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Edited by E. S. Shaffer

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Comparative criticism

24

**Fantastic currencies in comparative literature:
gothic to postmodern**

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with an Index to volumes 1–24

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Edited by

E. S. SHAFFER

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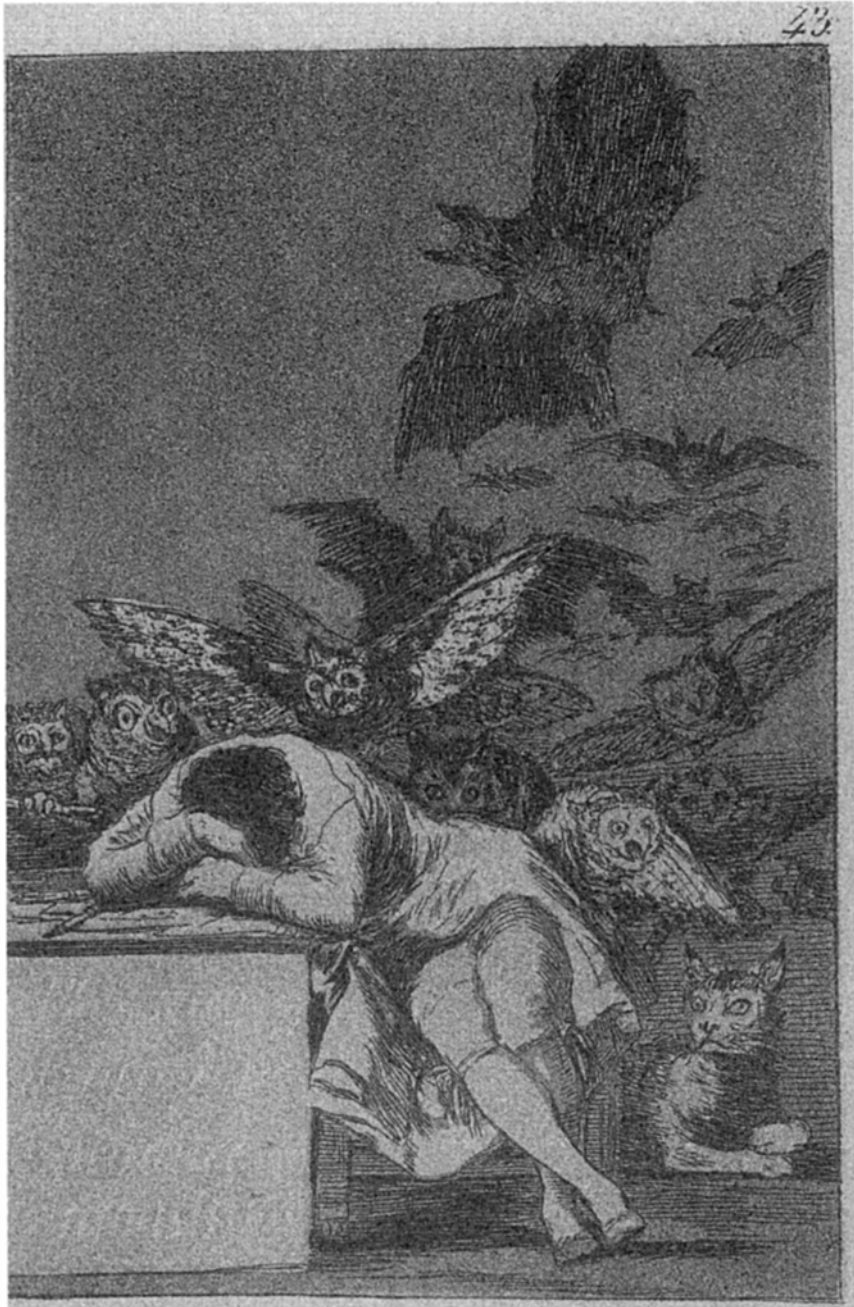
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Francisco de Goya, 'The sleep of reason produces monsters'

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CONTRIBUTORS

DAME GILLIAN BEER is King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at the University of Cambridge. Her most recent books are *Open Fields: Science and Cultural Encounter* (1996), *Virginia Woolf: the Common Ground* (1996) and the second edition of *Darwin's Plots* (2000). She is at present finishing a study of Lewis Carroll's Alice books in the context of Victorian intellectual controversies.

