

Călin-Andrei MIHĂILESCU and Takayuki YOKOTA-MURAKAMI, eds., *Policing Literary Theory, Textxet: Studies in Comparative Literature*, 86, Brill Rodopi, 2018, ISBN 978-90-04-35850-8, 218 pages.

Sean BRAUNE

English Language & Literature, Brock University  
sean\_braune@hotmail.com

*Policing Literary Theory* is the new special issue of *Textxet*, edited by Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu and Takayuki Yokota-Murakami. The special issue emerged from the workshop of Literary Theory Committee of the International Comparative Literature Association held in April of 2014 at Osaka University. It stands at the intersection point of comparative literary theory and world literature and it marks the location of a crime. This review will partly ask the following two questions: 1) *what is the crime?*, and 2) *where is the body?* The recent return of *Twin Peaks* featured an episode called “There’s a Body all right” and the same can be said about this special issue — *there’s a body all right* and that body is an entire corpus.

*Policing Literary Theory* emerges at a unique sociocultural and academic moment. Before discussing the issue directly or the two questions that ground this review, I would like to, following Fredric Jameson’s well-known dictum to “[a]lways historicize!” (9), situate the special issue in a historical context. The context of the issue spans the origins of the modern university to the present moment of what Bill Readings presciently called (already in 1996), the “university in ruins.” From Hellenic hedge schools to the contemporary university controlled by hedge fund managers and corporate interest groups,<sup>1</sup> *Policing Literary Theory* emerges from an academic landscape that looks more and more like an episode of *CSI*. In the wake of the rampant

---

<sup>1</sup> Marko Juvan’s article in the collection makes this point in reference to Bill Readings’s *The University in Ruins* (1996). Juvan points out that in “Readings’ view, in the corporate, consumer-oriented universities of today ruled by bureaucratized administrators ‘the professoriate is being proletarianized’” (105). Juvan argues that “[f]or decades now, the university has been policed by neoliberal economics destroying its traditional structure and deterring its social mission” (105).

corporatization of academia — a trend that began towards the middle or end of the twentieth century and has accelerated evermore into the 21<sup>st</sup> — the university, and the humanities in particular, are under attack. The humanities are repeatedly required, through departmental reviews, to defend its existence (or right to exist) in the face of administrators, federal granting agencies, and a media that appears to consider (especially in North America) academic discourse to be obscurantist chicanery with little relation to the “real world” — wherever that “real world” may be, which is probably a shopping mall. Capitalist media (and social media) privilege disposability and speed in the face of the apparent slowness, nostalgia, and intellectual romanticism of the humanities. Despite the popularity of the “posthuman,” it may be necessary for the humanities to return to its humanist roots that are admittedly somewhat problematic because of their reliance on an Enlightenment metaphysics of presence — in the service of safe-guarding the “human” from the apparatchik class of Kafkaesque bureaucrats and administrators. To be a sessional instructor or even a tenured professor in today’s academic atmosphere is to feel more and more like Josef K. in *The Trial* or Agent Cooper trapped in the Black Lodge.

In this defensive situation on the part of the humanities, the field of comparative literature is even more precarious. In a larger field that must legitimate its right to exist, comparative literature departments are receiving repeated cuts to funding and many are faced with closure — even the University of Toronto’s prestigious comparative literature department faced closure back in 2010 and was rescued from the brink by a rather vociferous academic outcry from scholars and students around the world.<sup>2</sup> This is the situation that we find *Policing Literary Theory* in — a situation in which comparative literature is looking more and more like the “dead field” of philology (despite the fact that philology departments still exist even though they are hard to find).

### **What is the Crime?**

In this scenario then *what is the crime?* The crime could be considered the death of the age of “Theory” or “High Theory” that took hold during the 1980s to the late 1990s and

---

<sup>2</sup> The *Globe and Mail* featured two articles on this issue: the first by Elizabeth Church dealt with the imminent closure on July 13 of 2010 and then Joe Friesen reported, in his article from October 28, 2010, that the department was rescued by the public outcry.

has recently seen a downturn in popularity. *Policing Literary Theory* maps the various policing procedures of the academy — those policing procedures that work both *against* and *inside* the academy. The critic is presented as a cop and this cop is entrusted with policing the boundaries of his or her field or discipline.

