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Title

CROS, EDMOND. *D'un sujet à l'autre: sociocritique et psychanalyse*.
Montpellier Université Paul Valéry, Editions du CERS, 1995.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/17w5d2c9>

Journal

Mester, 26(1)

Author

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Publication Date

1997

DOI

10.5070/M3261014504

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Book Reviews

CROS, EDMOND. *D'un sujet à l'autre: sociocritique et psychanalyse*. Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, Editions du CERS, 1995.

Edmond Cros is professor at the Université Paul Valéry in Montpellier, where he also directs the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Sociocritiques. Professor Cros began his career as a specialist in Golden Age studies, with a monumental *thèse d'Etat* on the picaresque *Guzmán de Alfarache* and a rhetoric of seventeenth-century sermonizing (Paris: Didier, 1967). This was followed by the very useful *Mateo Alemán: Introducción a su vida y a su obra* (Salamanca: Anaya, 1971). Some time ago he widened his focus to include Latin American literature, especially Mexican, as well. He has become well known as a theoretician and practitioner of "sociocritique", a form of cultural studies concerned with the relations between literature, ideology and society. In general, Cros has been fascinated by the interplay of social and literary semiotics, in a series of essential works that have followed and at least partially incorporated the evolution of European socio-literary theorizing. Bakhtin's influence is apparent in his 1975 study of Quevedo's picaresque *Buscón: L'aristocrate et le carnaval des gueux*, which explores the usurpation of social roles and status by *pícaros* and criminals as a version of carnival. The overt Bahktinian reference is replaced by ideology in the revised and rearranged Spanish translation, *Ideología y genética textual. El caso del "Buscón"* (Madrid: CUPSA, 1980). Cros combined theoretical speculation and practical analysis in *Théorie et pratique sociocritiques* (Montpellier: CERS, 1983), published in English translation as *Theory*

and Practice of Sociocriticism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988), and with the same focus but different organization and some different examples, as *Literatura, ideología y sociedad* (Madrid: Gredos, 1986). These volumes incorporate and systematize specific studies published principally in Cros' Montpellier journal *Imprévue*. The theory is concerned with notions of social semiotics and how the social signs are represented in literary texts. Cros has always displayed a predilection for systems, codes and taxonomies, inspired ultimately by Saussurean linguistics. The practice returns again and again to texts by Mateo Alemán (principally *Guzmán de Alfarache*) and Quevedo (principally the *Buscón*), joined now by Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz, now by Howard Hawks and Orson Welles.

The present trendily-titled volume, where the double sense of *autre* is concealed by the resolute imperium of upper-case typeface, is a collection of essays grouped around the notion of the "cultural subject", which Cros defines in the first chapter. The functioning of the cultural subject is then worked out in a series of examples spanning time and space from early modern Spain and America to the contemporary scene, but with a preference for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century themes and texts: a Buñuel film; the star system; the colonial subject; the Old Christian; the Abencerraje; Mateo Alemán. The last three chapters return to theory: postmodernity; history in literature; materialism and literary discourse.

Most of these are the socio-literary themes Cros has dealt with before, to which he returns from a different vantage point inspired by French linguistics in combination with his most recently acquired theoretical weapon, Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Cros works with Louis Althusser's notion of ideology and ideologi-

cal interpellation in combination with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus*. The recourse to Lacan and psychoanalysis in general might be considered an attempt to introduce the missing notion of the unconscious into Althusser's and Bourdieu's schemes.

Culture is defined as "the ideological space whose objective function consists in anchoring a collectivity in the consciousness it already has of its own identity" (1) (rather like Erik Erikson's definition of identity). Culture cannot exist in the abstract. Like ideology, and like language, it can only exist in its particular realizations: language and discursive practices, a particular ensemble of social institutions and practices, its reproduction in individual subjects according to certain forms generalizable regardless of the particular culture in question. The concept of subjectivity as the product of language, and the notion that the pronoun "I" can refer only to discourse, is derived from Benveniste. What Cros calls "the cultural subject", then, combines: a discursive instance defined by "I", the appearance and function of a subjectivity, a collective subject, a process of ideological subjectification (1). The cultural subject is "an instance which subsumes all the individuals of a given collectivity so that its fundamentally ideological character remains visible" (2). In the notion of the cultural subject Cros offers a personal, somewhat idiosyncratic variation on the methodology of "mentalities and forms of representation" that the *Annales E.S.C.* school has imposed on French cultural studies with such positive results.

