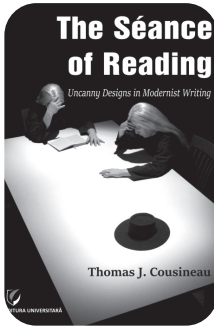


RESPONSE NOTE

to Teona Farmatu,
 “Rereading the Literary Modernist Core”,
 a book-review to Thomas J. Cousineau,
*The Séance of Reading. Uncanny Designs in
 Modernist Writing*, Bucharest, Bucharest
 University Publishing, 2023,
 in *Caietele Echinox*, vol. 45, 2023, p. 401



Two chapters of my *The Séance of Reading* – one on “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and the other on *Waiting for Godot* – began as guest-lectures at Babes Bolyai University. For this reason, it is a special pleasure to read such a sensitive and stimulating review of it in the pages of *Equinox*. Particularly intriguing is Teona Formatu’s suggestion that I treat the works under consideration as involving a “mystical construction” and, later, “a sacred and multi-layered monument.” Her choice of these phrases – which would not otherwise have occurred to me and for which I thank her – reminds me that the “éminence grise” undergirding my critical practice as a whole is the French Jewish mystic Simone Weil. One passage from Weil’s *La pesanteur et la grâce* is especially foundational to my various writing and lecturing projects: “Une œuvre d’art a un auteur, et pourtant, quand elle est parfaite, elle a quelque chose d’essentiellement anonyme. Elle imite l’anonymat de l’art divin.” The three volumes of my overall project – *Ritual Unbound*, *The Séance of Reading*, and *Balancing All: The Symmetrical Imperative of Writing* (in progress) seek to uncover the “anonymous” paradigms – scapegoating, immuring, and symmetrizing, respectively – that were fashioned in the course of human prehistory and that emerge, albeit in disguised forms, in individually authored works.

I also appreciated the way in which references to literary critics who write on such subjects as digital humanities and the modernist Anthropocene reminded me of the great distance that separates my own work from theirs. The paper that I read at your “Worlding (Semi-) Peripheral Literatures” conference last year – “Oedipus. Manole. Exekias: Covert Models for Literary Prehistory” – was a reply to Franco Moretti’s *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary Prehistory*. Similarly, the title of the introduction to my current book-in-progress – “Always Symmetrize” – replies to Fredric Jameson’s better-known “always historicize” admonition, and the Greek potter Exekias’s “Achilles and Ajax Playing A Board Game” – an amphora that so perfectly visualizes the *symmetrical* unconscious with which this work is concerned – replaces the Greimas square of which Jameson makes use in his *The*

Political Unconscious. Likewise, Teona Formatu’s reference to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* as “revisit[ing] the hegemonic, unjust relationship between Europe and Africa” and her mention of Flannery O’Connor as being the only female author included in my book remind me of equally legitimate ways of doing literary criticism upon which, however, my own interest in timeless paradigms necessarily casts a blind eye.

Thank you for commissioning this review, which is a much-appreciated response to a book that was inspired by my late-in-life discovery of a Romanian ballad and published, as I had hoped it would be while working on it, in Romania.

With best wishes,
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