What would be the politics of *Policing Literary Theory*? It would be difficult to generalize to the issue as a whole, but throughout the issue there is a suspicion of the normalized Marxist and communist positions popularized by French continental thought. This position is made explicit by the editors when they provide what could be called an “ideological critique” against those (Marxist) critics who regularly engage in ideological critiques: often “the critic of an ideology is granted a standpoint outside of that very ideology, and is thus entitled to critically master it” (2). I recently had a conversation with a staunch Marxist critic where I asked him about how he reconciles Marxist critical theory with the realities of implemented communism; i.e., those countries that had or have “communist” governments (Ceașescu’s Romania, Stalin’s Soviet Union, Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht’s German Democratic Republic, Pol Pot’s Cambodia, Mao Zedong’s China, Kim Il-sung’s North Korea, and so on). Even though each of these countries featured political, social, and cultural differences, they each could be called dictatorships and police states.<sup>3</sup> The response from my rather incensed interlocutor was that these countries were not, in fact, as bad as we are lead to believe, but have been misrepresented by Western media. At this point I headed for the door. These conversations place me in a difficult position because I admire much of Marx’s writing and Marxist critical theory, but I have never adopted any theoretical position wholesale and the question of how Marxist theory can be reconciled with the historical applications of Marxism in politics should be interrogated. Essentially, what the editors of *Policing Literary Theory* do is extend Marx’s understanding of ideology — which Slavoj Žižek locates in Marx’s claim: “*Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es*” or

---

<sup>3</sup> See: A. James Gregor’s *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism* (2009) for a look at some of the foundations of revolutionary movements in the twentieth century. Gregor notes that Stalin’s Soviet Union was seen as a bastion of hope for academics around the world until Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the Communist Party (3). Norman M. Naimark describes Stalin’s mass killings of the 1930s as genocide. See Naimark’s *Stalin’s Genocides* (2010).

“they do not know it, but they are doing it”<sup>4</sup> — to the Marxist critic herself or himself. The critique of ideology falls into its own ideological pitfalls, which creates a prismatic feedback loop of ideological mirrors where none of the reflected doppelgängers would be able to see the backs of their own heads. Ideology critique functions best when it is “outside” of ideology, but how are we to know when we are outside of ideology? Where is this outside located? The editors cleverly ask: “If theorist and policeman are uneasy, yet fated bedfellows, what can literary theory honestly say about policing and being policed?” (1). The focus of the issue is this paranoid situation for the critic that Reingard Nethersole calls, in his article from the issue, the “critic-as-cop” (36).

### **Where is the Body?**

The special issue is separated into three distinct parts: the first part, “Theories of Policing in Literature and Literary Criticism,” features three articles that situate policing in a theoretical context. The second part, “Case Studies,” considers four specific instances of policing and the final part, “Policing Literary Theory across the World,” contains four papers that apply a policing theoretic to a world literary context. In linking the theorist to the policeman, Mihăilescu and Yokota-Murakami, in their editors’ introduction, discuss three distinct points: 1) *theory*, 2) its “other” as *ideology*, and 3) the link between the two as *method*. This tripartite framework can be applied to the issue as a whole with Part One falling into “theory,” Part Two into “ideology,” and Part Three into “method” (although this framework is not entirely perfect for the issue as a whole). Slippages occur.

Nethersole insists that “[t]heory, informed ultimately by Philosophy, I contend, becomes operational in the hands of the critic-as-cop” (36). Marko Juvan makes a similar point in the collection when he argues that, following Bill Readings, in “Anglo-American universities, it was literary criticism — and not philosophy, as was the case in Western Europe — that represented the core discipline entitled to interpret the social totality” (97-98). Literary criticism and not philosophy was privileged as the dominant modality of Theory. Péter Hajdu, in his article in the volume, offers a breakdown of how

---

<sup>4</sup> Žižek argues that this saying in Marx is “the most elementary definition of ideology” (28). In the Penguin Classics edition of Marx’s *Capital*, the German phrase is translated as: “They do this without being aware of it” (166-167).

the critic-as-cop legislates knowledge through a kind of *Polizeiwissenschaft* (“police knowledge” or “police science”):

As if a legislator or a schoolmaster were showing what is the rational, good behavior, and what is naughty in a critic’s mistakes. Do not collect the author’s biographical data to explain a text, because it is wrong; do not investigate the textual models of a text to explain its meaning, because it is wrong; do not try to find out the author’s intention to explain a text, because it is wrong; do not communicate your emotions about a text, because it is category mistake to speak about what something does instead of what it is; and so on. (137)

These various policing procedures on the part of academia instruct students how to read and how to write about literature, but, as Hajdu argues, “theory emerges as the police of literary criticism, with those performing such acts implicitly claiming the power to reward the good and punish the naughty” (135). The historical distinction between “Philosophy” and “Theory” is contained in the American reception to twentieth century continental thought (primarily from France), but the emergence of Theory has resituated the theorist as a cop who polices thought. In a sense, professors are the police officers of thinking because they define the boundaries of a discipline; as well, they model, for their students and colleagues, a vocabulary for that discipline. Juvan writes, in his contribution to the issue, that: “The Humboldtian interdependence of scientific research and teaching relied on hierarchic relations between faculty members, who controlled the knowledge of their students, along with their command of appropriate methods and styles of scholarly arguing” (94). The professor-as-cop captures ideas in the jailcell of a discipline.

