subversion of the whole, the closed and the complete, to the bourgeois control over the means of cultural production and the practice of concealment and effacement which characterises this control. He further links the grotesque to the social and physical alienation (away from a sense of self as physical whole and part of a social whole) created by capitalism and the development of the 'atomised bourgeois individual' (p. 182). Grotesque laughter here (and this is the first time laughter is referred to in the anthology) serves as a 'disalienating' force (p. 187) restoring the wholeness shattered with the radical division of labour within the capitalist system.

Of the rest of the articles included, I would say that the pick are: Jack Slay's 'Delineations in Freakery: Freaks in the Fiction of Harry Crews and Katherine Dunn', Kelly Anspaugh's 'Jean Qui Rit' and 'Jean Qui Pleure': James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and the High Modern Grotesque, and Greg Metcalf's 'The Soul in the Meat Suit: Ivan Albright, Hannibal Lecter and the Body Grotesque' (if only for its interesting confrontation with the horror of the grotesque, its dominant mode within contemporary popular culture).

These titles (Anspaugh's excluded) of themselves give a clear indication of the lack of centrality of which I have already spoken. I fear that it cannot be argued that the volume escapes this censure on account of the sense of the width of the field that the range of its selections affords.

****

Rethinking South African Literary History

Rethinking South African Literary History
edited by Johannes A. Smit, Johan Van Wyk & Jean-Philippe Wade
Durban: Y-Press, 1996, 250 pp.
ISBN 1-875094-05-9

Reviewed by David Johnson
Department of English
University of Natal (Durban)

At a certain happy moment in the career of an academic, s/he ascends to the status of 'expert', and in so doing earns the right to tell the rest of the profession how to do their jobs. The most common event for such (invariably tedious) pontification is the professor's inaugural lecture, but there are other

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2010).

moments as well. Johan Van Wyk and Jean-Philippe Wade's colloquium on 'Re-thinking South African Literary History' in Tongaat in May 1995 was such a moment, where in Wade's words they 'gather[ed] together as many experts as we could' (p. 3), and encouraged them to pronounce on the declared topic. This collection, with additional editorial input from Johannes Smit, is the result of the colloquium.

The results are not quite as dull as one might have feared. There *are* pious instructions from professors as to how 'we' should be doing 'our' research, but there are also several essays dealing in interesting ways with particular Southern African literatures, and others which summarise usefully different histories of constructing national literatures. In addition, the expert contributors disagree at times entertainingly on quite what writing a national literary history might involve.

Although they might lack (for some) the necessary epistemological self-consciousness required for writing something as important as South Africa's national literary history, the essays by Maje Serudu on Northern Sotho literatures, Jeff Opland on Xhosa literatures in newspapers in the nineteenth century, and Annemarié Van Niekerk on Afrikaans women writers, introduce fascinating material. Writing of the challenges facing Indian literary historians in forging a national literary history, Aijaz Ahmad has insisted on the need to assemble the available literatures in all languages of the sub-continent before considering any notions of a national literature. Such an emphasis is served well in the Southern African context by these three studies: the material surveyed challenges, as much as any theoretical intervention might, the received definitions of the 'nation', the 'literary', and the 'historical'.

In terms of summarising the histories of how national literary histories themselves have emerged, there are four essays worth checking. In order of appearance: Rory Ryan summarises in detail the histories of Cultural Studies in Britain and Cultural Ethnography in the U.S., though curiously mutes the defining influence of the Frankfurt School; Shane Moran in 'The New Hellenism' traces the rise of the notion 'culture' in European thought, and warns that the unifying claims of culture, including those of national literatures, have historically concealed economic divisions and conflicts; Johannes Smit surveys with varying degrees of accuracy the historical methods of *inter alia* Hegel, Marx, Ranke, the Annales School, Habermas, Geertz, and Jauss; and Michael Green in a frustratingly short section of his paper discusses the South African social history industry. The material covered in these essays—even if at times schematically—represents a useful contribution to the process of inter-disciplinary 're-thinking' inaugurated by the editors.

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2011).

As to the disagreements, not surprisingly they coalesce for the most part around the relationship of the literary historian to the new nation. Many of the contributors must have shuffled uncomfortably with the liberal use of the inclusive 'we' in the collection; joined in a community of literary scholars perhaps, but certainly not united in their views on nationhood and literary criticism. Several contributors assume that the rainbow nation's literary intelligentsia can nurture nascent democratic forms: C. F. Swanepoel sees a new national literature contributing to nation-building and the Reconstruction & Development Programme (now-defunct—could there be a connection?); Johan Van Wyk justifies the quest for a new national literature as a necessary response to both the new political dispensations and conceptual challenges posed; Michael Chapman regards literary activity as concerned with justice, and the literary historian engaged in national literary re-construction as a potential contributor to the creation of a civil society and democratised public sphere; and C. T. Msimang concludes with an appeal that the artist (and, presumably, the literary critic) should show the way towards nation-building. There are several other contributors, however, who are rather more cautious about the capacity of a new literary canon to heal the wounded nation: Shane Moran, Jean-Philippe Wade, and Michael Green's papers proceed in this critical spirit, and Leon de Kock re-states his rejection of the encyclopaedic national literary synopsis in favour of plotting what he calls 'our many smaller stories'.

Two final points. It is inevitable that any such collection will be uneven, and that the editors' ability to address this will be limited by the quality of the submissions. Nonetheless, there are several essays here that would have benefited from stringent re-writing, and further research. They read as hastily-assembled and opportunistic attempts to get into print (successful, as it turns out), and they diminish the impact of the worthier contributions discussed above.

In conclusion, the context of this collection should be noted. The editors, the publisher, and seven of the seventeen contributors are based in KwaZulu-Natal, where ongoing, low-intensity civil war continues to confound the myth of a new South Africa. Although there is nowhere in the collection engagement with this immediate context, the desire for a common South African literary history might be read as a displaced imaginative attempt to transcend the economic and political tensions of the province. The competing definitions of nation, literature, and history in the collection should therefore be read not only in terms of wider 'theoretical developments', but also in terms of how local material conflicts, and the anxieties they generate, are being expressed.

Reproduced by Sabinet Gateway under licence granted by the Publisher (dated 2011).