

imaginary relation results in an unacknowledged indifference of the Left to itself. For Baudrillard, the projects still exist in the "real," still generate their discourse (endlessly and without real resistance or

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stakes), but at the level of the imaginary, the figure of transcendence has been replaced by the transsexual, the transpolitical and the transeconomic. We see ourselves less in a mirror of boundaries and transgressions than in a mirror of political, sexual and economic indifferention—as clones, transsexuals, prosthetic attachments, computers, digitalization and codes. Or perhaps Baudrillard is saying that we see less and less of ourselves altogether, as the tension between the "real" and the symbolic implodes. None of these strange creatures that inhabit Baudrillard's universe has an Other; they are only points in a network of disembodied circulation. They all signal an operational world where everything is being reduced to its simple, digital components before being made to circulate. With no ability to transcend their aims in an imaginary, the emancipatory projects collapse upon their objects—the masses, sex, knowledge, art, nature, goods. Because these never really did exist fully, they are made to exist, and the familiar Baudrillardian world of simulation subtly replaces the old one.

The implications for the Left are twofold. Firstly, the attempt to render the world rational and transparent inadvertently results in a "whitewashed" society, one in which negativity has become obsolete. This is tantamount to erasing the ground on which the Left stands because, for Baudrillard, the Left intellectual's domain is the negative. Secondly, the further soci-

ety goes in this direction—the more "positivized"—it becomes, the more susceptible it is to anomaly, viral attack and mass abreaction. The systems suffer from unpredictable returns of exiled negativity in the form of catastrophe, random violence, terrorism, epidemic and other "extreme phenomena." The Right is perhaps better situated to take advantage of this because it erects its discourse of order on the fetishization of categories rather than their dissolution and exchangeability. In any case, the Left is in the position of adding flame to the fire when it tries to address these issues.

This is surely not an unsympathetic challenge to the Left, but one that leads in an uncertain direction. For Baudrillard the problem is posed in terms of the relationship between the symbolic and the rational. The analysis of evil is a case in point. When the Ayatollah condemned Salman Rushdie to death, according to Baudrillard, he spoke with a power that was much greater than one of simple material or military wealth. "Power exists solely by virtue of its symbolic ability to designate the Other, the Enemy, what is at stake, what threatens us, what is Evil." The Ayatollah spoke "Evil" because he negated all Western values of progress, rationality, political ethics and democracy with a single utterance. He spoke with power because the West has ceded the power of evil and symbolism to him and others, as a result of the operationalization of its values and the "leukemization" of the body politic. The power to speak evil no longer exists in the West. Only a positive discourse exists on the rights of man which the typically irreverent Baudrillard characterizes as pious, weak, useless and hypocritical.

In Germany and Austria the reaction to the neo-Nazis lends itself to this sort of analysis. The neo-Nazis are dangerous, but their capacity for violence is nothing beside the punitive power of the state. It is because they deign to speak "Evil" — about refugees, about the Holocaust, about

Hitler — that they incite a disproportionate fear of Nazi virulence and resurgence. They evoke the "accursed share" which the assumed existence of a social democratic consensus sought to suppress. Like Mitterand naming the Ayatollah "absolute evil," anti-Fascists suddenly find themselves colluding with evil, calling neo-Nazi spokesmen "Auschwitzlugner" (liars), spreading destabilizing innuendo about drug use, homosexuality and infidelity among the movement's leaders, and, in parody of the Gestapo, keeping detailed files on neo-Nazis and extreme Right organizations.

The power to speak "Evil" has been exiled from the post-War political discourse. This must be the source of the Left's peculiar ineffectiveness. Under the sign of the Holocaust and terror of Fascism, Social Democracy in both countries has evolved along a course of rights, consensus and rational management. The official response to neo-Nazism is heavily coded with law and order while a substantial response to the extreme Right issues of refugees, foreigners, drug users and AIDS victims has not been forthcoming. (This is in part to avoid alienating the apparent right-wing vote and in part because there is no language with which to respond). By banning neo-Nazi groups from the legitimate body politic and, in Austria, rewriting the laws on Nazi Wiederbetätigung, the Left continues along the course of management by silencing one half of the discourse and letting the courts, in their limited arena, deal with a fundamental challenge to the premises of the social democratic state. It must also be said that no amount of people in the street holding candles in silent vigil will suffice to fill this emptiness. Planned marches and crowd scenes only signify more emptiness. Because the Left discourse no longer lives in any passionate relation to transcendence, utopia or Truth, people depend on this ultimately futile show of numbers to demonstrate solidarity to each other. Even the concept of solidarity itself betrays a passivity of response that holds no stakes, makes no real demands and expresses no vision. The Left attempts to reenact itself by "necro" reference to the Holocaust and combative gestures towards *Rechtsextremis*,

but does not admit to itself that this eruption of evil in its midst is nothing but a sign of its own empty projects and weakness. While the Holocaust was a horror historically, we might ask the repugnant question, as Baudrillard does, about whether—given its constant use to found a leftist discourse, the constant return to its site to render it more and more factually and analytically transparent, and the constant levelling ability of the media to replace thus rendered facts and histories with any other—the Holocaust really did occur (like that), or at least, whether it can be said to exist for us today.

