



Archaeology

Daniel Finamore and Stephen D. Houston, editors

FIERY POOL

The Maya and the mythic sea
328pp. Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum / Yale University Press. £45 (US \$65).
978 0 300 16137 3

The Yucatán Peninsula sticks out like a thumb into the Caribbean Sea from the Central American mainland. Ranging from flat and arid in the north to hilly and well-watered in the tropical forests of lowland Chiapas, the Peten and Belize further south, it was and is home to the Maya, creators two millennia ago of one of the most astonishing civilizations of pre-Hispanic America. The adjacent highlands of Guatemala and Chiapas, sloping south to the Pacific shore, were probably the birthplace of the Mayan languages and culture. Nowhere in the whole Maya area is more than 160 miles from the sea, although for much of their history they do not seem to have been great navigators:

- coasting trade from the Gulf of Mexico south-east towards Panama, plugging in to traffic up the great rivers which penetrate the lowland interior, seems to have been their limit.

The watery realm which bordered and limited their world was the subject of endless interest, however, as we can see in Maya art from the Late Preclassic (400 BC–AD 300) to the Spanish conquest nineteen centuries later. *Fiery Pool: The Maya and the mythic sea* is the catalogue of an exhibition this spring and summer (and subsequently in Fort Worth and St Louis), launched, appropriately, at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, one of America's pre-eminent centres for the study of the maritime world through the ages.

Four main chapters, one by each of the editors on watery symbolism (Stephen D. Houston) and the actualities of maritime trade (Daniel Finamore), are flanked by an introduction to the Maya world by Mary Miller and Megan O'Neil and a study of Maya cosmology by Karl Taube. Each chapter is supplemented by a series of short essays by leading scholars, and then has a set of impressive full-page colour plates of relevant pieces in the show, with short descriptions: some are by the main authors, but many are exercises by Houston's students. The plate numbers and the catalogue numbers for the objects do not match.

Most studies of Maya art have concentrated on the cosmic, the chthonic or the dynastic – by no means exclusive categories. *Fiery Pool* brings in a hitherto under-considered dimension. Rivers have been seen mainly as avenues of economic and political linkage, the coasts as sources of marine resources for food and ornament. We can now appreciate that the ancient Maya did not just “go into the



Re-collection VII, 2008, by Carlos Betancourt; from *Psychedelic: Optical and visionary art since the 1960s*, edited by David S. Rubin (138pp. MIT Press. £22.95. 978 0 262 01404 5)

water” – their evocative term for death – but that, whether salt or fresh, it played a constant role in their perception of the universe.

NORMAN HAMMOND

Film

Heide Schlüppmann

THE UNCANNY GAZE

The drama of early German cinema
Translated by Inga Pollmann
296pp. University of Illinois Press.
Paperback, \$30.
978 0 252 07671 8

Two decades after its original publication, Heide Schlüppmann's landmark study of early German cinema, *Unheimlichkeit des Blicks*, has finally been made available to an English-speaking audience. Thanks to Inga Pollmann's faithful, generally fluid translation, students and scholars now have the chance to learn from the scrupulous research and profound analytical rigour that characterize this first-rate work. For what Schlüppmann undertakes in *The Uncanny Gaze* is nothing short of a total excavation of German cinema during the years leading up to the First World War. Training her eye on the so-called *Kinodrama*, mainly genre pictures (melodramas, detective films, comedies and social dramas) produced from 1909 to 1914, which marked the transition from a “cinema of attractions” to a more plot-driven cinema, she offers a far-reaching discussion of film spectatorship, gender and sexuality as reflected in, and discussed around, these diverse films.

