

*Art* (1986) showed that Monet composed and painted his pictures very deliberately. And Monet, Renoir, and other impressionists shifted styles far more frequently than has been supposed.

But the essence of the new scholarship is the shift in emphasis by T. J. Clark, Robert L. Herbert, and others "from concern with formal qualities to subject matter and its social context," writes Flam. These scholars have argued that the impressionists were united less by the way they wielded their brushes than by their attitudes towards modern life and their themes—generally, spectacle and urban leisure. Thus, several artists traditionally placed on the periphery of impressionism (Mary Cassatt, Edgar Degas, Edouard Manet, and Berthe Morisot) have been drawn into its center—even though Degas for

one loathed the very word impressionism. "No art was ever less spontaneous than mine," he declared.

In *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* (1984), Richard Schiff showed that the divide between the "mindlessness" of the impressionists and the symbolism of such post-impressionists as Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and Georges Seurat has been overstated. The impressionists were more than naive nature painters. Their notion of the quick and spontaneous rendering, though often honored only in the breach, "was an assertion of individual freedom," notes Flam. Their emphasis on the flux and relativity of experience challenged settled 19th-century notions of hierarchy and order. That is why they were considered shocking in 19th-century Paris and still stir interest among scholars today.

### *Critics at War*

"The Strange Case of Paul de Man" by Denis Donoghue, in *The New York Review of Books* (June 29, 1989), 250 West 57 Street, New York, N.Y. 10107.

In 1987, the literary world was stunned by the revelation that the dean of deconstructionist criticism in America, Yale's Paul de Man (1919–1983), had published anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi articles during the German occupation of his native Belgium in World War II.

As is their wont, de Man's fellow literary critics have reacted by issuing a new round of scholarly polemics and interpretations. These, along with de Man's *oeuvre*, are reviewed by Donoghue, who teaches at New York University.

After the war, de Man embarked on a career of scholarship in Switzerland and the United States, drawing upon the ideas of philosopher Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, the founder of the deconstructionist movement. De Man insisted that every text or symbol is susceptible to a multitude of interpretations, each of them equally valid—or vacuous. The author's intent counted for nothing. His was a particularly ascetic and controversial brand of deconstructionism. It seemed to deny that literature could simply be enjoyed and to assert that only a rigorous form of theoretic

cal *reductio ad absurdum* was possible.

Some of deconstructionism's harshest critics have seized on de Man's pro-Nazi past to try to discredit all of deconstructionism. Other writers have argued that de Man created his theory in an attempt to escape his long-concealed past. By reducing all language and texts to meaninglessness, critics like Tzvetan Todorov have reasoned, de Man was able to explain away, at least to himself, his early writings as insignificant and merely part of the vast morass of deceit and falsehood that is language.

Donoghue, however, views de Man's deconstructionism as a repudiation of the beliefs that "made a mess of his early life in Belgium."

He believes that the young de Man was "radically divided . . . over the relation of thought to action." When the one ideology which seemed to him to embody the unification of thought and deed, German fascism, proved to be an awful delusion, de Man's youthful faith in the unity of meaning and experience was shattered. As a result, Donoghue says, he spent the rest of his life in cynical and self-flagellating dis-

paragement of any "system of relationships" that implied universal truth.

Is deconstructionism discredited? De

Man did not invent it, says Donoghue (who himself is no fan of the movement), and it did not die with him or his reputation.

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## OTHER NATIONS

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### *Save the Wall?*

"If the Wall Came Tumbling Down" by Peter Schneider, in *The New York Times Magazine* (June 25, 1989), 229 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

"Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" President Ronald Reagan exclaimed in 1987 as he stood before the Berlin Wall. He was repeating a demand that virtually every Western leader has made—implicitly, a call for the reunification of the two Germanys—during the 28 years of the wall's existence.

What if Gorbachev did it?

Reagan, his successor, and America's allies in Western Europe would be "terror-stricken," predicts Schneider, a West Berlin novelist. "Who really wants to see the two German states—each the leading economic power in its half of Europe—join forces to become an economic superpower? Who wants to see 80 million Germans gathered under one roof again in the heart of Europe?"

More surprising, Schneider believes that the West Berliners and the West Germans, for whom reunification has been a Holy Grail, would be even more dismayed. As a West German diplomat in East Berlin once told him: "It sometimes seems to me as though the wall is the only thing that still connects the two Germanys."

The relaxation of East-West tensions is already making West Germans rethink their devotion to German reunification. Bonn has long guaranteed the 17 million East Germans and millions of ethnic Germans in Poland, Hungary, Rumania, and the Soviet Union the right to resettle in West Germany. Until recently, it was merely a theoretical promise. But last year 200,000 ethnic Germans showed up on the doorstep of West Germany—one of Europe's most densely populated countries (one burdened, moreover, with an unem-

ployment rate near eight percent). These "foreigners," heavily dependent on government aid, have contributed to the xenophobia that propelled far-Right parties to surprising successes in local elections in Frankfurt and West Berlin last spring.

Schneider likens the two Germanys to twins separated at birth. "Inevitably, our twins, raised so differently, have developed ambivalent feelings toward each other

### *European Salad*

Delirium about a "united Europe" has apparently set in as the 12-nation European Economic Community nears its goal of creating a single market by 1992. In *The American Spectator* (April 1989), Mark Lilla anticipates the challenges of tossing a European salad:

*Just as Europe was never really "Americanized," but simply produced a half dozen home-grown perversions of an imagined American culture, so too it will never be "Europeanized." Young Parisian lawyers can be expected to hunt down jobs in Brussels after '92; Spaniards might start buying more British lamb; and soldiers from Hamburg and Marseilles could even find themselves sitting in the same tank. But the idea of a transnational European culture arising from these exchanges is only put forward seriously by those who have a special interest in believing it, like government arts administrators and Esperantists. If a century of economic integration has not succeeded in making Milanese and Siciliani into Italiani, it is not about to turn Basques and Bavarians into "Europeans."*