

critique of Islam in the context of Rabelais's and James Joyce's criticism of organized religion. Al-'Azam summarizes Rushdie's fiction as "a sustained attack on the unexamined" (290).

The most interesting of the new essays is Peter Jones's "*The Satanic Verses* and the Politics of Identity." Jones suggests a more detached consideration of Rushdie than has been common in recent years. In Jones's reading of *The Satanic Verses*, he deliberately abstains from the emotional position common since Khomeini's *fatwa*: "I shall examine just those features of the novel that have landed Rushdie in trouble. I shall concentrate on Rushdie as offender rather than as victim" (321). Jones identifies the problematic fusion of belief and identity as a central cause of Rushdie's dilemma. According to Jones, in a society where the two are not separated, Rushdie's postmodern play with a text many believe to be sacred but that Rushdie regards as just a story cannot but cause violent reactions of self-defense, since what is being threatened is not only the belief system, but also the very identity of numerous people. While not justifying the attacks on Rushdie, Jones's essay allows the reader to see much of their inner logic.

The scope of the various contributions and their consistently high quality make *Reading Rushdie* a welcome tool for everyone seriously interested in Rushdie's fiction. The collection's usefulness is enhanced by a complete bibliography of Rushdie's books, essays, and interviews, a list of books and articles about the Rushdie affair, and an annotated bibliography of English-language criticism of Rushdie's fiction up to 1993. Altogether, *Reading Rushdie* is a useful glance backward on ten years of Rushdie criticism as well as an indication of the direction of future study.

Lance Olsen

Lolita: A Janus Text

Twayne's Masterwork Studies

New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995. Pp. 143. \$14.00

Reviewed by Allan Reid

Few works attain the combination of fame and notoriety which has accrued to Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. It is ingeniously complex, outrageously contradictory, provocatively scandalous, and stylistically peerless. Despite—or more likely because of—this, it remains elusive, problematic, occasionally unfriendly, but always enormously interesting to scholars, students, and other readers. Lance Olsen's contribution to "Twayne's Masterwork Studies," *Lolita: A Janus Text*, is up to the task of providing a concise, accessible study of this challenging novel.

The text is framed by a detailed chronology of Nabokov's life and work and a well-selected bibliography. Both are nicely articulated and provide just the right amount of information. The same principle holds generally for the rest of the work as well. Olsen offers brief but choice data on and insights into the author, the novel itself, its critical reception (both in historical and conceptual overview), its incarnations in other media, especially, of course, the Kubrick film, and the host of critical problems raised by the text. The discussion is given a good grounding both in general critical concerns, and in terms of Nabokov's idiosyncratic approach to writing and to this work, in particular.

Olsen does a commendable job of confronting the complexity and ambiguities of *Lolita*; indeed, he confronts them directly and makes them the focus of his study, whence the reference to Janus in the title. This is hardly an original approach to any text, least of all to a major work of twentieth-century fiction with one foot in the modern and the other reaching for the post-modern. Still, it is not unfruitful, and the reader is presented with a full and satisfying range of possibilities for reading *Lolita*, notwithstanding the brief and introductory nature of this study. Olsen is sufficiently even-handed in his discussion to the extent that his reader can disagree with even substantial individual conclusions and still not feel inclined to disregard the whole.

The only truly regrettable aspect of this useful study is the almost neurotically obsessive apologetics Olsen constructs for the entire enterprise based on his predilection for a deconstructivist and/or postmodernist poetics which does not really allow for the validity of such a study, never mind a series based on the notion of *Masterworks*. The fact that he feels the need to apologize at considerable length for what he is doing implies a somewhat slippery compromise with his own intellectual principles, while the success with which he nevertheless carries out his undertaking would seem to serve as a rather strong challenge to, if not contradiction of, those very principles.

William V. Spanos

The Errant Art of "Moby-Dick": The Canon, the Cold War, and the Struggle for American Studies

Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995. Pp. 416. \$18.95

Reviewed by Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso

William Spanos's new book is, like his other previous works, not only an exercise in Heideggerian criticism but also a brilliant demonstration of the effects of (close) textual reading on the appreciation of the value of literary works, from their representational powers and limits to their possible function as canon-makers. And Spanos's choice to focus now on Melville's masterpiece confirms