This situation designates the confines of a crime: the critic is a cop when Theory overtakes Philosophy, but the dead body is Theory itself. Vladimir Biti argues in his contribution, “After Theory: Politics against the Police?,” that the “case in point is ‘the death of Theory’ around 2000, which was accompanied by the discovery of its ‘terrorist character’” (15). The body is Theory and its dead body has been stinking up academe for almost twenty years. The police have been slow to arrive, but *Policing Literary Theory* is a crime scene diagnostics. The special issue reconstructs evidence and traces the

samples left at the crime scene. In the process, it implicitly diagnoses the prospective death of the university — a prolonged death that we are witnessing in real time. However, this “death” is also a murder — a murder perpetrated by administrators, culture, and economics. Biti makes a similar point as the editors when he points out that: “Having been conceived in the Marxian spirit as ideology critique, Critical Theory championed its own judgments at the expense of others’ prejudices” (25). This argument mirrors Mihăilescu and Yokota-Murakami’s arguments about the inside and outside of ideology critique — how the Marxist critic presumes an objective perspective from the outside of ideology in order to diagnose it effectively.

Reingard Nethersole looks at a specific instance of the critic-as-cop, an instance that she claims is exemplary; that is, the work of Edward Said. Nethersole’s article interrogates a “*Polizeiwissenschaft*” (32) as “police knowledge” or “police science” that can be exemplified in Said’s *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Nethersole argues that Said is the “foremost figure in the literary policing game” (32). Whether or not Said is the “foremost figure in the literary policing game” is less important than Nethersole’s analysis of his work as a hallmark in the model of literary policing. The critic-as-cop defines the boundaries of a discipline and even the boundaries of how students can read. How we read and what we read — assuming we want to read “great works” from the “canon” — are designated by the critic-as-cop.

Mihăilescu’s contribution to the volume is a playful consideration of John le Carré and Ian Fleming. His theoretical scaffolding in the article is notable. Mihăilescu begins by considering the intertwined nature of the narratives of the prostitute and the spy:

Stories not too old intimate that, from the first division of labor, which broke up the primeval pile of non-specialists, there came the prostitutes; from the second division — the spies, suspected to be their sons. Spies were born to check on the prostitutes spied upon by other spies. The prostitute hovers on the borders between nature and society; the spy — on those between society and the unnatural. At one end, the play of bodies on display; at the other, the spy’s scrutinizing invisibility. (44)

The linked occupations of spy and prostitute are defined by their different significations in terms of visibility and the performances of visibility; on the one hand, the prostitute is exceedingly visible — the prostitute’s body is both visible and commodified. Everything private about the prostitute body is rendered, to a certain degree, public.<sup>5</sup> The spy, on the other hand, is invisible (or should be). The spy’s body is unknown and invisible to the subject-of-spying. In this sense, James Bond is one of the worst spies because he does little to conceal his identity — he typically uses his own name and has a penchant for nice suits, fast cars, and public explosions. Considering Bond as the body-of-the-spy renders his persona in distinctly un-spylike terms. As well, considering his love of serial sexual encounters with beautiful women, the linkage between prostitute and spy is exemplified in the characterization of Bond.

Mihăilescu insists that “the police abides by the enigmatic nature of the law itself: the police does not respect the law; it enforces it” (45-46); however, this moment contains an intriguing footnote: “Or ‘applies’ the law, rather than ‘enforce’ it” in “that the Police is the faceless figure (a violence without a form; *Gestaltlos*) of the *Dasein* of the *polis*” (46, n. 3). The Police is a faceless figure in much the same manner as the spy is an invisible body. However, this phenomenological situation of the *Gestaltlos* can easily lead to the Gestapo in the transition from invisible to visible, from a formless form to an inescapable and omnipresent form that watches and seeks to prosecute your every move. Mihăilescu notes the “atmosphere of suspicion that marred the first few years after 9/11,” an atmosphere that “looked like a story running away from Robert Ludlum’s *Bourne* series into Orwell’s *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*” (49). Of interest to the history of subjectivity though — a history that would include the identities of prostitutes and spies — is Mihăilescu’s provocative claim that *Descartes is a spy*: “No doubt, then, that Descartes might have looked like a professional spy to some” (53). Mihăilescu links spying with lying and, in the context of Descartes, his famous claim “I think, therefore, I am” could be re-phrased as “I lie as I think, therefore I think as I lie,” which would locate doubt at the heart of the *ego cogito*. Mihăilescu is insistent on the necessity of doubt in the Cartesian formula — a doubt that links Descartes to the tradition of spies.