Langue and parole. Cros remarks the same duality in Freud: an unconscious *langue* with universal symbols, vocabulary and syntax opposing a *parole* peculiar to each individual subject. In a dream the dreamer realizes a universal unconscious *langue* with its syntactic rules

etc. through a series of particular images and imagined events. But this unconscious symbolic system isn't limited to dreams; it has a history, and is present in all popular collective representations: folklore, myths, legends, sayings, proverbs, puns. This was already observed by Benveniste. So there is both a timeless-universal and a historical-specific dimension to cultural practice and consequently to cultural subjectivity. With the aid of Benveniste glossing Freud, Edmond has rediscovered Aristotle's poetic universal-historical particular dichotomy! This brings him more or less effortlessly to Lacan's famous observation that the unconscious is structured like a language, with its vocabulary and syntactical rules. From here he steps easily to Lacan's equally famous observation concerning the substitution of the Law of the Father, concretely in the form of the *Nom (Non) du Père*, for the father's phallus as signifier, the acquisition of language and simultaneous entry into the Symbolic Order and into Culture. The "cultural subject", as opposed to the "desiring subject", is the result of, can only be realized through, the already enunciated (that "network of signs organized into trajectories of sense and ideologically traced which is generally designated by the name 'culture'" p. 7). The subject of desire, on the contrary, can only be realized in the form of an enunciation. Cros summarizes: "In the cultural subject, *je* is confused with all the others; the *je* is the mask of all the others" (9). So what we're talking about here is the presence of tradition, ideology, habitus etc. speaking through an "I" who sincerely (maybe) believes he's saying something original. Or does the cultural subject know that he is merely the mask his culture is hiding behind? This question is answered by recourse to Lacan's Imaginary Order, the product of the *stade du miroir*, which Cros summarizes by saying that "in the Mirror Stage the *Moi* is formed, in

effect, by the image of the other, the *Moi* is a concentration of images sent by the other" (11). Cros' study of Mateo Alemán's self-portrait (ch. VII) will be based on this dynamic. The self is always in a rivalry with its own ideal (reflected) image. This situation gives rise to what Lacan calls "la plus intime agressivité", and which will lead to the universal desire for the other's disappearance (11). Cros' study of Antonio de Nebrija (ch. V) will be based on this dynamic. Lacan's *idéal du Moi* (as opposed to the *moi idéal*) mediates between the *moi* and the *moi idéal*. This *idéal du Moi* is formed by the internalization of the symbolic traits inscribed in the given culture, that is, by the introjection of that instance Cros calls the "cultural subject" (12). It is the cultural subject, then, which acts as intermediary between the *moi* and the other. Cros' study of the Abencerraje (ch. VI) will be based on this dynamic. The chivalresque values incarnated in both Abindarráez and Rodrigo de Narváez constitute the structure of mediation through which the two "fraternal enemies" recognize themselves in each other. Cros concludes this chapter with a trip through Lacan's dialectic of the Subject, the other (i.e. the reflected self or ideal self), the consequent creation of the *moi*, the subject's subsequent perception of real Others (*Autre* or *objet grand A* in Lacanian) doubly mediated through a) the subject's own ego-ideal and b) the "wall of language" (12-14). Cros' study of the colonial subject (ch. IV) will illustrate this process of alienation through language, which renders the Other unrepresentable.

Chapter II introduces what Cros calls the "cultural text", by analogy with the cultural subject, a fragment of an intertext so widely diffused and so thoroughly assimilated as to present itself as "a common possession from which all the original marks of identification have disappeared" (17). The cultural text is realized only "as reproduced

within a cultural object, as an underlying semiotic organization visible only sporadically and fragmentarily" (17). Another era might have called them archetypes. The stories of Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, along with the temptations of Christ by the Devil and of Adam by Eve and the Serpent all constitute such cultural texts, and Cros teases out their presence in Buñuel's *Viridiana* (1961). He works out an analogy between the fragmentary presence of these cultural texts, including their deeper, more troubling thematics that psychoanalysis has brought to light, within the larger filmic text of *Viridiana*, with its unique images and episodes, and the presence of the universal language of the unconscious within a dream composed of unique images and episodes.