A Baudrillardian critique like this is compelling but elusive. It is compelling as an explication of the paradox at the limit of the universalization of exchange value (the "viral"), and of its repercussions for Left criticism. The individual's subjective moment of understanding and decision is convincingly shown to be lost to discourse. Baudrillard is certainly speculative and hyperbolic, but in the manner of a machine of enunciation he demarcates a near future or recent (unrecognized) past, both by assuming a Western world radically entering into simulation and susceptible to "viral" attack, and by describing it as if the process were already complete. And we cannot say that he does not find a responsiveness there.

His critique is elusive because this plays uncertainly on Baudrillard's contraposition of the symbolic and the rational. The spheres of metaphysics and sociology are blurred (perhaps in the manner of the contagious superconductivity he portrays), and it is never clear whether we are in the domain of the logic of reason, causes, realization and the law, or in that of theatre, game rules, seduction and metamorphoses. By moving the analysis to the systemic structure of signification and discourse, Baudrillard can speculate, announce a total emptiness and throw down a challenge from the position of the symbolic, while at the level of his sociological analysis in the rational world, the confusion of forms, motivations and practices tumbles over itself, as indifferent to or as interested in politics, clones and the crisis of art as it is in ironic strategies. He moves

quickly to describe the form and thus, like a literary machine, would seduce it onto a course, but from such a level of abstraction (post-situationist, post-post-structuralist?) and to such an incomprehensible "Otherness" of ritual game and gesture, that we may not wish to give ourselves up to the looseness and arbitrariness this implies.

Baudrillard's "reversibility" seems to be a sociological phenomenon whereby the idea of, say, politics, reverses itself as it becomes detached from its imaginary and referentiality. Instead of dissolving the alienating government structure in an ideal of Greek city politics, political qualities like citizenship, moral responsibility, leadership and power itself dissolve in simulation, in the people's corresponding indifference to politics without stakes, and in the move of power to more genetic, uncompromising spheres. But isn't reversibility also a mysterious metaphysical principle, whereby things or ideas just flip their meanings by themselves, without intervention from the "real" world? Baudrillard suggests as much by opposing the rational sphere, where logic is based on irreversibility (of time, meaning, progress), to the symbolic, where things are reversible by "nature," and according to rules which are played up to but remain unknown. Does the essential kernel of things just flip because the essence is symbolic and "objectively" ironic, or is it made to flip through struggle in the real as a parody of the symbolic?

By means of a vulgar pragmatism we may ask, in the end, whether the value of Baudrillard's analysis is not simply contained in what it can do. With respect to the neo-Nazis we are offered a strategy of analysis that would not reason with hatred of foreigners and Jews, the use of violence, the reenactment of Fascism, etc., but would undermine the concept of difference that informs reason. Neonazism and racism are a fetishization of difference, the virulent reverse side of the same liberal system of commodity exchange. In Baudrillard's agonistically conceived universe, on the other hand, where Objects (and races) are radically Other, racism may be turned from its path only through irony: "an ironic give-and-take founded precisely on racial terms: not at all through the legit-

imation of differences by legal means, but through an ultimately violent interaction grounded in seduction and voracity." The Nazis would not be debated or exterminated but the polarity between them and their objects of hatred would be diffused, "brasilianized," by ironic doubling and by valorization of the Other as an Exotic Other, a distant mirror in which to see ourselves and to "exchange gifts." If the Nazis are not allowed to be the sole holders of the symbolic wealth, their menace declines to the status it deserves; namely, a feeble abreactionary attempt to recover life in the social scene.

Perhaps Baudrillard would suggest that the overabundance of symbolism that emanates from the swastika—that transcendence of mere racism that constitutes the "Evil" of *neonazism*—is something to be respected, at least as an enemy. Is this acceptable? Baudrillard's ironic critique is elusive, but it is also a worthy challenge to think through.

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Laura E. Donaldson, *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-building*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

BY Nicole Shukin-Simpson

Laura E. Donaldson's *Decolonizing Feminisms: Race, Gender, and Empire-building*, engages postcolonial and feminist criticism—what many feel is the critical juncture in a radical politics—with a perspicuity equal to the task. In the company of Trinh T. Minh-ha, Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said and bell hooks, among others, Donaldson tracks the guises of nationalistic identity that accompany and even constitute colonialist regimes. She does so through an analysis of the subtle intersections of race, gender and

class "among" and "within" women (33). Layering both literary and filmic study, Donaldson situates the overlap and the slippage within race and gender, making visible the latent ideologies that mark colonialist enterprises.