---

<sup>5</sup> See: Shannon Bell’s excellent analysis of the narrativizations surrounding the prostitute body (1994).

This inclusion of doubt in the complicated world of the critic-as-cop and theoretical policing leads to the next section of the special issue entitled “Case Studies.”

### **Evidence**

The crime scene of the death of Theory is further supported by “evidence” taken from a variety of sources. The first piece of evidence is provided by Sowon S. Park in her article “Dear Leader! Big Brother!: On Transparency and Emotional Policing.” The focus of her contribution is on Shin Donghyuk’s North Korean defector memoir *Breaking Free from the World* or 세상밖으로 나오다, *Escape from Camp 14*. After providing a chilling and breathtaking account of the televised funeral of Kim Jong-Il — an analysis that considers the Freudian superego, brainwashing, and Orwell’s *1984* — she situates the “emotional policing” of the North Korean people (77). Park argues that:

What was distinctly eerie about the images from the funeral was the sense that individual emotions had been overwritten by a single code from which no one could opt out. The homogeneity, the ferocity, and the competitiveness of the behavior seemed to indicate that to *not* demonstrably mourn would amount to a violation, a crime, or, in the Orwellian Newspeak, a “thoughtcrime,” subject to the disciplinary powers of the State. It is in this sense that the affective state of the citizens of Pyongyang could be said to be policed, that is to say, enforced by the law as a function of the state. (77-78)

The mass presentation of mourning is a visual depiction of the policing of the subject — a full performance of mourning (a performance that may even be misrecognized as real) that narrativizes or re-narrativizes the subject in the face of discursive and political pressures. Elsewhere, I have argued for the contemporary subject as being a *subject-of*; that is, the subject is effaced in the face of the subject-of, which is a subject constantly and repeatedly pressurized in the face of the exigencies of the outside — what this means is that the “ofs” of the outside (as culture, society, and the political) constantly re-code and re-write the subject.<sup>6</sup> In this model, the subject is not only lacking (as it is in a Lacanian formulation), but it is never fully existent or in-itself because it is constantly in

---

<sup>6</sup> See my *Language Parasites* (2017) for more on the subject-of. Chapter Three is of particular interest in this context.

the process of degeneration and regeneration. *Policing Literary Theory* as a whole, and Park's article in particular, depict what I would call the *subject-of-policing*. Shin's escape from North Korea epitomizes this point. Park writes:

When he was 13, Shin was forced to watch the public execution of his mother by hanging and his brother by firing squad. He was then thrown into a tiny, low-ceiling underground cell where it was impossible to stand or lie down for eight months and tortured periodically. Torture involved being trussed and hung over an open fire like a hammock and being burnt. But, as he wrote, such treatment is only to be expected. (85-86)

This nightmarish environment leads to a fully developed subject-of-policing. The Foucauldian-Benthamian panopticon is internalized to the point that the eye of a punitive authority (as "Dear Leader" or "Big Brother") erases the total subject due to the intensity of introjection. However, what is unique about Park's analysis is that she points out that Shin retains some kernel of subjectivity. This interpretation, supported by Shin's devastating narrative, pushes against the tradition of discourse analysis initiated by Foucault, and points to a metaphysical essence of subjectivity that remains untouched by panoptic surveillance. Park writes that "his testimony props the door open to the kernel of human nature that is not subject to being produced and shaped by social processes, an idea that is largely absent in Foucauldian or other theoretical elaborations," so that there exists in Shin "a parallel if inchoate self that is not subsumed. Shin's self that remained unseen by the panoptic eye reminds us that it is precisely this private self which requires most shielding" (87). This notion of a remainder of selfhood that remains untouched (or unseen) by panopticism is also addressed by Kyohei Norimatsu's "Within or beyond Policing Norms: Yuri Lotman's Theory of Theatricality" and Yvonne Howell's "The Genetics of Morality: Policing Science in Dudintsev's *White Robes*." Norimatsu situates the semiotician Juri Lotman in similar terms to the ones that Park uses to discuss Shin Donghyuk: "Lotman attempted to make room for private opinions inside official norms — in other words, to develop a public sphere that was not totally integrated into officialdom" (116). Howell likewise points out that Dudintsev writes that an individual moral compass "[d]oes not come from capitalism or from socialism, but from within" (qtd. in Howell 191). What is this

ineradicable kernel of self that defies the panoptic eye and the propagandist dictates of totalitarian police states? Does this remnant point to the limitations of Theory? Or to a necessary return to phenomenology or its long-banished cousin, metaphysics?

