

of a homogeneous colonial center, but the stories of London as a complex and diverse postcolonial space that moves from the local to the global, the authentic to the inauthentic, and from cultural specificity to cosmopolitanism.

Robert Walser

The Robber

Trans. and introd. by Susan Bernofsky

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. Pp. 141. US \$15.00

Reviewed by Josef Schmidt

In an informative introduction, the translator Bernofsky sets out the pragmatic context of this writer and his work: a novel published posthumously in 1972, written by an author secretly during the twenties, his years in Bern (Switzerland). She analyzes why “for us Walser still inhabits the fringes of the European canon” (ix). But she very clearly places him as an equal to the likes of Kafka, Joyce, or Mann in terms of “modernist writing.” In fact, she implicitly adheres to the label that has been applied to this very enigmatic writer: that of a “serene version of Kafka.”

“Der Räuber” is a peculiar love story, reflecting the somewhat bizarre behavior of Walser towards the fair sex prior to being institutionalized permanently—first at his own request, later by the authority of outside agencies (in the mental asylum of Herisau, Switzerland). However, there is also a disturbing historical feature: Walther Rathenau (1867–1922)—the Weimar Republic minister responsible for reconstruction (and later foreign affairs) and murdered by a nationalist with whom he was personally acquainted (13)—features prominently in this “novel.” But the dominant theme is that of a latter-day “Good-for-Nothing”; and Eichendorff’s charming hero has become a very sophisticated twentieth-century figure. Throughout the novel, the narrator maintains an imbalance between himself and the object of his tale. Very early we get the following thumbnail sketch of the robber: *Nicht alle Menschen sind von der Natur bestimmt, sich nützlich zu machen. Du bildest eine Ausnahme. Diese Worte bildeten für mich eine Möglichkeit der Weiterexistenz, ohne daß ich etwas leistete* (“Not all human beings are destined by nature to be useful. You constitute an exception. These words constituted for me the possibility of continued existence without the performance of work,” 3). In other words: we are dealing with an anti-bildungsroman!

It was an acrobatic act to translate this novel for Walser spares his silent reader no effort to follow his dazzling train of thought. He is a *causeur* par excellence, and, like his illustrious intellectual cousin Walter Benjamin, he describes the perfect “flaneur.” Down to the last page, he treats his reader to very unique word uses and creations (in olden times called “apax legomena”): *Wurstigkeit, Schnupprigkeit von Fußgängern auf Straßen irritiert Automobilisten* (“The

by-your-leave-ism, don't-mind-if-I-do-ishness of pedestrians on the streets vexes motorists," 2). There are his characteristic word plays such as *seine Gehilfenleistungen bei vorliegender Handschrift* ("his performance as assistant with the manuscript at hand"), *eine Art Herzkäfer* ("A sort of darling little lamb," 141), and so forth. But the greatest challenge was to maintain the fluidity of style, the constant change of perspective of the narrator/robber, and the almost endless series of puzzling pastiches. There is a very good monograph on the subject, Thomas Bolli's *Inszeniertes Erzählen. Überlegungen zu Robert Walsers "Räuber"-Roman* (1991), using Todorov's system of different categories of literary discourse. He provides a very lucid insight into Walser's "reflektierende Rede" (above all the playful manipulation of the reader). Susan Bernofsky has achieved what every good translator aspires to: Her work reads like an original English text. The contemporary relevance of this author's work is illustrated by a Montreal production of "La Promenade" (*Der Spaziergang*) at the Usine C théâtre in 2005 with a virtuoso performance of Paul Savoie. The cover of this attractive volume shows a watercolor portrait of young Robert Walser as Karl Moor by brother Karl Walser (1894).

Psiche Hughes, ed.

Violations: Stories of Love by Latin American Women

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. Pp. 186. \$45.00 \$19.95

Reviewed by Michael Hardin

In her introduction to *Violations: Stories of Love by Latin American Women*, Psiche Hughes establishes four categories of violation: "infringement of the social code; infringement of the religious code; indictment of historical and political structures; and perversion of the sexual ethos." Hughes's delineations of these categories provide socio-historical contexts for the stories in this collection, and thus some insight into the justification for her thesis. However, the categories overlap to such a degree that when she attempts to locate a particular story within a specific category, it is hard not to argue that it could just as easily fit one or more other categories.

The first story of the collection, Cristina Peri Rossi's "To Love or to Ingest," is a wonderful first-person narrative about a long-distance, anonymous affair. The narrator details the erotics of sex and eating, and even muses on the notion of eating either one's lover or one's enemy. While the beloved is a woman, the narrator's sex is not given until the final page or two, where we discover that the narrator is Carlos, a man. So what is the violation? Until we discover that the narrator is male, the violation appears to be that the relationship is homosexual. Given Peri Rossi's other writings, a homoerotic narrative would not come unexpected. So do we read this as a closeted narrative (and thus not a violation), or is the violation that Peri Rossi is writing as male (although not very convincingly), or is the violation that sex and ingestion are equated?