While Donaldson trains a critical eye upon the colonialist complicity idling beneath white feminism, urging feminists' self-reflexive examination of their own nationalistic tendencies, she also exposes the equally monological positions of some Third World feminists. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, is caught in the act of simplifying Jane Eyre as the privileged "individualist female subject" (15), overlooking the complex interaction of gendered race and racialized gender. Donaldson initiates her book with a "take" on the problematic dynamic between Miranda and Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, stating, "the Prospero and Miranda complexes should become parables about the dangers of monotheistic reading" (17). Singular readings wielded by any critic, Donaldson suggests, function to colonize the subject.

Donaldson supplements her exploration of the interaction of identities with an interaction of disciplines, complicating unified readings with a "cultural studies" approach. Only at the intersection of film and literature does she discover the ways in which dominant representations stitch themselves together into almost seamless discourses. Donaldson targets the filmic device of "suture," a term popular in the "Screen" school as well one used by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, where it is described as the ideological practice of covering over complex relations. Donaldson sees it as that which creates "the imaginary unity, the sutured coherence . . . set up by the classic film" (230). Foregrounded as a colonialist technique of meshing together incompatible differences of race and gender in cinematic imagery, Donaldson locates the stitches, so to speak, in "natural" representations of people of colour and of women. In *Peter Pan*, film and book, she traces how the racial stereotype of the "pickaninny," or the "infantilized" Native Other, is an image sutured almost invisibly to the stereotype of

woman, blending race and gender in a colonialist project that depends on the mastery of difference.

Donaldson begins by arguing that Bertha, the madwoman in the attic in *Jane Eyre*, and Jane herself, are more complex embodiments of race and gender than are allowed by either Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their groundbreaking study *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, or Spivak, in her essay "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." By reading the text from the angle of filmic "shots," Donaldson unravels Jane's unwitting participation in Bertha's othering without erasing Jane's own oppression within patriarchy. (It was both a surprise and a disappointment, however, that Donaldson never mentions Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel that counters *Jane Eyre* by giving the native, colonized Bertha a voice).

In her second chapter, the diaries and novels around Mrs. Anna Leonowen's experience in an Indian court are juxtaposed with several Broadway and film versions of the story, eliciting here, too, Anna's subtle imbrication in and exploitation by dominant culture. In the next chapter, Donaldson, again, braids her discussion of text and context, or postmodernist feminisms and essentialist feminisms, into an analysis of the 1982 Australian film *We of the Never Never*, highlighting the specific narratives of racial and gendered colonization in the Australian outback as they are constructed in "sutured" representations. It is in this third chapter that Donaldson introduces her own project, proposing a reading strategy that blends feminism's split positions, that "graf(ph)ts" one onto the other and arrives at a powerful hybrid. Borrowing and relocating Derrida's deconstructionist term, Donaldson writes, "Graf(ph)ting as the combination [of difference] . . . could become an extraordinarily powerful trope for feminist criticism because it insists not only upon the text as a playful system of signs but also upon the material rootedness of signification" (57). The rest of the book offers various configurations of femi-

nisms that splice together difference to become not a singular entity, or one that grows irreconcilably apart, but one that accommodates many strains. Graf(ph)ting, as opposed to the ideological device of suturing, splices rather than fuses difference.

Donaldson goes on to make a Marxist appeal for a materialist analysis of discourse, one that would expose both the ways in which women's experience is discursively mediated and the ways in which discourses are experientially embodied. She does this around a discussion of James M. Barrie's 1911 story *Peter Pan* and its revival in a Leonard Bernstein musical in the 1950s. The blurring of "pickaninny" and woman in the figure of Tiger Lily exemplifies what Donaldson calls "graft as political corruption." Corrupt grafting, as opposed to the empowering technique of "graf(ph)ting," resembles the suturing described by Laclau and Mouffe, one which Donaldson situates as operating in literary and media representations of race and gender. In Tiger Lily, we witness the grafting together of a racialized Other and a woman so that each term is exerted against the other and cancels the difference. The enthymeme is a vehicle for such corrupt grafting, suppressing in logical argument an assumption that gives rise to a foregone (sexist, racist) conclusion (76). Yet if graft naturalizes and extends an empire, graf(ph)ting responds agentially by transforming it into a trope of resistant reading.