ZBIGNIEW BIALAS is Professor of English and Head of the Colonial and Postcolonial Studies Centre at the University of Silesia, Poland; he is also Privatdozent at Essen University, Germany. From 1995 to 1997 he was Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellow in Germany and in 2001 he was Fulbright Senior Fellow in the USA. He is the author of three books: *Post-Tribal Ethos in African Literature* (Essen 1993), *Mapping Wild Gardens* (Essen 1997) and *The Body Wall* (forthcoming in 2002), editor/co-editor of five other volumes, and translator of English, American and African fiction into Polish.

FANFAN (FENG FANG) CHEN is Assistant Professor of English at the National Dong Hwa University in Taiwan. She specializes in Chinese and Western fantastic literature narratology. 'French Modernity and the Transformation of Fantastic Discourse' will be published in *Chung Wai Literary Monthly* (Chinese and Foreign Literature). She is also engaged in a research project on 'The Metamorphosis of Fantastic Fiction', sponsored by the National Scientific Council of Taiwan.

IAN CHRISTIE is Professor of Film and Media History at Birkbeck College and previously taught film at Oxford and the University of Kent. He has published mainly on Russian and British cinema, and has contributed to a number of major exhibitions. As former head of distribution at the British Film Institute, he has a continuing interest in the vicissitudes of European cinema. He is currently preparing a study of the British moving picture pioneer Robert Paul.

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CONTRIBUTORS

YVES CITTON is Associate Professor in French at the University of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. He has published *Portrait de l'économiste en physiocrate: critique littéraire de l'économie politique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), *Impuissances: défaillances masculines et pouvoir politique de Montaigne à Stendhal* (Paris: Aubier, 1994) and *Les doctrines orthographiques du XVIIe siècle en France*, with André Wyss (Geneva: Droz, 1989). He has also published articles on Rousseau, Condillac, Charrière and the Physiocrats. He is currently working on the neo-Spinozist tradition from Diderot to Deleuze.

PAUL COATES is Reader in Film Studies in the School of English and Film Studies of the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. His books include *The Story of the Lost Reflection: the Alienation of the Image in Western and Polish Cinema* (Verso, 1985), *The Double and the Other* (Macmillan, 1988), *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism and the Image of Horror* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) and *Film at the Intersection of High and Mass Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1994). He edited *Lucid Dreams*, a collection of essays on Kieslowski, for Flick Books (1999), and his *Through a Glass Darkly: Cinema, Religion and Spirituality* is forthcoming from Ashgate in 2002.

BRIAN COLE studied French and German at Oxford, and worked as a senior executive in three multinational groups. After retirement he started Brindin Press. His translation of Pablo Neruda's *The Captain's Verses* was published by Anvil Press in 1994. In 2000 Arc Publications published *Anthracite*, a selection of translations from the Italian of Bartolo Cattafi, and in 2001 Brindin Press published his translations of Circe Maia, *Yesterday a Eucalyptus*. The latter two works were Poetry Book Society Recommended Translations.

NEIL CORNWELL, Professor of Russian and Comparative Literature, University of Bristol, is editor of the *Reference Guide to Russian Literature* (Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998) and the author of two books on Vladimir Odoevsky, as well as translator of Odoevsky's *The Salamander and Other Gothic Tales* (Bristol Classical Press and Northwestern University Press, 1992). Among his other books are *The Literary Fantastic* (Harvester, 1990) and, most recently, *Vladimir Nabokov* (Writers and Their Works Series, Northcote House, 1999). He is currently editing *The Routledge Introduction to Russian Literature* and researching a general study of the absurd.

MARGARET ANNE DOODY is John and Barbara Glynn Family Professor of Literature at the University of Notre Dame, where she is currently

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Director of the PhD Program in Literature. She has written a number of books, including *Frances Burney: the Life in the Works* (1988) and *The True Story of the Novel* (1996). The second novel in her 'Aristotle Detective' series, *Aristotle and Poetic Justice*, will be published in England in May. She is working on another 'Aristotle' detective novel as well as on a book about Venice, and a study of Apuleius.

ANNE GUÉRIN-CASTELL, director and film editor, teaches film at the University of Paris VIII and at the University François Rabelais in Tours, and is an instructor at the National Audiovisual Institute. In January 1998 she submitted a doctoral thesis in Aesthetics, Sciences and Art Technologies (specializing in cinema) at Paris VIII, on 'The Place of the *Saragossa Manuscript* in the Cinematic Œuvre of Wojciech Jerzy Has'.

