

everyday stories of the people, in their daily conversations, those which are not written but told, retold, and above all, lived.

Finally, conclusions are left open to the readers' imagination, perhaps as an attempt to make them also feel the need to retell them, in order to make them tell stories of their own. Vikram Chandra is a real storyteller indeed, one who goes on giving us stories in an endless process that, hopefully, has just begun. Perhaps, as one of the characters in this collection, he is "silenced by stories that appear abruptly in his head" (*LLB* 183), stories that, written on paper, we are also able to listen to, somehow.

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**Chantal Cornut-Gentile D'Arcy and
José Angel García Landa, eds.,
Gender, I-deology: Essays on Theory, Fiction and Film.
Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996. 465 p.**

While collections of new critical writings are inevitably subject to editorial contingencies, their strength is that they can provide readers with varied constellations of fresh perspectives and complementary new departures. *Gender, I-deology: Essays on Theory, Fiction and Film* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1996) is such a volume. Edited by Chantal Cornut-Gentile D'Arcy and José Angel García Landa, it contains twenty-nine essays which offer readers a textured overview of the theoretical questions and textual analyses one can bring to bear on intersections of gender and ideology within literary and film studies. Organized in three roughly equal sections—"Theory," "Fiction," and "Film"—these essays at once cover diverse materials and yet come across as focused and dialogically reinforcing. Most were written by members of the Zaragoza university faculty, which may partly account for the volume's cohesion. But this sense of unity is also indebted to the editors' effort to guide

and organize their diverse contributions within a shared discourse that aims to elucidate a common subject matter.

While all three sections of *Gender, I-deology* are informed by recent developments in critical and gender theory, the essays included in the "Theory" section pursue them centrally, and in so doing provide a foundation for the subsequent "Fiction" and "Film" sections. "Theory" concerns the agendas, methodologies, and ideologies which have been informing contemporary debates about literary and filmic representations of gender, notably variants of poststructuralist and New Historical thinking. The "Fiction" and "Film" sections apply these and related theoretical strands to specific texts, and do so in a flexibly eclectic manner. As such, these two sections provide readers with case studies against which one may assess the applicability and potentials of the theoretical approaches probed in the first section. Furthermore, with "Fiction" and "Film" focusing on narrative media, and with "film" limited here to fiction film, these two sections dovetail and echo one another despite the fact that the two media constitute radically different modes of representation (or "languages," or "signifying systems"). Instead of being torn asunder by such multiple undertakings, the volume is held together by a selection and organization of essays which end up constituting a whole made up of mutually elucidating parts.

As the inclusion of "Gender" in the title signals, this book's project is to elaborate a feminist orientation towards filmic and literary representations of gendered identities. Significantly, this orientation is not theoretical or critical in the sense of semiotics, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, New Historicism, or for that matter New Criticism. Feminism is a politics, and as such it gives direction to theories and practices of textual interpretation. The questions it raises concern the social use of textual production and reception. It fosters attention to ways texts help shape the collective ideological imaginary, to the position of texts within specific historic contexts, and to the meanings which emerge from texts as they are considered singly and in relation to one another. The essays assembled here respond to these questions by unmasking the inscription of gender in fiction and film. Using the tools made available through recent developments in theory and criticism, they stand as interventions in the political consequences of social ideology.

In part, such demystification invokes and expands European and American feminist work on literature and film as it has evolved over the last three decades. Published in 1996, this volume participates in a project which has been transforming the ways we understand art and cultural production—notably in terms of how cultural artifacts and social relations (political and

economic as well as gendered) intersect in the production of ideology. While the "Theory" section of *Gender, I-deology* reviews and critiques the theoretical foundations of these developments, the "Fiction" and "Film" sections supplement past work with additional case studies that further document ways those same cultural artifacts which nourish social and political formations can also create ideological formations can also create ideological spaces for change. That this work is brought to bear on two of the most accessible media—media that blur the "high/low" culture divide and use verisimilitude (in plot, character, etc.) to promote identification and empathy—makes it all the more useful.

An additional strength of this particular anthology is the clarity and accessibility of its essays. While the volume is just about bursting at the seams with its 465 pages which contains a richness of essays, the essays are clear and mostly short. Even the theoretical ones are clear and concise in a genre of scholarship notorious for its obscurantism. The commitment here is clearly to readability—to familiarizing readers with difficult but nonetheless important debates which have been guiding feminist cultural work since the 1960s, and to providing us with models of approaching these debates through applied critical readings. This goal is further assisted by a comprehensive introduction which lays out the book's concerns in a systematic manner. As José Ángel García Landa explains at the conclusion of this essay, at issue is ultimately the demystifying capabilities of literature, of feminist criticism and theory, and of cultural semiotics. In this volume, such demystification has a liminal function, for it helps expand readers' awareness of ways figurative discourse guides our understanding and action.

At the same time, the availability of appropriate materials is almost always a challenge for editors of such collections, and all the more so when the goal is to be comprehensive when what the field yields at a given point in time may not make that possible. As an American reviewer, I am struck by ways the scholarship published in this collection, including the helpful bibliographies appended to each essay, is at once inflected through a fresh European perspective I find very salutary, and yet is also insufficient in the space given to considerations of race, social class, and other kinds of social marginalization as inextricable from the social constitution of gender. While this volume's emphasis on semiotics in particular is stronger than one would find in representative American texts, attention to social marginalities is mostly tokenist. Ironically, this imbalance ends up essentializing gender in contradistinction to this volume's obvious effort to de-essentialize. Treating gender as universal—as mostly detached from its specific social, historic,

economic, and political inscriptions—the volume takes a step back from its goal of demystifying it as a factor within social relations.