The final section of *Policing Literary Theory* considers a variety of “case studies” of policing, such as those found in the mystery novellas by Roman Nikolayevich Kim considered in the article by Norio Sakanaka. Sakanaka writes that Kim’s novellas locate the “mysterious phenomenon” of the crime as “just an appearance” (161) through a sort of reinvention of idealism. John Zilcosky offers a wonderful reading of Kafka in relation to policing, especially by considering the “ego-less world” of Kafka’s choice to write in “*erlebte Rede*” or free-indirect style (174). In *The Trial*, Kafka’s narrator is encapsulated through the pronoun “he” instead of “I” (Zilcosky 175). Howell points out that, in Dudintsev’s novel, nothing can “remain of the stable ‘I’ when (...) almost every constituent category of selfhood” has “been inverted or tossed out” (180). One of Howell’s most incisive claims is that “the policing novel generates double agents” (189). Yes, and living in a panoptic society also generates double agents — an *I that lies* by way of an updated Cartesianism that has been exposed to espionage. Yokota-Murakami argues in his conclusion to the collection that the character So Gyonte “is hailed as a subjugated Korean subject in hailing another Korean subject” (204). The character So is unable to conceal his Korean status from the Japanese authorities. This reading effectively “dislodges” Althusserian notions of interpellation and demonstrates the fearfulness and imprisonment that can exist on the other side of hailing. However, this framework features various layers of policing, police work, and the policed; it should be noted that it is equally important to investigate the investigator.

### **Investigating the Investigator**

Marko Juvan, in “The Charisma of Theory,” places the critic-as-cop on trial and investigates the ways in which the critic-as-cop relies on the rhetorical charms of charisma to police academic discourse. Building primarily on the work of Max Weber and Bill Readings, Juvan defines “charismatic authority” as being “formless because it is exterior to the established conventions, procedures, or social contracts”; what this means is that such a “charisma is arbitrary, experiential, purely subject-based, and precarious. It fully depends on whether a given community recognizes — and on how

long it is in the mood to admire — the seemingly transcendent powers of a leader, hero, saint, artist” (94). What is worthy of note here is that charisma is temporary, prone to its own entropy in the face of changing social and cultural norms and affiliations. One person’s charismatic leader is another person’s buffoon. Therefore, it turns out that the critic-as-cop is *also* on trial because now, in our current phase of modernity (a modernity suspicious of the university), the authority of the critic-as-cop has become destabilized in the face of corporatized academia. Weber already foresaw this situation in 1919 when he wrote “Science as a Vocation,” in which he points to the emergent university as a “corporation whose standards are measurable and whose knowledge is marketable” (qtd. in Juvan 104). *Policing Literary Theory* therefore heralds a double crime: the death of Theory, High Theory, or French Theory sometime around 2000 and the subsequent death of the critic-as-cop; this situation is what Juvan calls, in a rephrasing of Nietzsche, “the twilight of theoretical idols” (106). The new critic is a worker in the university factory who creates fabricated student-automata who do not question modernity, but go out into the world and perfect their skills as the smaller cogs of a larger capitalist machine. The future professor will be less a cop or police officer and more of a public servant who works in retail — where a diploma would have the equivalent value of any other commodity purchased in a store. The future professor will not be the critic-as-cop, but a slightly more qualified McDonald’s employee who will ask student-consumers if they want their fries supersized with their degree. *Policing Literary Theory* is a timely contribution to a field under attack and a university system that is in shambles and it usefully interrogates some of the causes of this situation through the effective metaphor of a crime-scene drama. However, the “killer” remains on the loose and a future volume must find a productive way out of this current academic quandary.

## References

- Bell, Shannon. *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.
- Braune, Sean. *Language Parasites: Of Phorontology*. Earth, Milky Way: punctum books, 2017.

Church, Elizabeth. "U of T plans to shut down Centre for Comparative Literature." *Globe and Mail* 13 July 2010.

Friesen, Joe. "U of T abandons plans to close famed school." *Globe and Mail* 28 Oct. 2010.

Gregor, A. James. *Marxism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*. 1867. Trans. Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin Books, 1990.

Mihăilescu, Călin-Andrei, and Takayuki Yokota-Murakami, eds. *Policing Literary Theory. Textxet: Studies in Comparative Literature* 86 (2018).

Naimark, Norman M. *Stalin's Genocides*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010.

Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.