CHARLIE LOUTH is Fellow in German at the Queen's College, Oxford, and has published *Hölderlin and the Dynamics of Translation* (1998). He is currently translating Hölderlin's letters.

CIRCE MAIA is a Uruguayan poet, born in 1932, widely known in South America but little known in Europe. She has been a teacher of philosophy and languages and has written and published several volumes of poetry. Her latest collection is *de lo invisible* (Montevideo, 1998).

SILVESTER MAZZARELLA taught English at Helsinki University in Finland, and translates prose, verse and drama into English from Italian and Swedish. His latest book, edited and translated from Finland-Swedish, is *The Poet Who Created Herself: Selected Letters of Edith Södergran* (Norvik Press, 2001). At present, he is translating contemporary Italian plays and researching and writing a life of his great-uncle, the author and journalist Filson Young.

A. D. NUTTALL taught for many years at the University of Sussex, where he was Professor of English and Pro-Vice-Chancellor. He is now a Fellow of New College and Professor of English Literature in the University of Oxford. His books include *Overheard by God* (1980), *A New Mimesis* (1983), *Why does Tragedy Give Pleasure?* (1996), and *The Alternative Trinity* (1998).

AGNETA PLEIJEL was born in Stockholm in 1940 and is a full-time writer. Her first novel was published in 1987. *Lord Nevermore*, her fifth novel, came out in 2000 and has so far won four awards in Sweden.

FRANÇOIS ROSSET, is Director of Studies and Research at the University

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of Lausanne. He is the author of many publications on eighteenth-century French literature and the Enlightenment in French-speaking Switzerland. His latest books are *L'Arbre de Cracovie. Le mythe polonais dans la littérature française* (Paris: Imago, 1996), *De Varsovie à Saragosse: Jean Potocki et son Œuvre* with Dominique Triaire (Louvain and Paris, Peeters, 2000); *Ecrire à Coppet: nous, moi et le monde* (Geneva: Slatkine, 2001); with Dominique Triaire he is editor of the complete French edition of Jan Potocki's works.

NINA TAYLOR-TERLECKA lectures on Polish Literature at the University of Oxford and at the Polish University Abroad. She specializes in Polish Romantic Drama, Polish writers from the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and Gulag and émigré literature. Most recent publications include an anthology of Polish Gulag poetry *Gulag polskich poetów. Od Komi do Kōymy. Wiersze* (London: PFK, 2001), a survey of literary doppelgangers ('Des Dioscures à Medardus – Goliadkine – Medrado et Martin Guerre – une typologie est-elle possible?' in *Figures du double dans les littératures européennes*, Paris: L'Age d'Homme, 2001) and a study of Polish Heimat literature ('Le Mythe de la petite patrie' in *Mythes et symboles en Europe Centrale*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2002); her book translations include works by Jarosław Rymkiewicz and Janusz Anderman.

DOMINIQUE TRIAIRE is Professor at the University of Montpellier III. He works on French cultural relations with eastern Europe in the eighteenth century. His many publications on Jan Potocki include an edition of his complete works, which he is editing with François Rosset.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

*Fantastic currencies in comparative literature:
 gothic to postmodern*

Comparative literary studies just after the millennium deal, as does the world, in fantastic currencies, past and present, and in possible futures. Gillian Beer's thoughtful meditation on 'currency' opens the proceedings, and together with Margaret Anne Doody's comprehensive overview of fiction, from *Daphnis and Chloe* to *Roger Ackroyd*, in its reflections on the multifarious forms of 'possession' that characterize the novel as genre, and A. D. Nuttall's essay on 'gold and iron', successfully set the stage not only for the conference on 'Money' held in 2001 but also for our special issue on the rediscovered European masterpiece, Jan Potocki's novel, *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (1797–1815), published in full in French only in 1989. The novel is a time-traveller which unlike most finds its own time.

