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*Rancière and Literature* ed. by Grace Hellyer and Julian  
Murphet (review)

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the moral law, valid for ‘everyone’ (see *Les Constructions de l’universel: psychanalyse, philosophie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997)). It is in the midst of this confusion that we might place ‘the subject’ in question in Gabriela Basterra’s book, a subject modelled on, and torn by, the third conflict of transcendental ideas in Kant’s antinomy of pure reason, opposing freedom and determinism. Kant solves this conflict by postulating that causality through freedom need not contradict the causality of nature because the acting subject has both an empirical and an intelligible character. One and the same deed might, from an empirical point of view, be seen as determined, while, from a rational point of view, it seems free. Instead of depicting the subject as ‘split between two viewpoints or references’ (p. 8), Basterra depicts it as ‘the site of the relationship between the series [of subordinated conditions] and its outside’ (p. 48). Nevertheless, how or whether her gesture does away with Kant’s distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal remains unclear. This *other* subject, she writes, ‘exceptionally’, and retroactively, ‘introduces a boundary, a fleeting moment of closure’ (p. 51) into the indefinite series of causes and effects determined by nature, and is thus in a ‘unique position’ to ‘play the exceptional role of the unconditioned’ (p. 56). Even though we are asked to understand such intervention as ‘a structural operation rather than as any willed action of a human agent’ (p. 51), what comes to mind is the image of the artist as an exceptional personality, who through poetic constructions of meaning establishes a precarious stability in an otherwise chaotic existence. Here, a discussion of what, in his seminar on Joyce published as *Le Sinthome* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), Jacques Lacan called ‘suturing’ would perhaps have been relevant. Although Basterra’s work presents itself as an attempt to bring Kant and Emmanuel Levinas into dialogue on the grounds that for both these thinkers subjectivity is marked by an excess, by ‘a relationship to the otherness of the law’ (p. 2), in my view the real conflict animating the monograph lies elsewhere. A complex history of psychoanalytical readings of Kant, from Jacques Lacan’s to David-Ménard’s (whose major works await translation into English), Joan Copjec’s, and Kiarina Kordela’s, underpins Basterra’s presentation of Kant’s antinomy. These readings, furthermore, mostly address the question of sexual difference. Cut off from this background, the echo of that ‘other relationship’ to ‘what is outside’, that Basterra asks us to hear in Kant, risks being lost.

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*Rancière and Literature*. Edited by GRACE HELLYER and JULIAN MURPHET. (Critical Connections.) Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016. xi + 272 pp.

This edited volume is a critical exploration both of Jacques Rancière’s direct engagement with various literary works and the potential of a Rancièrian approach to literature. It opens with an original contribution by Rancière, which examines fiction as ‘a structure of rationality that is required whenever a sense of reality must be produced’ (p. 25). Not only novelists but also politicians, journalists, and social scientists must use fictions in order to identify a situation and its constituting elements, as well as their causal interconnections. Rancière turns to Erich Auerbach, Georg Lukács, Virginia Woolf, and Dziga Vertov to explore the idea of modern fiction as a contradiction in terms. The volume is structured around three themes: Rancière’s theoretical positions, nineteenth-century literary realism, and contemporary works of fiction. The chapters analyse on a case-by-case basis what exactly a new distribution of the sensible means in concrete fictional worlds. In the first section, contributors examine the robustness of Rancière’s theory and ‘seek to establish the broad parameters of his philosophical estimation of literary practice’ (p. 16). They take up

questions of verification, translation, and political indiscipline (Éric Méchoulan); explore Rancière's missed encounters with tragedy (Oliver Feltham); analyse an alternative transversal regime through a reading of John Milton's work (Justin Clemens); and examine Rancière's critical attitude towards the concept of modernity (Andrew Gibson). In the second set of contributions, on nineteenth-century realism in Rancière's thought, his democratic vision of the literary is verified through narratological analyses of the poor in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (Elaine Freedgood), the phantasmatic representation of the whale in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (Grace Hellyer), and the death of Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (Emily Steinlight). Finally, the question of discarded refuse ('anything whatever'), and its potential to communicate meanings, is considered through a confrontation of Rancière with Walter Benjamin (Alison Ross). James Joyce, Michel Houellebecq, and Eli Yaakunah serve as sparring partners on questions of literature and politics (in the chapters by Julian Murphet, Arne De Boever, and Bert Olivier respectively). What is particularly noteworthy is that contributors explore problematic tensions between Rancière's politics of literature and his other theorizations of politics. The former is radically open to non-human entities whereas the latter contains a strong human focus. This points towards a possible opening-up of Rancière's work to explorations from various non-anthropocentric perspectives in current scholarship around the question of non-humans and politics. This volume is a welcome addition to current scholarship on Rancière. It both confronts Rancière's ideas with a wider scope of literary material and gestures towards new areas to which Rancière's philosophy could potentially be transplanted.

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*The Disavowed Community*. By JEAN-LUC NANCY. Trans. by PHILIP ARMSTRONG. (Commonalities.) New York: Fordham University Press, 2016. 144 pp.

This is the first translation into English of *La Communauté désavouée* (Paris: Galilée, 2014), Jean-Luc Nancy's response to Maurice Blanchot's *La Communauté inavouable* (Paris: Minuit, 1983), itself a response to Nancy's influential essay on community, 'La Communauté désœuvrée', originally published in the journal *Aléa* (4 (1983), 11–49). Early in the book, Nancy speaks of having been astonished not only by the fact that a figure as eminent as Blanchot should have written an entire book in response to an essay by such a young and relatively obscure philosopher, but also the apparent urgency with which he did so. (Blanchot's book was published just months after Nancy's essay.) During the thirty years that have passed since the publication of Blanchot's response, relatively little has been written on the exchange between the two thinkers, and Nancy dismisses the few texts that have appeared on the subject as failing to grasp the importance of the construction and economy of Blanchot's text. As for Nancy's own work, save for a handful of short texts on Blanchot, the absence of an engagement with *La Communauté inavouable* is conspicuous. In *The Disavowed Community* Nancy repeatedly acknowledges the long interval between Blanchot's response and his own, which he ascribes to his own intimidation and inability to comprehend fully the stakes of Blanchot's book. In his Introduction to this volume, Armstrong writes that 'Nancy has been doing nothing else over the past thirty years than preparing himself to write *The Disavowed Community*' (p. xxi). While this claim is surely an exaggeration, the book nevertheless testifies to the formative effect of Blanchot's text on Nancy's subsequent work. This volume touches on many of the principal questions that have occupied Nancy in the intervening thirty years: the sexual relation