Chapter III is a discussion of the star system in the movie biz. In the star system the actor is privileged over the character and is even considered responsible for the film in the mind of the public, but in fact the actor is manipulated and objectified by the director and is ultimately present in the film only as an absence. The mechanisms of the system work to conceal the real relationships between the actor/object and the other agencies. The fan magazines project an image of the star as an ordinary mortal with a private life, thus encouraging the public to identify with their idol. At the same time, however, the idol remains inaccessible. This tension between identification and inaccessibility makes the star system a model ideological product insofar as on the one hand it creates the impression that we can identify with our idol and the conditions of her life while it conceals the objective conditions of her socio-economic insertion, and on the other hand insofar as in order to remain an idol she must remain inaccessible, the system reinforces the perception of the star as star. Most of this is not new with Cros. He

contributes, by way of illustration, two contrasting films ads from Monterrey, México in 1936. One allows the reader to posit the star in the role of *auteur* and the other buries the star in a welter of references to sources, real authors, other cultural productions and so on. The point, I believe, was to demonstrate that the ambiguity in our perception of the star antedates the star system itself, whose beginning Cros traces (mistakenly) to the 1960's. Fatty Arbuckle, where are you?

Chapter IV brings back the halcyon days and heady polemics of 1992. The subject here is the colonial cultural subject, a new way of explaining what might uncharitably be termed the perpetual Latin American identity crisis. This essay incorporates work by Rolena Adorno among others. Cros begins by showing how Colón expresses the unknown in terms of the already known in a letter to Santángel. Alterity is assimilated to the similar. The indigenous peoples too are engaged in a symmetrical process of recognizing in the Other the signs that would permit assimilation to their existing categories: Cortés is assimilated to Quetzalcoatl; Spanish ecclesiastics are seen as *tzitzimime* or monsters, which are in turn assimilated to the fallen angels of Christianity. The representation of the diabolical is assimilated to that of the divine, and that of the divine into the diabolical (51). Christian images are integrated into the indigenous imagination, where they take on new contours. Autochthonous and alloigenous figures mutually deconstruct each other and explode the existing or original interpretative grids, leading to the creation of hybrid products that correspond to the practices generally termed syncretic (52). But the syncretism is only apparent. The result of this new discursive instance is the colonial cultural subject: "condemned to project itself in terms of the similar and the dissimilar, condemned to internalize its own alterity and therefore

to be in perpetual search of itself insofar as alterity is unrepresentable since the identification of the Other can only be effected in terms of my own discursive models which are in turn the products of who I am, what I know or what I imagine. Hence the inability of my discursive models to represent anything outside myself" (53). This is a restatement of the Lacanian dialectic of the mirror stage that Cros resumes in Chapter I, without the references to the theory, which might have helpfully simplified the exposition here. One gets the impression that the essay was perhaps written before the acquisition of the psychoanalytic theory.

The question of the meaning of 1492 is the point of departure in Chapter V, which is concerned with the cultural subject that will emerge from Antonio de Nebrija's prologue to his grammar and the cultural policies it prefigured. In what is perhaps the most genuinely psychoanalytical moment of this book, Cros seizes on an apparently insignificant anomaly and teases out its full significance. What to make, he asks, of the fact that Nebrija's grammar is simultaneously supposed to raise Castilian to the level of Latin and be the language of a new empire teaching the laws of the conqueror to the vanquished, and at the same time be a tool to facilitate the acquisition of Latin? Castilian is at once hegemonic and subordinate. The apparent inconsistency points to the realities of the administrative organization of a State and its daily operations. The laws in question may be written in Castilian, but the teaching of Law is entirely in Latin, and knowledge of Roman Law (the Law) presupposes a perfect command of Latin. Nebrija's prologue suggests the figure of the *letrado*, the educated son of Old Christian peasant stock who would constitute the new administrative class of the new empire. In this sense, Nebrija's prologue transcribes the birth

certificate of the modern Nation State. At the same time, Cros notes, this emergence of the modern state is accompanied by a discourse of exclusion, which “projects the contours of the Castilian cultural subject at the dawn of the modern era” (63). Within Nebrija’s text, references to body, unity, joining, assembly and the like are opposed by references to dismember, dissolve, distribute and sunder. What separates the assimilable from the non-assimilable, argues Cros, is religion, which confirms the theocratic underpinnings of the new imperial project. The cultural subject which emerges from this situation is founded upon the concepts of purity and exclusion, and bodied forth in the figure of the Old Christian, whose identity consists in the absence of Muslim or Jewish forebears (72). As an old Castronian I am not going to argue with Cros about the significance of *limpieza de sangre* and the emergence of the (male) Old Christian as the paradigmatic figure of the New Order, but (as an old Castronian) I would place ethnicity before religion.