It is fitting that the twenty-fourth volume of this journal, whose first volume appeared in 1979, should raise the curtain in English on this masterpiece of comparative European fiction, written in French in the Revolutionary period between 1797 and 1815 by a cosmopolitan Polish writer who combined the Enlightenment and the nascent Romantic modes, and enacted the struggle of reason and passion, of scepticism and strange undercurrents of belief that geometrical thinking could not after all stamp out. His own life seemed to participate in the change of sensibility, for he began as an enlightened aristocrat, who served as an army officer, fought bandits in Sicily, wrote court plays, carried on private research into the history and chronology of the early Slav peoples (in which he is a recognized pioneer), and played a considerable role in the government of the Polish nation, until in 1802 it lost its independence and its name under Russian domination; then, after working for the Russians for a time, he returned to his estate and wrote on his extraordinary novel, fell prey to fantasies, and finally died by his own hand like a young Romantic poet. The story of his death is operatic, combining both styles: he melted down a piece of household silver

(variously described as a samovar and a handle), made it into a silver bullet, had it blessed by the priest, and then used it to commit an act not countenanced by the Church. It is a story worthy of his own fiction. Nina Taylor-Terlecka here gives us a full account of Potocki's illustrious family and his roots in the Polish and European Enlightenment.

Potocki published in his lifetime the first section, in St Petersburg in 1805, and other fragments (*Dix Journées de la vie d'Alphonse van Worden*) in 1813 in Paris, as well as leaving several versions (including one for the censors) at his death. A Polish translator made a version from one of these in 1847, while the French fragments were exploited by imitators. There is a long and complex history of the translations in whole and in part from the various extant versions. Rediscovered by the notable French critic Roger Caillois, who edited a short version (about a quarter of the whole) in 1958, with an excellent introduction to the second edition of 1967, the *Manuscript* began a new and circuitous route to full publication in French via a translation from a German version based on the Polish translation (1989), followed by a new French version based on manuscripts extant in Poland; the best edition is now the 1995 edition in *Livre de Poche*. The fantastical history of the manuscript of the *Manuscript* seems to parallel the novel, which opens with the discovery of the manuscript, written and buried seventy years earlier, by a young Napoleonic soldier during the Spanish campaign of 1808–9.

A *roman philosophique* in picaresque mode, full of argument and witty disputation, but also a gothic novel carrying the seeds of Romanticism, it has a large cast of characters centring round the young, inexperienced *Bildungsroman* hero Alphonse van Worden. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1795), the acclaimed model of what later became known as the *Bildungsroman* or novel of education, was undoubtedly one of the starting-points for the novel. The large cast includes a *philosophe* (Velásquez, a sympathetic figure whose geometrical reasoning is nevertheless always stymied, to both comic and tragic effect), van Worden's father, an aristocrat fanatical about points of honour that culminate in disastrous duels; a gypsy king, Zoto, who has some of the best stories; a subtle cabbalist and his daughter; the Wandering Jew (who as an eye-witness, condemned never to die, gives a pungent running commentary on European history since Rome ruled Palestine); and an Islamic equivalent to Goethe's *Turmgesellschaft*, or Brotherhood of the Tower, the group who secretly guide the hero's education; and in addition, from the realm of the undead, vampires, hanged bandits, the Inquisition, ghosts and houris or succubi who haunt the living.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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Since the landmark publication of 1989 the novel has been translated into Italian, German, Spanish and English. In 1995 came the breakthrough into English, with Ian Maclean's translation (Viking) and publication in Penguin Classics the next year. A number of appreciative reviews appeared, recognizing the book as a lost masterpiece, and Maclean's translation was also widely praised. Maclean, a Renaissance French specialist at All Souls College, Oxford, was given credit for making the intricate book and its complex discourses available in lucid, flexible and well-shaped English prose. The most substantial reviews were by P. N. Furbank in the *London Review of Books* ('Nesting Time', 26 Jan. 1995) and John Weightman in the *New York Review of Books* ('Extravaganza in Progress', 30 Nov. 1995). Both gave searching attention to the work as a major rediscovery of European fiction, and between the two of them they suggested an impressive set of antecedents and influences and by implication placed Potocki in their ranks: Voltaire, Diderot, especially *Jacques le Fataliste*, published in 1798, itself an offspring of Sterne, and Le Sage (author of both *Gil Blas* and *Le Diable boîteux*). While they of course see the *Arabian Nights*, translated into French in 1700 and used as a model for a variety of *contes morales* (and *immorales*) through the century, often presented as emanating from distant, often oriental sources, as essential to the form of successive spell-binding stories, they strangely omit to mention *Don Quixote*, whose unfolding stories within stories told by different characters are closer to Potocki. *Don Quixote*, now voted the greatest of all novels by writers and critics, is the right comparison; for Potocki does for his era what Cervantes did for his, combining the major genres and playing off the opposed tendencies of the age, in Cervantes's case the idealist Romance and the realist picaresque, in Potocki's the claim to enlightened reason and the resurgence of the irrational, against each other. Several critics mention Potocki's interest in the style of Mrs Radcliffe, well-known in Europe since 1790, but seek comparisons with bigger game in the pantheon of established authors.

