

Chapter Five of Zogbaum's study, "The Monterias: The Unknown Hell," is particularly impressive. It is concerned with the series of six "Jungle Novels" which appeared between 1931 and 1939. Zogbaum provides extensive historical and documentary background (some of the latter in the form of eyewitness accounts from former mahogany camp owners and employees) which highlights the uncertain hold Traven actually had over his material, much of which came to him secondhand from ex-workers in the camps or through simply fictitious stories. One result of Traven's distortions and inaccuracies, Zogbaum notes, was that he had actually failed to stimulate serious debate on the socioeconomic conditions of the exploited Chiapan Indians.

B. Traven: A Vision of Mexico is by no means without its flaws. Occasionally, Zogbaum makes assumptions about the novelist which seem somewhat cavalier. Why, for example, should we assume, as she does, that Traven "probably knew next to nothing about Mexico upon his arrival," when the progress of the Mexican Revolution had been covered extensively in a range of left-wing and radical periodicals throughout Europe? Such shortcomings are very minor, however, and do not detract from the invaluable contribution Zogbaum has made in broadening and deepening our understanding of the man once described as the Marie Celeste of American literature. The fact that she does so in a crisp and jargon-free style is further to her credit.

Robert Pinget
The Enemy
Translated by Barbara Wright
New York: Red Dust, 1991. Pp. 89
Reviewed by Peter Broome

In the case of an author such as Pinget, for whom the "secret ear"—its murmurs, its undercurrents, its interferences—is of prime importance, the translator must be a sensitive receiver. Moving in the "space between," the translator is more aware than most of the elusive tones, divergent claims, alternative versions left in parenthesis or in a limbo if not a graveyard of approximations: of recalcitrant language, half-captured with missing dimensions, degrees and relativities of possession, the text as compromise and unsettled negotiation, tension between the original and its derivatives, sameness changing its face or distorted in different contexts. In this, the translator is Pinget's virtual twin: a shadowy double glimpsed in a mirror, at a distance, as through a glass darkly.

Barbara Wright is at ease (or perhaps at a finely attuned unease?) with the shifting registers of *The Enemy*. She straddles the gaps, rides the gear-changes, with a natural balance and deftness. She chases the voices with nothing obtrusive to frighten them away. She catches the heterogeneous tones, the flavors of idiom, the threads of colloquialism, the aural touches suddenly injected, with the appropriate dosage of looseness and rigor, drift and direction: two "secret ears" reverberating to each other's tune.

Pinget's novel is an inquiry into its own malady. It sounds its own alienation and inadequacies. Its subject, perhaps its only subject, is the unfathomable text, composing and decomposing, elusive, fragmentary, hemmed in and hounded by the conspiracy of alternative sounds and their inimical encroachment. Whether one can identify and differentiate the cast, reconstitute and verify the pattern of events, put together again the jigsaw of chronological time, hardly matters. These are the stuttering ciphers at the surface of a deeper drama, the flotsam of a former novel.

One needs no other character than language, with its conscious and subconscious, conflicts of interests, profits and losses, ambiguities and strange dualities. Who is this text, with its openings and closures on speech, its play of focus and fade, its deviations amidst innumerable hazards, its slide into parenthesis, its unexplained lurches into the interrogative mood, its dissatisfied aberrations somewhere between pre-language and post-language, virtual fluencies and frozen aftermaths? And who governs its maneuvers, in all its precarious passages between outer and inner, and through all the factors for distortion (whether drink, closed doors, or dubious gossip)? This is not a docile or tamed psychology. Nothing stabilizes, redeems, or puts to rest its involved contortions. One moves between divergent directions of speech, sudden changes of tone and register, unattributable fragments, unknown alignments and allegiances, intercalations which are a distorting lens, snatches of discourse with or without an addressee. Information is sifted and resifted. Sources and textual ownership are problematical. Some messages, cut off, though hardly in their prime, are never retrieved. Official guide books, now outdated or with sections missing, have become unreliable and need to be revised. Secretaries and other go-betweens, textual intermediaries, are less than competent and threatened with dismissal. References elsewhere, to points of clarification wider in (or beyond) the text ("see supra," "see commentaries volume III underworld lost souls") are too unspecific to make a connection. What is left is a text floundering in its own time: with too many erasures and superimpositions, like a palimpsest; congealing and melting, postponing and accelerating; troubled by uncontrollable exits and entrances, continuities and discontinuities, changes and constancies (like the ancient portrait with its inviting, recognizable family traits and impenetrable patina). A damaged text, interfered with too many times to remember what purity was like. It is language as self-betrayal, *écart*, lapse: language in decline, adulterated by all the different levels of impossible reading or misreading, giddy with versions, tormented by its own missing text, the unformulated other voice which calls from the wings or cries from its inaccessible underworld. Who is this textual Sisyphus ("Everything must be reworked"), undone with each conjecture and its metamorphic impetus? Who roves in the blanks and looks there for the secrets, for want of any more solid space?

Questions of identity and ownership extend just as voraciously to the role of the reader. Who, indeed, in the textual act, *is* the reader? Lackey and master, transmitter and receiver, center and periphery, his/her function is problematized with an unusual acuteness. The reader becomes the crossroads which are absent from the obsolete and wrongly marked map of the district: a place of junction and transit, of coordination and multidirectional ferment. He/she is pulled into the friction of the act of composition, indispensable to the writer's project yet persistently cheated by "him" and left stranded. The reader's role suffers, too, from a

"lapsed access agreement." He/she can only explore the obsession little by little, via its dislocations and its gaps as it evolves, not know the events. Can one hope, in the process, to "heal a mind adrift" or, all the more so, heal the text: to take its 144 fragments, with all the disconnections and reconnections, interlocks and misfits, and square its equation?