Chapter VI, on the novella of the Abencerraje, the story of enemies who become friends, begins as an exercise in close reading and linguistic-thematic analysis. Without recourse to any theorizing, either ideological or psychoanalytical, Cros demonstrates the ubiquitous presence of structures and instances of mediation: between a love story and a war story, between Christians and Muslims, between fortresses and perfumed gardens. It has been customary at least since I was an undergraduate to remark as well the presence of an underlying system of chivalric values to which both Muslims and Christians subscribe. Cros too emphasizes this bond. The text has also been considered a kind of plea for intercaste *convivencia* around the middle of the sixteenth century. Cros goes further, and posits instead of *convivencia* an absolute identification of Christian and Muslim, with an opportune reference to

the old Spanish saying "mi amigo es otro yo." And here is where the trouble begins, and where Cros' analysis invokes psychoanalytic theory to explain the ambiguity inherent in any identification of the subject with the Other: "the Other is my double, but let us be on guard against Utopias," he warns (82). He invokes Lacan's analysis of the subject's specular identification with the Other through his image of himself as the site of that "plus intime agressivit," that converts the Self/Double into a rival and an enemy. Concluding his analysis, which has now deconstructed the traditional readings of the Abencerraje story, Cros locates the text and its multiple versions (1565-1577) and adaptations (1596-1597), in the historical context of renewed hostility between Christians and Muslims: the revolt of the Alpujarras (1568-1570) and subsequent harsh repression, and the expulsion of the moriscos (1609). Read as he reads it, the text poses questions concerning the function of identificatory discourse in a context of socio-historical crisis, and the more general relations among self-examination, narcissism and paranoia.

Mateo Alemán had a self-portrait engraved on a copper plate he used to carry around with him and had printed as the frontispiece of all his published writings. Edmond Cros has been studying and writing about it since the mid-1960's. This is the densest analysis he has produced. The relationship between Mateo Alemán and his fictional character/narrator Guzmán de Alfarache is complex and suggestive to say the least. Their lives share certain concrete episodes, but especially general attitudes and preoccupation with certain psychic and social themes: the division of wealth and power in society, the social organization of charity, the crisis of capitalism, *otium* (*cum* or *sine dignitate*) and purposeful activity, wisdom and blindness, acting and narrating,

and the problem of *linaje*, to mention just a few. The portrait is the site of their presence, crossing, and recrossing. Cros takes us on a guided semiotic tour of the portrait, divided into its top, central and lower parts, showing how, for example, the rigorously historical (maybe) Alemán family blason in the upper left opposes the vignette of the spider and the serpent in the upper right, derived from and present in the fictional narrative, how the figure of Alemán in the center unites the "where I (Alemán) come from" of the blason with the "who I (Guzmán) was" of the vignette, and how consequently Alemán becomes identified with the fictional narrator/character of his novel. This narrator is obsessed with the imaginary relationship he posits with his reader, with the image he is projecting of himself as he narrates and with the reader's reaction to it. This dialectic too is present in the portrait. Alemán is simultaneously contemplating himself, in an implied mirror, and us contemplating him. The situation of the portrait, then, reproduces the psychic environment in which the *Moi* is formed and invites a Lacanian analysis. Probably because Cros has already described the process in some detail, this analysis is limited to noting the presence of the *Nom du Père* in the family blason.