Other reviews were by Jonathan Coe, Salman Rushdie, Valentine Cunningham and David Coward; all the major dailies and literary weeklies carried at least a short notice. A number pointed to the 'modern' and indeed 'postmodern' quality of Potocki's work: it had finally found its own time. Cunningham, calling the novel a 'striptease machine', compared it with contemporaries as weighty as the professors of French had found in the past: Eco, Joyce, Calvino 'or even' Borges, and said it finds a 'happy niche in our post-modernist sensibility'

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

(Valentine Cunningham, 'Stories to stimulate desire', *Observer*, 5 Feb. 1995). James Woodfall (a Borges specialist) goes even further in ensconcing it in a twentieth-century theoretical framework, praising it as 'a truly useless book, a book of Barthesian "*jouissance*" if ever there was one'. If only Barthes had come across it, and left an interpretation, he suggests, it would long ago have achieved 'cult status' ('A Polish Casanova', *The Times*, 2 Feb. 1995). Whatever historical vantage point the critic adopts, Potocki's novel has both impressive traditional credentials and a powerful appeal to our own time. It is noteworthy that the critics stressed the most elevated predecessors and most intellectually ambitious of contemporaries, playing down the undoubted debt of Potocki also to the Gothic vogue of the 1790s, reflected in the subplot of 'a group of Moors' and the corrupt Spanish Inquisition drawn from Lewis's *The Monk*, and a number of allusions to Mrs Radcliffe, especially *The Sicilian Romance*, which began her vogue, and *The Romance of the Forest*. It is part of Potocki's achievement that he incorporated the extremes of eighteenth-century thought and feeling, from rational conceptualizing of abstract ideas to the wild rebellion of feeling and emotion, and melded the genres of the 'high' and the 'low'. In fact, this rich novel acts as a kind of compendium and summing up of the major tendencies in the history and fiction of the century.

In May 1998 I organized a Colloquium on 'Jan Potocki, *Le Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*: Novel and Film' at the School of Advanced Study, University of London. The film of the novel had preceded the novel on the European circuit, becoming known in the 1960s through a considerably cut and dubbed French version of the Polish original. Salman Rushdie, among others, including myself, remembers seeing it in Cambridge in the 1960s, and hails the rediscovery of the original fiction, which he had been intrigued by at the time. On the occasion of the London Colloquium we held the first showing of the full Polish version of the noted director Wojciech Has's film, with a simultaneous translation from the original. In this volume we bring the revised and extended versions of the papers given on that occasion, together with a number of newly commissioned or translated papers.

Nina Taylor-Terlecka's fascinating account of Potocki's life in the context of his Polish milieu places him in the Enlightenment tradition of his aristocratic eighteenth-century education (largely in Switzerland and in French), against the background of major Polish writers too little known in English. She explores his complex relation to the French *philosophes* (his early and inescapable mentors) and to Napoleon, in the

fraught context of the Polish struggle to assert its own nationhood, a struggle which ended in 1802 with the hegemony of Russia.

Neil Cornwell places Potocki in the context of the powerful German and Eastern European tradition of 'the Nuits', or Nights. Here he stresses not the Enlightenment but the Romantic associations of Potocki, with the important German Romantics such as Novalis, and the strange, anonymous novella *Die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura*, Nightwatches of Bonaventura, as well as with the less familiar Russian Romantic Vladimir Odoevski, whose 'Nights' formed a significant link to later writers such as Dostoevski and Mann. Potocki's ability to command the styles both of the Enlightenment reasoners, sceptics and ironists and of the Romantic sense for the complex, dark and irrational, give him a unique pivotal place in the European novel, and create the powerful intellectual and emotional tensions represented in his fiction.