The Enemy may appear curiously self-enclosed. Its game of mirrors may seem inverted to extremes. Is the real here only a pretext for the text? The local junk dealers, unearthing old stuff, are in the image of the text and the mind loosely embodied in it, isolating a few worthwhile bits from the *ganguie* of an ageing language, jaded with use. The fate of the house, having undergone demolition and reconstruction work on one side, is also that of the written or spoken edifice. The different styles of furniture, nearer or further in time, some imperfectly restored and therefore identifiable as fake or distinct from the original, are a match for the competing styles, more or less authentic, more or less adulterated, of the polyphonic text. And so on, ad infinitum. With the result that, as one gropes and strains, through the shifting configurations, the optical illusions, the torments, the tantalizations of language, to reach the master's cryptic manuscript, one discovers gradually but inevitably that the text one seeks and feels for so vainly is the one that one is holding in one's hand. And what it is more real than language?

For, of all the poignant human images which are the evanescent stigmata of this book, language is, in the end, perhaps the most painful and tragic: words "too far from the heart," which will never quite "gel" in one direction or translate effectively elsewhere; "snatches of a dying man's words" which come back to him as punctures rather than pillars; the insuperable pain of self-parody, of speaking a caricature of oneself, the verbal habits and mannerisms of a lifetime congealing around one; a man drifting helpless among his unsalvaged resemblances; the human/linguistic cataclysm, "Dismember disjoint psychosis master," where words and persons fuse as if in some molten dictionary, somehow defined together but with no protective walls, no liaisons, a cataclysm come to undo the pretence of univalency, the neatly ordered mix and match. Pinget is as central to that crucial contemporary inquiry into the limits and lacunae, the contradictions and charismas, of language, as are Beckett with his unresolved hurdy-gurdy, Ponge with his quest to clear the contaminated words of the Augean stables, Sarraute with her infra-language weaving and wavering in the hinterland, or the Duras of *India Song* with her disembodied voices on different wavelengths in an indefinable space. Language as the ultimate mirage, both motivator and destroyer, renewer and tormenter, which leaves its exponent haunted by the finished portrait behind and the tantalizing virtuality ahead, both of which are masks of the dark, and of the silence.

"The precious substance to be purged of its dross resides in the chaos of the initial discourse." Does such a precious substance ultimately emerge, however arduously, however misshapen, from the Pinget text? Certainly, a cathartic communion takes place through the obscurities, the twisted seams, the ruptures of its passages. And if the sought-after painting mentioned there at intervals never convinces one absolutely of its bona fide credentials, caught as it is in a value-warp, perhaps fake, perhaps *trompe-l'oeil*, then this is not the case with Pinget's rare work of art. It sounds authentic, it rings true, despite the hollows, the chips, the

patchings up, the hair-line fractures. It is the real thing, however damaged. "We aren't taken in," says a voice at one point. But, emphatically, we are: we travel in their closest grain its lines of lack, explore the space between, to listen to the rustlings of its underworld, and be haunted by its mirages.

Susan Strehle

Fiction in the Quantum Universe

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. Pp. 282. \$22.50; \$62.95

Reviewed by Ben Stoltzfus

C.P. Snow argued in 1959 that the different world views of science and literature were responsible for an irreconcilable divergence. Susan Strehle's contention, three decades later, is that the *Weltanschauung* of physics and "actualism" is essentially the same. Actualism, although perhaps only a variant of metafiction, balances attention to questions of art and science with a deliberate meditation on the world of the signified. Whereas much of metafiction foregrounds the signifying process, Strehle maintains that actualism depends on the interaction of language and reality within the context of modern physics. Her thesis is that the world of relativity, uncertainty, chance, chaos, and indeterminacy appears in both content and form in the works of Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover, William Gaddis, John Barth, Margaret Atwood, and Donald Barthelme.

Strehle's premise is that "reality" is no longer "realistic," because in the quantum universe reality is discontinuous, energetic, relative, statistical, subjectively seen, and uncertainly known. One work from each of the above authors illustrates these characteristics—terms taken from the new physics and which are used to define actualism as a genre. However, despite Strehle's contention that actualism is not metafiction, the terms she uses also define metafiction. Although metafiction's focus on language as the prism that defines reality is not always acknowledged by writers or critics, the dissemination and indeterminacy of language that Jacques Derrida addresses are the direct result of Einstein's relativity, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, and Bohr's complementarity. Indeed, commentators have been making the connection between field theory and metafiction for some time, though perhaps not with the same insistence or detail that Strehle does.

Her point, and it is a point well taken, is that actualism is more realistic than the so-called realism because actualism has incorporated the changes in our understanding and perception of reality attributable to the new physics. Realistic fiction represents a Newtonian world which is linear, causal, and continuous because the traditional novelist believes that he or she can depict an objective reality whose essential structures are stable. In contrast, the actualist writer, unlike the realistic one, "displaces Newton's absolute space with the interactive field theorized by Einstein, Heisenberg, and Bohr." In the field model there is no longer a window on the world or a reflective mirror. Because Strehle wants the "actual" and the fictional she rejects not only realism, but also the more extreme forms of metafictional experimentation. This may explain why the works of Ronald