

summarize or paraphrase, is systematically, exhaustively, uncritically, almost obsessively couched in Lacanian terms and constructed on Lacanian principles, partly by way of Jane Gallop's *The Daughter's Seduction*.<sup>16</sup> Against all this, however, should be set Bersani's cautions: "*Wuthering Heights* is both almost embarrassingly vulnerable and astonishingly invulnerable to psychoanalytic interpretation," for "it is not enough to say that this sort of evidence exists in *Wuthering Heights*; we have to consider its *status* in the novel," and "to the extent that the novel does dramatize a fantasy of the self triumphantly 'leaving' itself for other forms of being, both familial drama and the sexual symbolism connected to it appear almost irrelevant to a gluttonous yet almost ascetic, erotic and yet sexless, passion for otherness."<sup>17</sup>

Kavanagh's psychoanalytic tunnel vision opens out some as he joins "the psycho-sexual problematic" of *Wuthering Heights* "with class and social concerns" (p. 49). In only too characteristic language Heathcliff, it is claimed, "enacts both the primal Father's incestuous desires and an oppressed class's resentful vengeance," while Nelly supposedly "enacts the phallic Mother's defence of the Law against incestuous desire, and a class project orientated towards moderate upward mobility within accepted parameters of class domination" (p. 51). But even granting these possible interpretations—and I can entertain their substance more than their style—the exact interrelation of these "economic and libidinal registers" (p. 50) is dangerously ill defined. What historical (Marxist) or literary (thematic) significance is implied by their formal textual interrelations and critical coupling? Metaphysical allegorical myth, classic realistic consanguinity, superstructural expressive causality, exasperatingly vague "homology," traces of the political unconscious, or what?

In some way, we are told, the book's "class and social questions . . . are *intrinsic* to its figuration of the Oedipal romance" (p. 56); its "major transformations are determined as much by its social as by its libidinal instance, by its 'infrastructure' as much as by its 'unconscious'" (p. 77). But no amount of hyphenative ("libidinal-ideological," "socio-ideological," "socio-libidinal"), conjunctive ("social and libidinal"), or adjectival ("oppressive phallogocentric," "patriarchal elitist") coupling can, by itself, tell us how or why. Nor can the final full chapter's crescendo of terms of connection: "embedded," "symptomatic," "inextricably bound," "affiliated," "unavoidable association," and even a "membrane" that is "permeable." By Kavanagh's rereading of *Wuthering Heights*, for all the story's own narrative resolutions of plot and myth and property, we get beyond "the psycho-sexual and socio-ideological tensions that constitute the novel" (p. 96), and which are the bases and the strengths of Kavanagh's energetic, difficult, willed, controversial critical project, only to "a peculiarly 'produced,' imperfect and imaginary resolution" (p. 97).

## A Note on W.P. Kinsella's Humor

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The Canadian author W.P. Kinsella has published two novels and over one hundred short stories, anecdotes, and brief "surreal" sketches (which he calls Brautigans after the late American humorist) since he first began to publish fiction in the mid-1970s.<sup>1</sup> Kinsella revitalizes old images and situations (the joy of playing

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<sup>16</sup> Jane Gallop, *The Daughter's Seduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> Leo Bersani, *A Future for Ashtanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976), 215.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed list of Kinsella's works, see Don Murray, *The Fiction of W.P. Kinsella: Tall Tales in Various Voices* (Fredericton: York Press, 1987).

together, the chill of isolation), blends romantic fantasy with baseball humor, and brings people out of the cold or off the Indian Reserve and into the pages of humorous books.

Humor is the basic ingredient in Kinsella's books. From the earliest collections of Indian stories, through the experimental forms of his non-Indian narratives and his celebrated first novel, *Shoeless Joe* (1982), to his most recent Indian stories and second baseball novel, Kinsella has depicted life's amusing incongruities.<sup>2</sup> The humor of Kinsella's narratives derives from both plot and character, which are interdependent but amenable to separate discussion.

First, with respect to plot (in Kinsella's case: comic complications of action), this humor includes the pratfalls of farce, the slight tribulations of love affairs and business dealings, the more profoundly comic relationships that often develop between individuals or groups and the institutions (religious, legal, educational, and the commercial "media") which are supposed to support, not disrupt, human life and harmony; and there are also the special cases of situational comedy, involving various perspectives (physical, metaphysical, supernatural), where dislocations of space and time transform the mechanics of farce into fantasy. At its farthest remove from realism, a Kinsellan plot posits a world in which degrees of anarchy are undoubtedly justified and unquestionably funny. This is a traditional domain of comedy—once called *carnevale*—whose spirit is inseparable from the fiber of the people.

