

at Lupe's rancho at 9:30 inquiring after Adolfinia, a tortuous waiting game begins.

As Argueta develops their story, we realize that only the Fuentes women remain to bear witness to the martyrdom of their menfolk and to carry on the struggle precipitated by the crisis of conscience that has motivated the Salvadoran pueblo to demand its rights. Chepe, Justino, and Helio speak to us through the memories of women who must cope with a world completely torn apart, one in which normal patterns of survival have been destroyed. Lupe thinks: " 'What's important is to be aware that one is poor,' Chepe tells me repeatedly." Waiting inside her Guard-occupied house for Adolfinia to arrive, she recalls what her husband's sense of commitment has taught her: "Conscience is all the things we do for the benefit of others without seeking our own interest." Adolfinia remembers her father Helio's words: "For as long as I can remember, the authorities have been this way—they shoot first and ask questions later. Well, I began to understand....It's not just about getting annoyed or getting indignant....It should be called awareness, not rebelliousness...."

Adolfinia has learned much from these men, using their teachings as the basis for her own involvement in the struggle for change. Already she has put herself at great risk by taking part in a demonstration for better prices for fertilizer and insecticide and by participating in the occupation of the San Salvador Cathedral to protest atrocities—including her uncle's murder—in Chalatenango Province. Interestingly, the guerrilla movement is not at issue here. The Fuentes Guardado family's single affiliation has been with the Catholic Church and the Christian farmworkers organization.

At the same time that he brings us inside the Fuentes Guardado family, Argueta also reveals the perverted mentality that guides the "authorities"—men who, as we learn from Lupe and Maria Pia and Adolfinia, are long-familiar sons of neighbors. In brilliant monologues spoken by a private in the Guard, Argueta shows us how a monster is created. Despite the strangeness of his new

life inside the Guard and the rigor of his training, the private comments: "All told, I wouldn't change my life for anything. God be my witness. We eat meat every day....We have to be well fed, the gringo tells us, so we can defend the country....One must be ready to defend the country even at the expense of our own brothers....The trainer shouts, 'Who is our worst enemy?' And we shout, 'The people!' " Referring to one of his classes, he says: "[There is] another class called psychology, which is to say, how you can make people suffer by the mere use of words....This science of psychology has something to do with electric apparatuses." Summing up his position in Salvadoran society, the private says: "What's worse is eating shit here [in Chalate], busting your ass from sunup to sundown for a wage that's barely sufficient to subsist on....The thing is, all civilians are shit...they envy our uniforms, the fact that we've gotten ahead in life."

When Adolfinia finally arrives at her grandmother's home, a cruel farce is played out for the two women. Under the pretext of needing Adolfinia to help identify a captured man, the Guard drag Chepe—Lupe's husband, Adolfinia's grandfather—into the house. He is beaten so badly that Adolfinia doesn't recognize him; and when Lupe does, she says to herself: "My body turns to ice as I see you transformed into a piece of meat bitten by dogs." Private Martínez—perhaps the private whose thoughts we have listened to earlier—tells them: "We want you to look in this mirror. That's how you're going to end up, all of you who don't love the rich, because the enemies of democracy have poisoned your hearts...."

To protect her small children and Adolfinia, Lupe must deny recognition of her own husband. Nevertheless, she summons the courage to tell the authorities: "We have allowed you to kill us slowly. But we've come to our senses while it's not too late. My granddaughter is alive and you are not going to kill her slowly. I know it, and it is what you don't like. She lives for all of us, she breathes for us, she is being born while we are in our death throes; it is also possible she will save us." When the Guard depart, Lupe must immediately face the desperate future awaiting her children, her grandchildren, and herself.