While frequently concentrating on the significance of the female gaze, Schlüppmann is equally attentive to such pivotal concerns as the bourgeois reform movement (*Kino-reform*), the establishment of feature film entertainment, gender-specific viewing practices (e.g., the *Herrenabende* at which only men were present), and the rise of the female

film star (e.g., Asta Nielsen and Henny Porten). The films she covers range widely, from the early “mixture of striptease and opera” to comedies of male cross-dressing, and from the more highbrow “auteur films” such as Max Mack's *Der Andere* (*The Other*, 1913) to female detective series. Given the presumed lack of direct access that an English-speaking audience may have to the films discussed, Schlüppmann's elaborate plot descriptions, details on the production history and reception, as well as her comprehensive filmography and inclusion of an unusually generous selection of evocative frame enlargements, help to orient the reader.

Until the time of the book's original publication in 1990, German film scholarship had favoured rather exclusively the epoch of cinema between the wars, with little attention to what preceded it. Owing to her assiduous labours in the archives, her bold curatorial efforts (notably, at the *Prima di Caligari* retrospective in Pordenone, Italy), and her work in film restoration, Schlüppmann has managed in large measure to change the field. Among anglophone readers, *The Uncanny Gaze* takes its place on an expanding bookshelf devoted to early cinema by such distinguished film scholars as Tom Gunning, Richard Abel and Miriam Hansen (who provides an insightful foreword to this edition), and is sure to spark continued interest.

NOAH ISENBERG

Literature

Charles Brockden Brown

ORMOND OR THE SECRET WITNESS
Edited by Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro
414pp. Hackett. Paperback, £15.95.
978 1 60384 125 2

Ormond (1799) was the fourth of seven novels produced in a three-year burst of creativity by Charles Brockden Brown

(1771–1810), and the first American novel to be published in Europe, in a German translation of 1802. The book, which took Brown less than six weeks to write, has a tendency to sprawl as its large cast of characters regularly interrupt the main narrative of the trials of Constantia (or Constance) Dudley to tell their own histories. Dudley père (aka Mr Acworth), a New York artist/craftsman, is cheated of his fortune and moves to Philadelphia where Constance earns the family bread and saves them from destitution and the yellow fever of 1793. In Philadelphia, people come and go: capitalists rapacious and kindly, labouring “men of colour”, a laundress, and French-speaking refugees driven out of France and Haiti.

By the time Ormond, man of mystery, appears in Chapter 11, Brown has shown his debts not only to Gothic romance but to the liberal principles of the Enlightenment, English dissent, and the radical-democratic thrust of Revolutionary France. He attacks capitalists, British francophobia, landlords and lawyers. He builds unorthodox views of marriage, suicide, women's rights, cross-dressing and same-sex relationships into a complex social philosophy which draws on Godwin, Wollstonecraft and the “Jacobin” English novel. Cruder than Thomas Holcroft, less playful than Robert Bage, his British contemporaries, Brown commits his fiction to educating opinion as a way of changing society without recourse to violent revolution. Ormond, whose manner is “repulsive and austere”, is both the “secret witness” and manipulator of events. A passionate rationalist, he makes an anguished, paradoxical advocate for the new ideas. He disapproves of marriage but does not defend women or believe in love. He urges plain dealing but operates through an arcane international society which seeks colonial hegemony. He expires in an over-heated Gothic climax which rescues Constance's virtue but leaves much unresolved.

Ormond is a fascinating period piece, as insistently tolerant and progressive as its omniscient editors are at pains to demonstrate. They supply an assortment of “related texts” and well-judged commentaries which help to explain why Brown is sometimes called “the father of American fiction”.

DAVID COWARD

Journalism

THE ECONOMIST STYLE GUIDE
264pp. Profile. £16.99.
978 1 84668 175 2

The Economist Style Guide, now in its tenth edition, gives general advice on writing, points out common mistakes and sets some “arbitrary rules”, which will be good news to those who would not be helped, on looking up the plural of concerto, say, to find “concertos; also concerti” – as they might in another book of this kind. It is based on the guide for editors used in house, and much of it has been compiled by John Grimond, who joined *The Economist* in 1969. In the introduction we are reminded of George Orwell's advice for clarity in writing, and given some further recommendations: catch the attention of the reader, read through your writing several times, do your best to be lucid, and do not be stuffy, hectoring, arro-