Second, with respect to characterization in his works, Kinsella's people are most engaging when they strike the chord of our common humanity. Overall, there is little viciousness in their actions and little vitriol in their words. Kinsella's narratives fit the definition of humor as a relatively harmless species of the genre comedy.<sup>3</sup>

We are drawn toward Kinsella's world because of its essential goodness and gentleness. Despite the risible social commentary, the anticlericalism of a few stories, the political wisecracks in a number of others, Kinsella is not known as a satirist; despite the racial context of much of his work, only a minority of his readers (perhaps *they* are the perceptive ones?) see him as a racist. Kinsella's humor is inseparable from the freshness and the benign unreality of his world; as one critic writes, in reviewing Kinsella's recent *Fencepost Chronicles*, he reminds us that "prairie fiction need not follow the rigid strictures of an outdated naturalism."<sup>4</sup> Kinsella's characters often say uncommonly funny things because they dwell in a comic world; but their creator does not play elaborate wordgames. Kinsella is not a "witty" writer devoted to verbal ironies and seven (magic number!) types of ambiguities. Like other memorable writers, he gives us the vivid image, the arresting simile, and he has the ability to revive dead language: as when grass is secretly put in place of artificial turf at a ballpark and the old-time fans "raise their heads like ponies, as far away as the parking lot, when the thrill of the grass reaches their nostrils." W.P. Kinsella is one of those rare storytellers who can turn writing into a mode of magic—so enthralling is his spell. Kinsella is a wit, moreover, in that he can perform his magic in "alternate universes" as adroitly as other contemporary authors and he is

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<sup>2</sup> *Shoeless Joe* won a Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship Award upon publication. In May of 1987 Kinsella won Canada's prestigious Stephen Leacock Medal for Humor; the next month he took the Canadian Book Publishers' author-of-the-year award.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (New York and Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Duncan, rev. of *The Fencepost Chronicles*, in *Border Crossings*, 6 (June 1987), 24.

in tune with the modernism of multiple time schemes and their comic possibilities. Finally, W.P. Kinsella is a moralist whose vision of man is tonic and stable; as Neil Randall recently demonstrated, Kinsella uses humor to unite "theme, style, and character" into a beneficent whole.<sup>5</sup>

## Problems of Representation in Butor's *Oï*

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In spite of its tremendous diversity, Michel Butor's work has an underlying current that connects all of it together. While deeply anchored in ethno-cultural and mythological references, his books are attempts to understand and define artistic expression. In his earlier novels, Butor comments on the literary process indirectly through a fictional author, but becomes directly involved later on. Among the many aspects of artistic expression pursued in his work is literary representation. Butor's interest in it dates back to his early works and is closely connected to his concept of *genius loci*, first communicated to us in *Le Génie du lieu* (1957). Butor once distinguished modern civilization from the ancients as people of the book rather than of places. Monuments were the ancients' way of giving expression to their reality, their way of "reading" it.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, by studying the place, Butor examines the notion of representation. In this study, we shall briefly look at Butor's approach in *Oï* (1971).<sup>2</sup>

Subtitled *Le Génie du lieu 2*, *Oï* is a sophisticated account of Butor's voyages to America and the Far East. While on the surface his work is a special kind of travel log, it treats essential questions posed by Butor in all of his oeuvre, in particular, the literary expression of creative energy. There is the resurgence of the theme of writing, where the author himself and not a fictional character is hard at work trying to recount certain events. We shall specifically examine three different attempts of representation in the book: a description of Mt. Sandia, an explosion in Santa Barbara, and most importantly, the Shalako ceremony of the Zuni Indians.

The problems of representing something by writing are studied through the author's effort of giving a picture in words of Mt. Sandia, which he is contemplating from his window. The rectangular form of the window is the rectangle of the pages that we have opened. The picture of the mountain through the window is what the author tries to transfer to the rectangle of the book. He wishes to cover the blankness of the page by words, just as the mountain fills the space of the window. There are problems involved in trying to imitate a model. The difficulty of his task

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<sup>5</sup> Neil Randall, "Shoeless Joe: Fantasy and the Humor of Fellow-Feeling," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 33 (Spring 1987), 173-83.

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marie Le Sidaner, *Michel Butor voyageur à la roue* (Paris: Encre, 1979), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Butor, *Oï* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). All references will be made in the text.