In an image that underscores the excruciating tension now assumed by the very passing of the hours, she thinks: "Sweating, the afternoon walks across the clean sky. Goodbye, José." But Adolfinia also ponders the future, envisioning the growing numbers of committed young Salvadorans and the final "death" of Private Martínez. **WV**

PHILOSOPHY AND THE ART OF WRITING: STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY STYLE

by Berel Lang

(Bucknell University Press; 246 pp.; \$28.50)

John E. Becker

In an oral discussion I can ask what you mean and get an answer. The words have a certain transparency and fluidity engendered by the immediacy of feedback, gesture, and situation. Writing, by comparison, exists in a kind of contextual vacuum. When you write, I can write back and ask what you mean, and you can write me an interpretation. And then I might ask if your first message said what your second message said it did. There is no longer, in other words, a conversation defining itself but, rather, a series of texts, stable and symbolic, from which I can ask a meaning and remain unsatisfied, or better, which I feel somewhat free to interpret. It is this static, nontransparent quality of texts—their noncognitive opaqueness—that literary critics focus on. What Lang is out to tell us here is that philosophical writings, because they are texts, are the legitimate objects of a similar critical attention—and not only legitimate but necessary. The concepts of literary criticism, that is to say, belong in the study of philosophy.

To illustrate: The epic tradition in ancient Greece, the "matter of Troy," was a content in process, forming and reforming itself through the centuries of a timeless culture's oral tradition. Once it became text, it became the ikons we know—the Iliad, the Odyssey—suffering not only our constant reinterpretations but our centuries-long failure to understand it as a record of an entirely different thought process from our own writing-based one. Similarly with Socrates, says Lang, who did not philosophize and then simply neglect to write it down. His very thinking, his philosophy, is different for being oral. The absence of a text was intrinsic to the thought, making it different even from the thinking Plato did in writing his Socratic dialogues.

In calling our attention precisely to this moment in the evolution of thought, Lang strongly supports his own point. To some it may seem a very obvious point; yet it is one that needs to be made: The form in which philosophy is expressed is integral to its content. Philosophy, Lang goes on, is less science than it is art; it is the ongoing self-definition of man, as is literature. Individual thinkers leave in their wake verbal ikons of themselves philosophizing. We,

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their readers, read and reflect on the ikons and proceed to carry on the process. Philosophy, as literature, then, is a series of well-wrought urns within which lurk jinn, the philosophers. We both look at the urn and cultivate the illusion of talking with the jinni inside. Lang's suggested approach to a literary criticism of the texts of philosophy treats them according to the various ways the jinn live in the urns. In doing so, he spreads out for us an interesting array of critical terms, ancient perhaps in their provenance, but new and interesting as applied to philosophy.

The genres of philosophical writing, for instance, are characterized by the way the individuated presence, the persona, "acts" in the text. *Dialogue* imitates the philosophical action of a plurality of agents, while *meditation* (including in its large sweep the essay, confessions, and autobiography) presents us with the philosophical activity of a single persona. *Commentary* is a philosophical genre in which the persona subordinates him or herself to another present in a primary text. *Treatise*, finally, completes the fourfold hypothetical list of philosophical genres: Here the action of the persona is withdrawn from attention, assumes the role of neutral observer, and points toward "the facts."

The cogency of this first chapter is somewhat weakened, it seems to me, by its final argument, which is an extraordinarily tortured, if undeniable, defense of the idea that nothing in a philosophical text is untouched by style and that if we read it without being aware of style, we simply identify our own sense of order, and the author's, with the cosmic order. Style, in short, is the man. It is possible, of course, that philosophers would not have been content with so basic a literary dictum.