François Rosset, one of Potocki's major critics and advocates in Europe, gives a deft treatment of an essential theme of the novel, the manuscript or book itself. Zbigniew Bialas traces the erotic intricacies of the narrative of the *Manuscript*.

Dominique Triaire, whose knowledge of Potocki is unrivalled, his critical works among the most insightful and subtle, supplies a fine analysis of the forms of humour in Potocki, including the whole gamut from theatrical comedy of manners and character (Potocki also wrote plays), to philosophical dialogues in the ironic mode of Diderot, the black gallows humour of his own country, and the romantic irony of Schlegel. His insight is so acute that we are given the movement of thought in Potocki's intertwined episodes, his grasp of the comic possibilities inhering in genres not intended to be comic, as well as overtly comic incident or witty sallies. The subtleties of his analysis of Potocki's rhetoric can be fully grasped only by the reader already intimately acquainted with the novel, and are not easily translated; but we are grateful to Charlotte Pattison for her gallant effort. (A French version of this essay may be found in François Rosset and Dominique Triaire, 'L'Effet comique dans le *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*', *De Varsovie à Saragosse: Jean Potocki et son œuvre* (Louvain, Paris, Sterling, Virginia: Editions Peeters, 2000), pp. 235–52.)

A substantial new paper by Yves Citton explores the 'postmodern' aspects of Potocki's fiction in theoretical and generic detail. This is a contribution to the literature on 'postmodern fiction' as well as to Potocki studies, and gives some solid grounding to the immediate instinct of today's reviewers to place the new 'find' in a current context.

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Fanfan Chen, comparing the French and the Chinese definitions and practice of the 'fantastic', and more broadly their respective modes of presenting the supernatural, goes further afield, and in so doing sheds light on Potocki's early nineteenth-century practice and that of his imitators. Charles Nodier, one of the major practitioners of the mode of the fantastic in its heyday in France, was a major and unacknowledged admirer and plagiarist from Potocki, whose work thus had an unacknowledged presence in major writings in this vein throughout the century. Roger Caillois, the French critic who made Potocki's reputation in France in the twentieth century, republishing him in part in 1958, setting in motion his complete recovery, pointed out that Potocki had long lived a subterranean life in the nineteenth-century French classics through Nodier's borrowings. Chen traces the 'aesthetics of the fantastic' through Nodier, Balzac, Gautier and Merimée. The American writer Washington Irving was also a notable borrower from Potocki. It is Nodier, though, who in employing Potocki's mode of construction, whereby one fantastic story prepares the reader to credit its amplification and heightening in another and another, draws closest to the Chinese practice of opening the door to the supernatural world with one impossible event and then moving on without explanation to another on the same higher plane.

The film of the *Manuscript Found in Saragossa* has led an independent life, and an exciting one, which three papers chart for us. It gained recognition and circulation in art houses in the 1960s in a shortened, French-dubbed, version, at a time when the complete novel was not available. When we set out in 1997 to hold a Colloquium on Potocki in London it cost us a great deal of effort to locate the complete Polish version of the film (some 80 minutes longer than the French) and a translation of it. The film version was sent on a video taken from a recent television broadcast in Poland (thanks to Zbigniew Bialas and Alexandra Podgorniak of the University of Silesia); a translation of it was found neglected and only after repeated inquiry deep in the archives of the British Film Institute. The BFI had hoped to release a new version of the film to cinemas, but had not received the funding to do so. The translation, originally supplied by the Polish Film Bureau, was unidiomatic and clumsy. For the showing of the entire film in Polish at the British Film Institute Studio, which formed the second day of the Colloquium, we had the good fortune to find a simultaneous translator of long experience, Natalie van Svolkien, Russian by birth but a long-time resident in Poland, who was able to interpret the material persuasively. Later, just after the Colloquium, we located an American

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company that had reissued the film on video; on receiving it we discovered that the same clumsy translation had been transferred word for word onto the film as subtitles, where they were often overlong, interfered with the images, and were incomprehensible, sometimes running off the screen. This brilliant film deserves and, it must be hoped, will still obtain a new release in a full-length English-language version, as well as in other languages.

Ian Christie's discussion of the historical or 'costume' drama in the European film contemporary with Has's film sets the wider stage. Paul Coates, a specialist in Polish and German literature, as well as film, examines the political framework in which Has had to work in the Poland of the 1960s. Anne Guérin-Castell, who in her French dissertation has given the most extended and detailed treatment of the complex history of the film versions of the *Manuscript*, here gives us a succinct account of the full-length version as related to the novel and its subsequent cut versions. Guérin-Castell makes a strong if still controversial case for there having been not one but two different cut versions at the hands of the Polish censors.