This caveat aside, the issues raised in various essays are important. Among them, Pilar Hidalgo's laying out of the potentials and difficulties entangled in New Historical approaches is helpful in making explicit ways cultural artifacts and their reception are embedded in evolving material history and social formations. Furthermore, the inclusion of perspectives on masculinity (e.g. by JoAnne Neff van Aertselaer), cross-gender identification (Juan A. Suárez), androgyny (Ana Zamorano and Hilaria Loyo), and lesbian identity (in essays about Jeanette Winterson's fiction by María del Mar Asensio, Susana González and Susana Onega) reminds us that "gender" includes much more than a binary male-female organization of sexual and social identities and relations. Though none of these essays makes this argument explicitly, the thrust of this work is to suggest that "feminism" itself needs to be reassessed in relation to a more complex understanding of diverse gender constructions and their ideological function within social and political appropriation.

This point is evident most clearly in the "Film" section, where critical analysis rests on a bedrock of scholarship concerning ways the viewing relations films set up for their audience's gaze end up destabilizing the meaning of "gender." That essays in the "Fiction" section lean towards thematic criticism while those in the "Film" section lean towards an emphasis on spectatorship and reception is to be expected, considering that literary and film scholarship have followed somewhat divergent paths in this respect. Though the two media share a concern with narrative arts given to verisimilitude and reader identification, there are specific historic reasons why critical work in the two fields headed in different directions, including material differences between the two media as discourses, and the differing reception they therefore necessitate. Still, a comparative reading of the differences between the "Fiction" and "Film" sections of *Gender, I-deology* is illuminating precisely because highlights the different assumptions each critical tradition makes and the different questions each brings to bear on its texts. For beyond the usefulness of reading specific novels and films with an eye to gender, or ideology, or for that matter any conceptual framework, the juxtaposition of the fiction and film criticism in this anthology helps us consider these two disciplines afresh.

This notion of seeing things afresh is addressed centrally in Beatriz Penas' discussion of "making strange" (*ostranienie*) as Julia Kristeva adapts it from Roman Jakobson in her work on desire and language. Key to here is the idea of taking the familiar and revisiting it from a perspective that renders

it unfamiliar, and so, capable of providing new kinds of understanding. This concept, so fundamental to modern and postmodern theories of art, reception, and social appropriations, is useful both as an approach to film and fiction and as a lens through which one may consider *Gender, Ideology* fruitfully. Though to date film scholarship on the operations of desire tended to be anchored in sight-based Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of reception (as initially elaborated by Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey), while word-based theories of reading have largely turned to linguistics, semiotics, and deconstruction (which are less concerned with desire, and certainly less with sight-based desire), an integrating reading of the essays gathered in this volume nudges us towards making both of these traditions "strange" and re-visiting each with a mind open to re-assessing its capabilities.

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Janet Holmes,
Women, Men and Politeness.

New York: Longman, 1995, 254 p.

Gender is a crucial factor to take into account when dealing with politeness phenomena. Holmes' book explains through nice examples and interesting experiments how gender differences may influence and affect linguistic politeness. She reviews studies and research on this topic by a great number of authors and she adds her own experiments and results obtained from speakers of New Zealand English (although one would expect the New Zealand evidence be dealt with in more detail, she fails to elaborate it thoroughly). The topic of research and the data used seem to be very well-connected since New Zealand culture has been described as a "gendered culture, . . . gender is the motif and preoccupation of New Zealand society, as class is in Britain" (*WMP* 27). This may be an advantage for her study or it might be a

drawback since it may lead to simplistic conclusions as I will comment on later.

Holmes bases her analyses and investigations on grounds defined in their essence by Brown and Levinson (1987). Concepts such as face (in its two modalities: positive and negative face), FTA (face-threatening act), positive and negative politeness, and the social variables influencing politeness have been treated in this book basically following Brown and Levinson's first drafts but adding some new touches. The main new stroke here is the addition of one social factor not included in Brown and Levinson's fine analysis of politeness: gender. This variable will give rise to two different politeness styles: a positively-orientated politeness identified in women's discourse and a rather negative politeness style in men's interaction.

The main idea from which the book starts is that women and men have different ways of talking and hence, of realizing and interpreting speech acts. In the first chapter ("Sex, politeness and language"), Holmes points out the feasible reason why this is so. Women and men use language in a different way because they have different perceptions of what language is for. Whereas men use language as a tool to give and obtain information (the referential function of language), women see language as a means of keeping in touch (the affective or social function). Holmes includes politeness, which is defined as "an expression of concern for the feelings of others" (*WMP* 4), within the affective or social function of language, and hence, the women being the ones who use language more in this way, women are more polite than men.

These two different perceptions and usages of language cause different norms of interaction, which is—as Holmes points several times—the most plausible reason why women and men interact differently. In other words, she explains in the second chapter that what is perceived as rude to the women may be perfectly polite to men and vice versa (*WMP* 53). Nevertheless, according to this, there is something that does not quite fit into the picture. On the one hand, there are different patterns of politeness due to gender differences, and the most plausible reason why this is so is that women and men have different perceptions of language. If perception of language implies what is polite or rude to both women and men, politeness is being regarded as a factor and as a consequence at the same time. In other words, politeness is being considered as a factor that contributes to the assessment of what is appropriate in each context by each gender—"politeness, or sensitivity to the needs of others, may be another contributing factor" (*WMP* 37)—and as the result of that assessment—"New Zealand women tend to be more polite than men" (*WMP* 70)—since she draws this conclusion after assessing the results