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Review: The Poetics of Yury Olesha by Victor Peppard

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most intense male relationships). Lesér has set herself a tremendous task here; chronology and Mann's words define the matrix of her laudable exploration, which, however, is somewhat at sea without a methodological compass in this wealth of words and information. The conventional biographical approach that acknowledges neither recent Mann scholarship nor literary-theoretical discussions of the past decades sets Lesér's book apart from the others discussed; it adheres to the traditions of literary analysis that see literature as a reflection of life, the author's work as constitutive of "an intellectual biography."

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Victor Peppard. *The Poetics of Yury Olesha*. Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1989. 175 pp. \$19.95 cloth; pb. \$9.95.

Despite all the critical attention that has been showered upon Yury Olesha (1899-1960) during the past twenty-five years, this Soviet writer remains a highly enigmatic figure whose oeuvre continues to generate major interpretive disagreements. Victor Peppard's monograph, whose purpose is "to demonstrate that there is in fact an identifiable set of interconnected poetic principles that governs Olesha's work and gives it artistic coherence," explores what he considers to be the three dominant elements in his poetic system: 1) defamiliarization, 2) carnival, and 3) dialogicality.

In the first chapter, "From Metafiction to Metaliterature," the author examines the aesthetic innovations that Olesha introduced in his works. Basing his analysis on Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie* ("defamiliarization" or "estrangement"), Peppard asserts that Olesha, in keeping with the spirit of artistic experimentation that inspired the best Soviet writers of the 1920s, attempted to rewrite the rules of writing in his texts, thereby forcing the reader to reevaluate and reformulate the very processes by which literature is produced. Olesha emerges from Peppard's analysis as "a persistent recaster and reshaper of familiar forms and conventions." The most salient examples of this generic and structural defamiliarization, he argues, are provided by *Envy* (with its ornamentality), *Three Fat Men* (with its multi-textuality), and *No Day without a Line* (with its metaliterary nature). In Chapter Two, "Variations on the Carnival," Peppard concentrates his attention mainly on the text of *Envy*, which, he claims, is "so profoundly permeated with the spirit of the carnival" that it serves as "a special exemplar of carnivalistic fiction in twentieth-century Russian fiction." Bakhtin's theory provides the basis for his examination of the various carnivalistic features, such as eccentricity (scandal scenes and verbal haranguing), *mésalliances* (parodic doubles), and the dynamics of crown-

ing/discrowning (mock kings and jesters), that appear throughout *Envy*. Peppard also connects two forms of popular entertainment from modern culture—sports and circus—with the carnival spirit underlying Olesha's literary works, a spirit that culminates in *Envy* with that "great carnivalistic event," the soccer match. The author concludes his study with a chapter on "The Poetics of Dialogue," where the theories of Shklovsky and Bakhtin are once again invoked, this time to provide the framework for a discussion of the widespread ambivalence that informs Olesha's writings. Competing narrative voices and perspectival viewpoints (adult and child, artist and athlete, and so on), Peppard notes, combine to create a highly complex and dialogical literary structure.

Peppard's monograph provides a number of illuminating observations about important (and, until now, largely unexplored) aspects of Olesha's poetics. One shortcoming, however, is the author's unfortunate tendency in his discussions to refrain from addressing broader implications raised by the notions of carnival, defamiliarization, and dialogicality. One wishes that Peppard, who is clearly knowledgeable about his topic, would have strayed more often from his narrow rhetorical plan, thrown off his exceedingly reverent (and thus sometimes restrictive) discipleship to Shklovsky, Bakhtin, and Morson, and speculated more freely and expansively about Olesha's poetics. Nonetheless, his book does represent a valuable addition to the scholarship now available on this remarkable Soviet writer.

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JoAnn Cannon. *Postmodern Italian Fiction: The Crisis of Reason in Calvino, Eco, Sciascia, Malerba*. Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1989. 139 pp. \$27.50.

Postmodern Italian Fiction: The Crisis of Reason in Calvino, Eco, Sciascia, Malerba consists of a preface, a lengthy introduction, and four chapters. It is a worthwhile collection of essays in English on four highly influential Italian writers, as JoAnn Cannon adroitly examines certain works which, for her, formulate "a cognitive role for the fictional work," because as she also states in her Preface, each of the works "discussed in this study is to varying degrees a self-conscious text, occupied or preoccupied with its status as literary artifice." In a lengthy historical introduction, Cannon offers an overview of the artistic and intellectual milieu in which each of these works was conceived and written. The chapters that follow, instead, are dedicated to specific works of the writers in question. (There is, unfortunately, an infelicitous editorial oversight: the book jacket refers to the Introduction as Chapter One, and so on, as does the author herself in an endnote.)

Chapter One deals with Leonardo Sciascia's historical essay *The Death of the Inquisitor* (1964) and his historical novel *The Council of Egypt* (1963). Here Cannon demonstrates how Sciascia fuses both the historical and fictional modes in the