Although the text of the novel is now widely available, and it has been selling very well, nearly all the critical work on Potocki has been in French, whether in France, Switzerland, or in Poland, where the French departments of Polish universities led the way. This volume of *Comparative Criticism* marks the critical breakthrough into English, seven years after Maclean's translation. To give an overview of the complex history of the editions and translations, and of the critical work to date, we are particularly pleased to be able to publish a comprehensive bibliography of Jan Potocki's work, the first in English, contributed by the leading French-language specialist in Potocki's critical reception and his French bibliographer, François Rosset (Lausanne). We are also indebted to others who have helped make the bibliography still more comprehensive: to Teresa Iribarren and Adelaida Martin-Valverde for the Spanish and Catalan editions and critical reception; and to Viking books, who made available the early reviews of Ian Maclean's translation into English. We hope this volume will be only the first of a number of publications on Potocki in English. The current vogue for work on the gothic should alone ensure attention to Potocki's novel, an encyclopedia of gothic modes current in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But beyond any current vogue it merits a place among the significant European novels of the last three centuries.

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Our Translation section celebrates another complex and fantastical feat of translation. Charlie Louth's essay describes the extraordinary eighteenth-century German Biblical translator, Johann Jacob Junckherrott, whose translation of the New Testament (1732) went against all the prevailing canons of translation to try to capture the supra-human 'style of the Holy Spirit'. Ignored in his time, he nevertheless anticipated the shift in translation theory and practice that brought forward the practice of the 'difficult' reading that made manifest the foreign origin of the language rather than domesticating it. Only in this way, the poet Hölderlin and the theorist Schleiermacher would argue in the early nineteenth century, could the quality of the original be suggested and the target language enriched and extended. We have previously been concerned with this vital shift in translation theory and practice, in the Editor's introduction to volume 6, Jeremy Adler's translation of Hölderlin's essays on Greek tragedy (in volume 7), David Constantine's translation into English of Hölderlin's brilliant version of Sophocles's *Oedipus* (in volume 20) and Charlie Louth's translation in volume 21 of the twentieth-century Viennese sound-poet Ernst Jandl's essay on translation (together with Michael Hamburger's translations of Jandl's virtually untranslatable sound-poems matching his earlier translation of the sound-poet's radio play, in volume 9). The bibliography on literary translation by Louis Kelly in volume 6, contrasted to his bibliography on technical translation in volume 13, marks the awareness of a different set of translation problems and solutions in the new scientific age.

The BCLA/BCLT Annual Translation Competition winners for this year are also announced in this volume. They were first publicly announced in September 2001 at the annual two-day event held by the BCLT at the South Bank Centre where the Translators' Association prizes are also announced and the St Jerome Lecture on Translation is given. We are delighted to announce in print and to publish the winner of the First Prize, Silvester Mazzarella, for a chapter of Agneta Pleijel's novel *Lord Nevermore*, translated from the Swedish. Agneta Pleijel is well known for her poetry, some of which has been translated into English, and this beautifully nuanced opening chapter has many of the characteristics of poetry, making the translator's feat in rendering its subtleties of tone all the more impressive.

The Second Prize went to Brian Cole, who translated poems by Circe Maia from the Spanish, of which we publish a small selection here. Circe Maia is a well-known figure in Latin America, and her evocative

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poetic glimpses into the midst of the everyday are finely rendered by the translation.

The winning entries will also be published on the BCLA website from 2002. Inquiries and entries should be addressed to the British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT), School of Languages and Linguistics, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ.

The Comparative Literature series of the LEGENDA imprint of the EHRC (European Humanities Research Centre, Oxford) continues to flourish. Two new volumes have appeared: Adam Czerniawski's translations of the Polish Renaissance poet Jan Kochanowski's *Treni (Laments)* (2001) (of which *Comparative Criticism* published *Laments* 5 and 14 in volume 19 from the translation of the *Laments* by Seamus Heaney and Stanislaw Baranczak, together with a review by George Gömöri); and Richard Serrano, *Neither a Borrower: Forging Traditions in French, Chinese and Arabic Poetry* (2002). Proposals for shorter critical studies, editions, or translations, as well as for theses and monographs, are welcome. Please write to any member of the Publications Committee: Professor Stephen Bann (Department of the History of Art, University of Bristol, Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TE), Professor Peter France (Department of French, University of Edinburgh, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9JX), or Dr Elinor Shaffer (School of Advanced Study, University of London, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU). Orders for books may be placed with Mrs Karen Bannister, at the European Humanities Research Centre, St Hugh's College, Oxford OX2 6LE or through its website, www.ehrc.ox.ac.uk.