The argument of the second essay is just as intriguing. Lang continues to distinguish the ways the philosophical persona is present in the text. *Point of view* is the literary term Lang applies here. There are three types of point of view in philosophical texts: expository texts assume a point of view or starting point common to both writer and reader; performative texts give us the philosopher examining that starting point; reflexive texts shift back and forth between the two. Philosophy, Lang goes on to say, is characterized by two things: It has the habit of being its own first problem, and it is ironic. Perhaps literature is more philosophical, then, than Lang appreciates, since both of these qualities are as characteristic—and perhaps more so—of literature as of philosophy. But then, since the days of

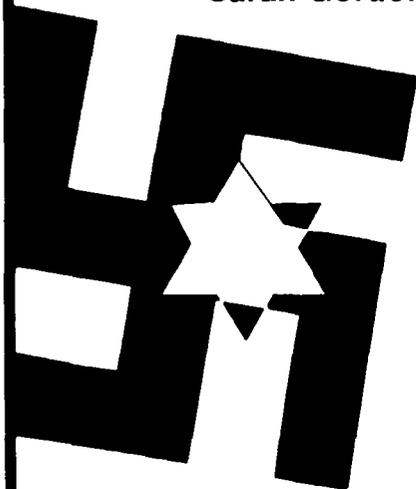
the Renaissance, when the disciplines refused any longer to receive their first principles from a "higher" discipline, they have all necessarily become their own first problem; and, driven back as they are on their own resources to decide what it is they are doing, they have all developed their own intrinsic and self-conscious ironies. The one possible exception is history, which, as Henry Adams so eloquently complained, has never been interested in knowing what it is doing.

Lang concludes the interesting part of his poetics of philosophy with the point that philosophy "has the manners" of art rather than of science, instancing the fact that there is no such thing as progress in philosophy—the modern philosopher having no more informed access to philosophical truth than did Aristotle; that philosophy is not and cannot be a corporate effort but must, rather, be the product of a unique creative vision; and that in spite of extreme differences among philosophers, none can ever be shown to be wrong. There is more to Lang's poetics, but from here on the going gets quite a bit more difficult, and one begins to wonder whether the style has not become the ikon of a very murky content.

If the skills of the literary critic are pertinent to the consideration of philosophical

Hitler, Germans, and the "Jewish Question"

Sarah Gordon



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texts, the same, by implication, might well be true of the skills of the philosopher in the consideration of literary texts. Lang does not make this reverse argument, but he does read literature philosophically. His criticism rewards the effort it takes to follow him through. The improbability of Lear's opening charade is the obvious enough point of departure for Lang's essay on that play. Lear, says Lang, wishes, as a man might, to demonstrate his control over his own death. He sees through Goneril and Regan well enough; he is stage-managing their protestations of love with the same arrogance with which he expects to retain power and prestige after giving it up. He sees himself enacting a role, performing in another play that he has contrived. Cordelia's refusal to play her role is the beginning of the process of his enlightenment: Mortality is not, as is virtually everything else in his kingdom, subject to his pleasure. He must eventually find himself located within the fact of mortality rather than outside it. In the end his dying "role" becomes a subjective and first-person consciousness of death's full impotence; the inability to retrieve life from it or maintain anything of life in it is unmistakable.

Lang also has excellent chapters on Borges and on 1984. It is a valuable and interesting book. Most important, Lang is continuing the necessary process of opening up the disciplines to one another—a process that has resulted in rich and exciting insights into the traditions we live by, the progress we hope for, and the conundrums that continue to bedevil us. **WV**

HISTORICAL CAPITALISM by Immanuel Wallerstein

(Verso Editions [distributed by Schocken Books]; 110 pp.; \$6.50)

Brian Thomas

Here, in refreshingly few pages, is a succinct how-it-works of the modern world economy. Well, almost. Wallerstein's book is a condensed version of his multivolume *The Modern World System*, and though it is impressionistic, owing to its slenderness, it surpasses many longer works. His account of the genesis of today's woes has at first a familiar leftist ring. He utters *bons mots* about "individualizing the profit and socializing the risk" in mercantile ventures over the past two centuries; he discusses the contradictions that have emerged as elites have devoted themselves more strenuously to amassing money; and he inquires into

the muting of objections to the system. Readers are not spared the usual disdainful remarks about the "commodification of everything" and the absurdity of capital accumulation as an end in itself. (Although cover art rarely has much bearing on a book, the reproduction here of a sixteenth-century woodcut depicting big fish eating little fish, and men devouring all, deftly captures the tone of this portion of the essay.)

