

BOOK REVIEWS

Heide Ziegler, ed.

FACING TEXTS: ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY WRITERS AND CRITICS

Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1986. Pp. x + 301

Reviewed by Josef Raab

In compiling this "anthology," Professor Ziegler asked ten contemporary American writers to submit a new piece and then invited ten critics to comment on these pieces. Her explicit goal is "to bring together, in one book and between two covers, unpublished pieces by authors as well as critics that would, in a sense, defy the chronological secondariness of critical interpretation" by making the "relationship between author and critic an unmediated encounter, with authors and critics becoming one another's ideal readers (ix). This is an admirable, innovative concept. Ziegler let the authors "choose their own critics in order to ensure that the close encounter I had in mind would not, unintentionally, be hostile, and thus destroy the possibility of mutual ideal readership" (ix). But the process of selecting these critics leads to a series of commending interpretations by a hand-picked, exclusive community and contradicts the editor's wish for openness and for an ongoing discussion by a wide audience.

Among the authors chosen for this anthology, Susan Sontag is the only woman. If the collection wants to be "a gathering together of exemplary specimens" (5), names like Toni Morrison and Maxine Hong Kingston should not be missing. With regard to the selection of critics, the inclusion of European commentators is praiseworthy, while, again, only one woman is admitted into this community. Critical methods used here range from New Critical close reading to deconstructive analysis and from a concentration on the piece chosen for this collection to a more general discussion of an author's work or of a literary movement. Although Ziegler stresses the importance of context, there are no attempts to link some of the primary and/or secondary writings collected here. In the name of "defying closure" (5), the establishment of this connection is made the task of the reader.

To these two essays are added four stories and four excerpts from novels. Alan Wilde's explication of Donald Barthelme's story argues that what is distinctive for Barthelme is not metafiction but the use of the ordinary; Marc Chénétier's pointed discussion situates Robert Coover's "Aesop's Forest" in the fable tradition, in the tension of myth and fiction, and in metafiction; Richard Howard traces Susan Sontag's Nietzschean roots and works out infinite regress and enjambement as principles of Sontag's fiction. In the section with novel excerpts, Christopher Butler examines the moral effect of Walter Abish's problematization of the relation between familiar world and text; Tony Tanner takes a close look at William H. Gass's asides and his allusive topic of a picnic; Christine Laniel discusses John Hawkes's seductive strategy and the reversal of seduction into derision, arguing that Hawkes has returned to his origins; and

Robert Walsh neatly explores the narrative technique of Joseph McElroy's works in general and of *Women and Men* in particular.

Although the selection of authors and critics for this anthology remains problematic, most of the primary texts are captivating and many of the interpretations are fresh and insightful. In order to preserve the ongoing discussion that Professor Ziegler proposes, a response by several of the authors to their critics might have been a valuable addition to this innovative enterprise.

Julio Ortega, ed.

GABRIEL GARCÍA MARQUEZ AND THE POWERS OF FICTION

Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988. Pp. 96 \$14.95

Reviewed by George R. McMurray

In recent years collections of essays on Gabriel García Márquez's works have proliferated, enhancing in most cases the already enormous bibliography on the famous Nobel laureate. The short volume under scrutiny here consists of five pieces, all of which are worth reading and most of which present new and interesting interpretations. The book ends with a reproduction of García Márquez's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, "The Solitude of Latin America."

Julio Ortega's "Exchange System in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*" treats the subjects of time and structure as well as the discourses of legend, chronicle, and myth in García Márquez's best-known work. The entire story, Ortega believes, is constructed on two axes: (1) on return (rhythm, repetition or mythical time), and (2) on dissolution (progress, deterioration or linear time). Basing his remarks to a great extent on the initial and final pages of the novel in question, Ortega concludes that the masterpiece rests on two metaphors: Melquíades, the author within the story who writes of the future, and the reader Aureliano Babelonia, who discovers the past from Melquíades's manuscripts while experiencing the present through an ever-changing reality conveyed by language.

In his essay dealing with the economy of the narrative sign in *No One Writes to the Colonel* and *In Evil Hour*, Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat focuses on the relationship between the economic component of society and the content of the two novels. Gutiérrez sees names such as Asís, Arcadio, and Pastor (*In Evil Hour*) as bucolic symbols of the Arcadian myth, whereas the lampoons that appear on house doors not only poison the town's atmosphere, leaving Cain's mark on the society, but also represent a carnivalesque sign used by the underclasses to subvert and, if possible, topple the powerful. In *No One Writes to the Colonel* the letter that never arrives is gradually replaced by the fighting cock as a symbol of monetary economy, but when no satisfactory price is ever set on the bird, its value ultimately becomes more human and political than economic. Unlike *In Evil Hour*, with political and economic strife highlighted through the slanderous lampoons, *No One Writes to the Colonel* presents images of affection and domestic harmony.

The most enlightening essay of this volume is, in my opinion, Michael Palencia-Roth's "Intertextualities: Three Metamorphoses of Myth in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*." Here the critic defines the three basic types of inter-