It is an appropriate moment to recall the founding of this journal as the organ of the newly formed British Comparative Literature Association, which held its founding conference in 1975 at the University of East Anglia. In looking back over it the major fields of our concern are evident: to record and encourage the development of Comparative Literary studies in the UK, both institutional and scholarly; and to place it within the developing framework of international theoretical and critical studies, in a period of rapid change and intense debate. It has regularly published the plenary papers from the triennial Conference of the BCLA. Translation studies is one branch of comparative literature that has come to the fore over the period of our publication, and the translations themselves have provided readers with the possibility of extending their awareness of literary potentialities beyond the field of

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their first, second or third languages. Many of these have been winning entries in the annual British Comparative Literature Association Translation Competition, which only in the last five years joined hands with the BCLT (British Centre for Literary Translation) founded by the late Max Sebald to form the BCLA–BCLT Translation Competition. But many of the translations we have published were commissioned or submitted without reference to the competition. While Cambridge University Press does not normally publish creative writing as such, this journal has been concerned to provide the stuff of new perceptions as well as commentary on them. This journal also pioneered the *Bibliography of Comparative Literature in Britain and Ireland*, in order to highlight the scholarly and critical contribution of the United Kingdom to the international comparative literary community. Special bibliographies either of special subject areas or of the work of individuals (of which this volume adds an important example) have also been a feature of the journal.

It is also an occasion to express our thanks to the members of the Editorial Board, both the founder members, and the more recent additions, who have lent their names and their advice over many years. Some of the founders are among the departed: Northrop Frye, René Wellek, Peter Stern, J. W. McFarlane and Malcolm Bradbury; but their signal contributions to our subject live after them.

Thanks are owing to the Syndics of Cambridge University Press for their sustained support for this journal and to the staff of Journals. Successive production controllers, first Jill Walden, then Gwenda Edwards, have kept us on track in the nicest possible way. Special thanks are owing to our excellent sub-editors, and in particular Kay McKechnie, who has been a keen reader and tireless worker in the vintage fields of *Comparative Criticism*. Her level-headed good sense, her accuracy and her enthusiasm have been an unfailing resource. We are grateful to her also for compiling the Index of the first twenty-four volumes of the journal, which is included in this volume. I also thank my past Assistants, all of them Cambridge research students, many of them now eminent in their own right, and my current Assistant, Andrea Brady, who has also kindly agreed to help to assemble materials for the archiving of this journal after the appearance of volume 25.

We are pleased to announce that volume 25 of *Comparative Criticism* will be published by Edinburgh University Press in the autumn of 2004. Volume 25 will be on the theme of 'Lives of the Disciplines: comparative biography'. It will explore the art of biography in different,

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evolving disciplines, and address the challenges posed by writing biographies of individuals whose contributions are internal to their subject, whether that subject be mathematics, medicine, poetry, or music.

We are further pleased to announce that a new, successor journal will be published from 2005 by Edinburgh University Press which will absorb both BCLA journals, *Comparative Criticism* and the house journal *New Comparison*. The new journal, *Comparative Literary and Cultural Criticism*, appearing three times a year, will continue to feature themed issues, translation studies and translations, and will offer an expanded reviews section; one issue a year will feature Comparative Reception Studies, in conjunction with the multi-volume series on 'Critical Traditions: the Reception of British Authors in Europe' (Continuum Books), of which Elinor Shaffer is the General Editor. Association news, the full texts of prize-winners and commended entries in the annual BCLA–BCLT Translation Competition, and the Bibliography of Comparative Literary Studies in Britain and Ireland, will appear on the BCLA website at <http://www.bcla.org>. Further information and order forms are enclosed with the current volume. While we look back with gratitude and affection on our long association with Cambridge, we look forward with pleasure to our new association with Edinburgh University Press.

Elinor Shaffer