

# Front Matter

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# criticism

A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts  
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1 GHOST-RIGHTING: THE SPECTRAL ETHICS AND  
HAUNTED SPOUSES OF RICHARD LINKLATER'S  
*BEFORE* TRILOGY

Lilia Kilburn

In recent years, analysts of cinematic ghosts have called for ways of “learning to live with ghosts”; in this paper, I argue that Richard Linklater’s *Before* trilogy—1995’s *Before Sunrise*, 2004’s *Before Sunset*, and 2012’s *Before Midnight*—models precisely such a process. I attend to the crucial role of ghosts in sparking and sustaining the romance at the heart of *Before*, and I argue that Linklater’s trilogy is not only ghost-written (relying formally on ghosts) and ghost-ridden (relying narratively on a preponderance of them) but a staging ground for ghost-righting, an active ghosting in the vein of Derrida’s spectral ethics. Issues considered include traditional narrative patterning of love and death; ghosts and (dis)embodiment in Western cinema; spectrality in the work of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes; questions of temporality, duration, and fear of death; romantic historiography; and the intimate politics of *Before*.

27 JANE AUSTEN’S “EVELYN” AND THE “IMPOSSIBILITY  
OF THE GIFT”

Shawn Normandin

Jane Austen’s “Evelyn” is a remarkably precocious tale that repays philosophical scrutiny. The protagonist’s absurd adventures reveal paradoxes about giving that Jacques Derrida would formulate much later. Austen’s project of imagining a true gift justifies the tale’s lack of closure and realism. Yet the gift is not just one theme among others: since giving is intrinsic to literary language and its production, the tale’s concern with giving reflects the challenges faced by Austen as a writer. “Evelyn” provides an oblique commentary on the political, economic, and even ecological interests of the late eighteenth century.

47 REGICIDE ON REPEAT: THE PENSIVE SPECTATOR OF  
REBECCA WEST’S *BLACK LAMB AND GREY FALCON*

Jonah Corne

This essay examines Rebecca West’s treatment of the 1934 newsreel footage of the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia in her classic book on the Balkans, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941). Giving an account

of watching the newsreel again and again in a specially arranged, post-theatrical private screening—an account that gestures at and rhetorically emulates a host of image-manipulating playback techniques (rewinding, slowing, freezing, zooming)—West offers a striking anticipation of the ground covered by Laura Mulvey in *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006), where Mulvey mobilizes Raymond Bellour’s concept of “the pensive spectator” to theorize the newly widespread affordances of digital home-viewing technology. Relating ideas of unhurried seeing in Bellour and Mulvey to West’s famously long, time-taking book, the essay identifies in West’s evocation of cinematic spectatorship a pattern of endlessly refracting self-projection that speaks to the complexities of her devotion not to “los[e] sight of the importance of process.” Enlarging and pushing backwards in time the genealogy of the pensive spectator, West offers to film studies a rich nodal point in the ongoing project of writing the prehistory of the digital.

75 THE PERMISSIBLE NARRATIVES OF HUMAN RIGHTS;  
OR, HOW TO BE A REFUGEE  
Bishupal Limbu

This essay examines critically the relationship between stories and human rights by focusing on refugee narratives in two contemporary novels. An influential account of this relationship suggests that stories make legible the human in human rights and therefore storytelling is a performance of human rights work. This essay challenges this notion by analyzing the forms and limits of narratives that attempt to “humanize” the refugee as well as the forms and limits of the human that they produce. It shows that recent literary representations of refugees rely on the conventions of sentimental fiction and argues that while such a strategy may be useful in soliciting sympathy for the suffering other, it also constrains the narrative field and conceals other stories that tell of much more pervasive structural wrongs. By emphasizing individual and spectacular suffering, sentimentalist humanitarian storytelling generates a depoliticized figure of universal humanity and displaces the narratives that would indicate a more ambivalent role for stories and a more difficult task for human rights.

99 “SO STRANGE IN QUALITY”: PERCEPTION, REALISM,  
AND COMMODIFICATION IN *THE ROARING GIRL*  
Matthew Kendrick

This article reconsiders and reevaluates Dekker and Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl* as an instance of literary realism. The article proposes that the play reveals the fundamental inadequacy and limitation of a social perception that reduces human life to quantifiable abstractions. Moll is real, the article claims, in the sense that she represents an elusive surplus of

being, the idiosyncrasy of human life that, in its qualitative particularity and complexity, is irreducible to the commodity-form. This critical interrogation of London's emerging commercial regime is possible as a result of the unique circumstances surrounding the play's production and performance.

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