and religion, mutilated in its territory, and buried in its own pollution.

Though there is frequent use of Mexican slang, the novel’s sociolinguistic referent is that of the educated Mexican who also knows English. Its allusions to Mexican and World literature and history are recurrent. Its punctuation and some of its vocabulary are akin to blasphemy since they conform to English practices. The reader, who is shocked at first, and repelled throughout by the punctuation and some of its language, soon realizes that the erosion of Mexican Spanish parallels the disappearance of Mexican society, culture, and institutions as we have come to know them. The use of language in the novel is also comical. In a Joycean manner, the narrator is constantly playing with language. Mexico City has grown so fast that it is necessary to hire the well-known Irish “novelist” Leopold Bloom so that he can name the new streets, neighborhoods, and places that appear daily. This novelist-narrator cleverly anglicizes Mexican place names and hispanizes English words creating a comical, though grotesquely sad, new reality.

Each section of the novel is titled with fragments of Ramón López Velarde’s “La suave patria” (The loving Fatherland), a political ode which exudes the optimism of some Mexicans soon after the Revolution at the beginning of this century. The content of each section contrasts sharply with the ideals expressed in its title and satirizes a leadership which has managed to lead Mexico to the point of no return in less than a hundred years. The author also satirizes the inaction and complacency of Mexicans who would rather believe that a loving, divine protector is going to

help them change their situation, than do something in order to improve it. Sensing the need to replace an obsolete Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint, Federico Robles Chacón, an enterprising politician son of the bankrupt banker in *La región más transparente*, creates a new patron saint. Mamadoc, as she is named, is a mixture of Mae West, Coatlicue (ancient Mexican goddess), and the Virgin of Guadalupe. The absence of a protest by the Church implies its inability to curb the excesses of the government.

In Fuentes's future world, economic interests will prevail over cultural and national values. The Americans, with the blessing of the ruling party who profits from this venture, are waging a limited "Vietnam-like" war in the jungles of Veracruz. The states of Campeche, Chiapas, and Yucatán have been leased to Club Med so that the government can pay the interest on an ever-growing foreign debt. Ixtapa is the southernmost city of a new country, Pacifica, which includes the Pacific coast of the United States, Canada, and Alaska, as well as Oceania, China, and Japan. Mexico's fragmentation is completed when we read that Mexican and American states adjacent to the border have declared themselves independent of both Mexico City and Washington. Mexamerica, as the new country is called, serves as a buffer zone, facilitating illegal immigration and providing cheap labor.

As in *Where the Air Is Clear*, the protagonist is the collective whole. Though character development is not important in *Cristóbal Nonato*, it is significant that Fernando Benítez, dean of Mexican intellectuals, appears as a character in this novel. He is Cristóbal's uncle, a dejected elderly man gallantly fighting to maintain Mexican values and sanity in a crumbling society. On the other hand we find Homero Fagoaga, also an uncle of Cristóbal who represents the intellectual in politics: ineffective and self-serving.

Though other Spanish-American writers have experimented with language in a Joycean manner (e.g., Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Fernando del Paso), and with the self-conscious narrative found in *Don Quijote* and in *Tristram Shandy* (e.g., Julio Cortázar and Vicente Leñero), few come close to the linguistic play between English and Mexican Spanish, and in the manipulation of the interplay between reader, narrator, and story which we find in *Cristóbal Nonato*. As for the apocalyptic vision of the novel, some readers will probably dismiss it since it comes from a man who, after all, lives abroad most of the year and therefore cannot possibly experience first hand the present Mexican situation. Such readers will be surprised to learn that Fuentes's vision is the fictionalized account of what sociologists, economists, historians, and poets are also saying to Mexico's leaders: change your course or face disaster!

Rereading Victorian Fiction: Steven Connor's *Charles Dickens* and James H. Kavanagh's *Emily Brontë*

LAURIAT LANE, JR., *University of New Brunswick*

These two short books¹ use recent, still controversial critical methods to "re-read" classic authors and works and "reread" such authors and works to show the use and strength of such methods. One comments closely on Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* using exhaustively the most appropriate recent critical methods; the

¹ Steven Connor, *Charles Dickens*, Rereading Literature, ed. Terry Eagleton. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 184 pp.; James H. Kavanagh, *Emily Brontë*, Rereading Literature, ed. Terry Eagleton. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 124 pp.