Chapter 5 allows us to compare E. M. Forster's novel, *A Passage to India*, with its 1984 film adaptation, both of which "write" the metonymic structure of colonizing desire and the consequent exoticization of India. Donaldson recognizes that although white women may be excluded from men's clubs on the basis of gender, they are still implicated in the colonizing of a Ralph Lauren-ish British Raj. With Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, for which there is no cinematic comparison, Donaldson reinforces her contention that plural and ambiguous, rather than singular and nationalistic, identity politics are the only hope for a truly subversive feminist movement, or "exodus." Hurston understands, as must feminisms, that exodus (liberation movements) can

symbolize freedom without demanding a unified political identity. This contention is theoretically enlarged in Donaldson's last chapter, when the book begins to articulate something beyond the thorough—but not entirely new—readings of film and literature that precede it.

In "(ex)Changing (wo)Man: Towards a Materialist-Feminist Semiotics," Donaldson examines the abstract commodification of "woman" within postmodernist discourses. Only by graf(ph)ting postmodern feminism onto the body of women's experience does Donaldson see a way in which societies might stop exchanging woman by changing man. Here, there is a sensitive and timely attempt to heal, but not seamlessly to seal, what she describes as "the ethereal ballerina of deconstruction and the flat-footed ethicist of feminism" (126).

Donaldson both complicates and honours organicist feminisms. Her horticultural tropes of graf(ph)ting (and, later, gardening) pose a feminist vision that remains grounded in the soil of women's experience without falling blindly into the dangers of pure, nationalistic identity. For graf(ph)ting is a tool that equally cultivates hybridity. The book contributes to today's theoretical discourse through its careful attention to feminism and difference, situating race and gender within the historical and ideological contexts of film and literature, and ultimately working out a theoretical stance that offers a productive non-solution to the shifting intersections within and among women.

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Sharon Butala, *The Perfection of The Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature*. Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994.

BY Gayle Irwin

Funny: how you can learn more about people through their fiction than you can when they are writing about themselves. It's a trendy project, but Life Writing can be a tricky task; and when you combine an often shifting autobiographical voice with other trendy genres like social history, eco-feminism, Jungian psychology, a sometimes new age spiritualism, not to mention anthropology and postcolonialism... well, pulling the project together can be a monumental task. Perhaps too big a task. In the opening section of *The Perfection of the Morning*, Sharon Butala explains how her latest text grew and insisted its autobiographical form. In the end, however, her short stories and her novels are far more "immediate" and "insistent" than this Life Writing text.

Funny: the impulse to hide behind quoted texts and quasi-psychoanalytical truisms, when you want to investigate not character, but self. As I read this book, I couldn't help feeling Butala would have been better off concentrating on the rich descriptions of the various not-quite-banal rural moments which sometimes peek through her narrative agenda. She could have given rein to her trademark aptitude for ironic detail. Instead, her attempt to weave together the mesh of historical, botanical, anthropological, mystical, feminist, and psychoanalytical titbits is often frustrating, and when all this merges with a "prairie call to the land," the project brushes precariously close to "just plain hokey."

Recently in the "Introduction to Gender in Literature" course I teach, my students and I reflected upon the rise of social history within the academy—another

big and, yes, trendy topic. Throughout the year we had been discussing concepts of voice and exclusion, and we studied a number of Life Writing texts. I remember one discussion in particular which may be pertinent here: One student (a bright, white woman returning to school after four years on the wheel of fortune that pretends to be a workforce) complained of never learning about "her" culture in the midst of all our new-found consciousness surrounding ethnicity and race. Discussion that day hovered on the edge of what we defined as traditional history—a history that seemed little interested in "anyone's" culture, truth be told, and preferred instead to concentrate on the acts of a relatively few "great men," and a constricted sense of "great civilizations" (always Western). Hoping the issue could shed valuable light on a year long misunderstanding, I listened as my students coaxed out each other's sense of the changes being made. They zeroed in on the fact that we were studying Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash* and Cecil Foster's *No Man in the House*, for instance, and the way the CFB Heritage Series, which has been coming out with sixty second Canadian vignettes for years, now seems to be redressing the silences of past programming by producing pieces on a Manitoba suffrage leader, Canada's first female doctor, the underground railway, the Chinese labourers on the Trans-Continental line, and Native Canadian oral history.

All of which brings me, in a roundabout way, to my take on Sharon Butala's *The Perfection of the Morning*. I'm from Saskatchewan, a fact which probably weighed in my favour when I was handed this book for review. I know the territory Butala is trying to describe. This text is about building a relationship with nature: an old Canadian theme, one that crops up everywhere in prairie fiction. Butala's story follows her "apprenticeship" in the often harsh, certainly unfamiliar, world of her second husband's ranch. His place in the far reaches of southwestern Saskatchewan is a rural world in the true prairie sense of the word "rural." It is only fitting, then, that some of the most poignant passages in the text come when Butala is describing