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Princeton University Press

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Abstract. An essay on language that Benjamin wrote in 1916 provides access to his “arcades project” (*Das Passagenwerk*), the materials on nineteenth-century Paris that he collected from 1927 until his death, in 1940. The arcades, glass-and-steel structures enclosing spaces between houses into exotic commercial zones, function as Benjamin’s emblems of capitalist modernity. Rhythms of ceaseless production and obsolescence not only absorb all counterideologies (revolution) but control the language of possible experience. By juxtaposing documents on objects, technologies, and dreams with glimpses of allegorical clarity in Balzac, Baudelaire, Blanqui, and others, Benjamin seeks to establish a text that will both embody and unmask the myth of history that obscures these rhythms. His goal is a structure of quotation that will speak for itself. Such speaking requires and makes possible “awakened” readers, able to translate the repetitious syntax of commodified individualism into a usable political language. (JLR)

The <i>Doll House</i> Backlash: Criticism, Feminism, and Ibsen.	
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Abstract. One of modern feminism’s most crucial literary texts has incited a systematic backlash that would save its author from feminism, denying that mere gender can have a place in Ibsen’s universal art or claiming that Nora Helmer is too inconsistent, frivolous, dishonest, abnormal, or unwomanly to be a feminist heroine. The argument that Nora represents not Woman but Everyman is a gender-based tautology in itself; applied to the play’s thoroughgoing feminist text it becomes doubly nonsense. The confused notions that Nora’s critics have about feminism and its relation to art lead them to uphold equally illogical positions, and their charges against Nora, which repeat those of her foil and husband, constitute both a serious misreading and, unintentionally, a kind of spurious deconstruction that denies the play’s coherence and worth. Finally, research on Ibsen’s life proves that, all claims to the contrary, his intentions in *A Doll House* were thoroughly feminist. (JT)

Vallejo’s <i>Venus de Milo</i> and the Ruins of Language.	
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Abstract. The critical reception demanded by an avant-garde artwork recapitulates in intensified form the hermeneutical problem of literary study, the relation of criticizing to criticized text. Walter Benjamin’s dialectical concept of allegory, rooted in the interpretive practice of “critical decomposition,” provides a singularly productive model for analyz-

ing the notorious difficulties inherent in an avant-garde text by the preeminent Peruvian poet, César Vallejo (1892–1938). In *Trilce*, Vallejo depicts *Venus de Milo*, the celebrated symbol of Romantic, symbolist, and *modernista* aesthetic perfection, but only to dismember the sculpture's self-sufficient totality and to propel it into a temporalizing linguistic fragmentation, into an allegorical mode of signifying. (CvonB)

Kenneth Burke's Divine Comedy: The Literary Form of *The Rhetoric of Religion*. ROBERT MCMAHON 53

Abstract. In *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Kenneth Burke refigures Augustine's *Confessions* as a Platonist comedy, structuring his book as an Upward Way that imitates and overgoes the textual ascent he analyzes in Augustine. He links that ascent to the principles of hierarchy, order, guilt, and victimage: the sacrificial principle of tragedy. Yet he counters the tragic motif with a comic criticism, teaching a tolerant charity and humble irony. His comedy thus tropes the *Confessions* on a large scale, converting it to logology. Burke teaches us about the tendency toward perfection obvious in the Upward Way, yet inherent in all symbols. In the political realm, this tendency aims toward perfect order and works to anathematize the opposition, exerting the principle of victimage. Burke warns us against this principle, which functions as much in the rhetoric of politics as in the rhetoric of religion. (RMcM)

The Politics of Johnson's *Dictionary*. ROBERT DEMARIA, JR. 64

Abstract. In definitions, occasional comments, and especially the selection of illustrative quotations, Johnson's *Dictionary* both conveys specific linguistic information and presents its readers with knowledge of the broadest kind. Like the abstract authority "the dictionary," Johnson's *Dictionary* is an active instrument of the culture it reflects and helps to shape. As such, Johnson's book embodies a politics, while transmitting political views on every one of its quotation-filled pages. As a collection of quotations, the *Dictionary* tends to display an underlying political consensus founded on cultural assumptions winnowed from the arguments of combatants on a variety of different but, at a distance, analogous controversies. As a cultural act in its own right the *Dictionary* supports the growth of democracy and liberalism through its assistance to and dependence on the growing population of literate, book-buying, voting English citizens. (RDeM, Jr)

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