After a nod/feint in the direction of Julia Kristeva, chapter VIII proposes a redefinition of the term *idéologème* in light of the notion of the cultural subject. The ideologeme for Cros is "a semiotic-ideological microsystem underlying a functional and significative unit of discourse" (105). Although the essay is essentially a bleak definition and description of postmodernity, and makes abundant use of Fredric Jameson and Joan Lluís Marfany, it takes as its point of departure the proliferation in recent French discourse of "patrimones" of all kinds. This leads Cros to conduct a mini-diachronic survey of the term and its

meanings. After relating "patrimony" as ideologeme to notions of permanence, stability, the *Nom de Père* and "culture" in general, he takes up the question of its sudden ubiquity by considering it in relation to another ideologeme, "postmodernity". There is a concise discussion of the conceptual differences between modernity and postmodernity, after which Cros zeroes in on postmodernity as the consequence of a process of homogenization that coincides with the third industrial revolution following World War II and the last phase of the expansion of international capitalism. "It is clear," he writes, "that this process of homogenization, which began in the so-called advanced countries and now extends to the third world, constitutes the essential factor in what we call postmodernity" (118). Postmodernity as ideologeme is defined as the internalization by the cultural subject of a vision of the future defined by the endpoint of a mass march toward total socio-economic and socio-cultural homogeneity.

Chapter IX takes up the vexing question, kicked around by Aristotle and Cervantes, to mention only two of the most expert kickers, of history and literature, and of the study of history and literature. After clarifying that historical research is just as dependent on texts as is literary criticism, the discussion finally centers on the literary text as a source of historical information. Cros proposes a semiotic, as opposed to a positivistic reading strategy. He assumes knowledge of the Kristevian *phenotext* (objective, printed) and *genotext* (generated by the reader). The trick is to know how to construct the socio-historical context (genotext) from the phenotext by paying attention to founding structures and what he calls "the entire semiotic ensemble". He offers four examples: a dialectic of exposure vs. concealment in *Los olvidados*, which, he claims, demonstrates "how an entire semiotic network is

generated by this founding structure" (125); a dialectic of positive vs. negative figurations of the father and the question of filiation in *El periquillo sarmiento*, which demonstrates how the "reformist project of the Enlightenment calls into question the predominance of physiocratic and anti-monetarist discourse as well as the project of Latin American economic independence, that is, crucial problems, central preoccupations of societal interplay characteristic of the first decades of the nineteenth century in Mexico" (126); a mediated dialectic of sin vs. salvation in the *Libro de buen amor*; and finally a double dialectic of transgression vs. respect for the norm and transition vs. immobility in *Cumand*, which allows one to see that "for the transindividual subject, the cyclical, that is, the return to the political situation that was ended by the assassination of García Moreno, passes through the stages of civil disobedience and transgression of that conservative Catholic orthodoxy which is the fundamental value of that same transindividual subject" (127). My old philosophy professor would say that if these examples were syllogisms, they all lack a distributed middle term. Or any middle term.

The book does not end with a bang; the last chapter's title promises more than any ten pages could deliver. The questions raised at the beginning are fundamental and daunting: how does the social inscribe itself in the text? in what forms? by what means? And how does it function? Is there a relation between the volume of social information and the degree of literariness and esthetic value? After a brief discussion of Lucien Goldmann and the limitations of "genetic structuralism", and of Bakhtin and the vulgarization of his thought by, among others, Julia Kristeva, Cros offers his own contribution to a materialist poetics. He would insist on the semiotic processes described in the

preceding essay, he would retain the notion of history and society as discursive practices which generate others, he would insist on internal contradiction and dialectic as a structuring and meaning-producing principle, and he would insist equally on the notion of polyphony, restored to its full Bakhtinian meaning. The emphasis on multiplicity of voices and points of origin, he concludes, privileges the notions of critique and text over those of consciousness and authorial intention.

D'un sujet à l'autre demonstrates the breadth of Cros' reading, especially of literary texts; he moves with admirable facility from Nebrija to Buñuel. I applaud the effort to enrich socio-cultural analyses by incorporating the Lacanian *jeu de miroirs* and the contradictory constitution of the subject. Unfortunately, the closing essay's tendency to telegraphic abstraction does not do justice to the rigor and richness of analyses Cros has conducted elsewhere using the techniques he only hints at here. For a nuts-and-bolts demonstration of how the social enters and functions in a literary text, and how the attentive study of a literary text enriches our historical knowledge, Cros' 1975 study of the *Buscón* (or its 1980 Spanish version) remains exemplary.

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PERELLI, CARMEN. *Las ratas en la torre de Babel: La novela argentina entre 1982 y 1992*. Santos Dumont: Letra Buena, 1994.

The enterprise of establishing a critical discourse on recent literary history — that is, on living authors, and works about which little has