In spite of these familiar echoes, Wallerstein differs from most leftists in his suspicion of progress. He considers it a dangerous shibboleth. Brand X—capitalism—draws most of his scorn; it deserves no praise as a spur to development because material gains have been deceptive. Progress and equalization have taken place only among the top 15 per cent of the population; Panglossian talk of the sweetening lot of mankind ignores the abject misery of the remainder. The appeal of the march of money wilts under the force of that hoary and embarrassing question, Who's getting it?

Marxism, of course, is also tainted by the evolutionary bug; and the confidence that many leftists have in an ever-increasing bounty alarms Wallerstein more than would a similar confidence among the members of the Chamber of Commerce. He points out that the future could be worse than the present, that we could end up writhing under yokes more obnoxious than those that bear down on us today. The future may hold a refined barbarism, or a more efficient brand of exploitation. Here, as elsewhere, other critics of modern life—some radical, some nostalgic for simpler times—have spelled out Wallerstein's sketchy arguments in more detail.

Not until Wallerstein begins exploring the connections between knowledge and power does interest quicken. He scrutinizes the links between racism and the professed universalism of the Enlightenment, the way meritocracy has cloaked oppression, the toll exacted by cultural domination. He suggests, for instance, that what racists have wanted is not to expel oppressed groups but to keep them inside the system, where they can serve as a source of inexpensive labor. Far from being an evil easy to eradicate, racism, he insists, is embedded in the growth of capital as a whole, both justifying inequality and bullying the downtrodden into accepting their serfdom.

The most controversial part of *Historical Capitalism* concerns "truth" as an ideology and the pose of science as a neutral culture. The great emphasis on the rationality of scientific activity, Wallerstein says, has masked an endless delirium of acquisitiveness. To paraphrase: The shift away from

the narrow cultural base that religion once furnished, onto a scientific base that supposedly allows one to escape the biases of individual cultures, has merely justified a pernicious kind of cultural imperialism—domination in the name of skepticism and intellectual liberation.

Controversy will inevitably arise because of Wallerstein's habit of conflating critical inquiry—the proper pursuit of truth—with the mere pretension of objectivity. He takes a demonological view of so-called rationality's part in the suffering of the majority, chiding Marxists for clinging to the positivistic dogmas of the nineteenth century. This is true as far as it goes. Yet Wallerstein never clarifies whether he thinks the culprit is "reason" or reason, a moral failure or a failure inherent in the very exercise of thinking about the human condition.

In a field where no one seems to write except to produce dull prose by the furlong, brevity stands out. Unfortunately, Wallerstein himself suffers from a mealy-mouthed style; his most vigorous points are blurred by qualifiers and second thoughts. The result is at once wooden and garrulous—a danger common to transcribed lectures, as these essays are. One wishes an editor had persuaded Wallerstein to speak plainly and face the consequences of his novelty. And no care has been taken to document assertions or supply a bibliography. **WV**

GANDHI'S CHILDREN

by Trevor Fishlock

(Universe Books [New York]; 189 pp.; \$16.50/ \$8.95)

W. Howard Wriggins

Trevor Fishlock has sharp eyes, sensitive ears, a lively, humane wit, and a skillful pen. Like many other serious journalists posted to India, he copes with the contradictory, aspiring, and disheartening realities of India by providing numberless vignettes and pithy comments on what seems to him important. Fishlock brings us religious ceremonies millennia old, the teeming excitement of major cities, the monotony and harshness of rural village life, the argumentative, remarkably vigorous criticism of India by Indians and their touchy sensitivity when non-Indians go half as far. He contrasts the tidy, productive, well-ordered Punjab with the anarchic, corroded, corrupting life in Orissa or Bihar. In short, he gives his readers as rich and compact a tapestry as this reviewer has seen. Americans should become more knowledgeable