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## Review of *The Body*, ed. by Ilona Dobosiewicz and Jacek Gutorow

After *Community and Nearness* (2007) came *The Body* (2009), the second volume of “Readings in English and American Literature and Culture” series from the University of Opole Press, edited by Ilona Dobosiewicz and Jacek Gutorow. In preparations for the third heave, the editors, I hear, are now hunting for contributions in American studies on dreamy visions, illusions, reveries, altered states of consciousness and suchlike. But first, teasingly, they feigned the need to map what was once considered the more solid vectors in American culture, those dictated by irreducible bodies, resistant skin and nonnegotiable bodily needs. Of course, their collection shows in so many ways that the old dichotomies—body vs. soul, nature vs. culture—no longer hold.

Gutorow’s elegant introduction lays out the setting for his contributors. Cartesian extrapolations, he says, have long since been replaced by the accounts of the body offered by the late Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. The world we are given is always already embodied, our corporeality nothing less than a “medium for having the world.” This also means “the lived body” is not just inscribed but also in the position to negotiate.

After the introduction the reader is plunged into a welter of approaches, specializations and critical temperaments. First in the collection, Ilona Dobosiewicz’s essay is modestly conceived but lucidly written; her treatment of the male body in Victorianism makes the book seem comprehensive. She discusses Thomas Hughes’s Victorian novel *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* to only evoke the discourses of athleticism and character building as important elements of Great Britain’s imperialist ideology. In the next essay Alicja Piechucka finds traces of *écriture féminine* in little known poems by Hart Crane and Mina Loy. Very solidly and lucidly argued, the essay only left me wondering why *écriture féminine* in the first place, and whether the choice of the poems was not arbitrary and Cixous’ concept made to seem applicable without limits. If Hart Crane and “Stark Major” is in, why not Hemingway and “The Indian Camp,” with its recognition of birth trauma unacknowledged by conventional medicine? Isn’t the woman’s breathy silence behind the doctor’s noisy self-assurances pre-

cisely *écriture* “in white ink”? Or how about Addie Bundren from *As I Lay Dying*? Couldn’t one make, in fact, a similar case for all writing that is solidly modernist? And then, of course, all the studies of woman-identified writing first might have to grapple with the observation of Derrida, Cixous’ friend, that all *écriture* is *écriture féminine*, all writing lapses into the other of logos.

Jerzy Durczak, in a highly readable piece, gropes for the main thematic concerns of Lucy Grealy’s 2003 *autopathography*. The title of Grealy’s novel *Autobiography of the Face* could not have been more apt. Very memorably, Jean Stafford in “The Interior Castle” withdraws from her social face/interface to commune with her disembodied self, re-fleshed with hallucinated tissue but anatomically evasive and safely removed from the reach of the most zealous surgeon. Durczak shows how Lucy Grealy, by contrast, “*was* her face, *was* ugliness.” Appreciating pain as staring her in the face and therefore more honest than her high school friends, affectionate for hospitals as offering her some respite from the revulsed looks, flaunting her sex appeal to make up for years of neglect, she is thoroughly invested in her face. Warning the reader it will be a venture into an understudied and under-understood subgenre of American autobiography, Durczak gives a detailed review of its sentiments and interests, quotes profusely, but avoids offering any incisive reading.

Boguta-Marchel’s essay on the grotesque in *Blood Meridian* seems a bit uncertain of its purposes. First, it ambitiously sifts through disparate and often verbose theories of the grotesque but rests with the disarming admission the term is “anything but clear.” No wonder the subsequent inventory of the grotesque images in the novel does not add up to much. For instance, the author presents well W. V. O’Connor’s definition of the grotesque as manifesting internally conflicted racism but then drops it as useless for McCarthy’s novel. Similarly Boguta-Marchel finds the existentialist sentiments in the grotesque mode of little help either. The last section on—curiously—the “limitations of visibility” only aggravates the general impression of directionlessness.

We are used to seeing Lacan’s name crop up in the most unlikely places, but Paweł Stachura’s essay is truly imaginative. He finds traces of Lacan’s imagination in the 1950s science fiction by Cordwainer Smith, known among foreign policy scholars as Paul M.A. Linebarger. Lacan read the artistic representations and dreams of bodily disfigurement, evisceration and suchlike as ways of reliving the anxieties and desires involved in the process of ego-formation. We’re hard wired to envision it in terms of a body seeking to ascertain its integrity against the infinite space. Cordwainer Smith’s characters have bodies dislocated, strained to the breaking point to live up to the scale and extremities of space. More interestingly they are rooted in

the same sentiments as Paul M.A. Linebarger's ideas on the psychologies of the Cold War and America's body politic. Stachura's modest claims and imaginative association show that nations and their ambitions are projections of ego-formative anxieties and desires.

Monika Sosnowska argues that Mary Reilly in Valerie Martin's rewriting of Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* remembers through her body—her scarred hands and wrists—her father's domestic violence. "The change of optics" in the story to focus on a figure invisible to Stevenson's narrator parallels the change of optics in the theory of the senses from the scopic masculinity to tactile femininity. She writes at great length about the new interest in the symbol of human skin and its various uses as if it was a major recent paradigm shift (Bergson). The reading it yields is sensible but slightly disappointing after this initial fanfare.

Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis's study of the transgressive nature of the spinsterly bodies in the stories by major Southerners is truly imaginative and inspiring. And so is Paweł Marcinkiewicz's analysis of what he calls "lyricism" in Ashbery's late volumes *Where Shall I Wander* and *Worldly Country*. Here the body figures as a mode of the structurally complex *Dasein*. Marcinkiewicz explores less the phenomenological "lived body" than the various ways in which, in a neo-Platonic/Christian fashion, the self inhabits his corporeal frame and often feels weighed down by it. He also explores how the self skeptically revises accumulated knowledge, negotiates alterity, retroactively organizes fantastic snapshots of the past and is headed toward the shrouded future. I can't judge how well he reads the poems but Ashbery's being in the world may be matched by the elaborate architecture of Marcinkiewicz's argument.

So much in the essays, even those which seemed to me less successful, warrants serious attention. They all show that in American studies the "body," after decades of post-dualist sociological and anthropological revisions, is still "alive and kicking." I miss the bios of the contributors to see how the essays sit in their long-term projects and careers, but it is clear that the collection is a major publication on the trope of the body produced by Polish Americanists of late.