

admire the Brechtian stance, I am not advocating a return to the old form of political criticism.” Instead, he wants “day-to-day militancy” in defense of the “rights of the *sans papiers*” (917). Except in their own countries.

If reading is to become factory work, it should not be “a minor aesthetic diversion” but should offer “day-to-day militancy” (917). What happened to the Lecerle of *Philosophy of Nonsense*? People change. I had no right to expect Busby Berkeleysque pillow fights rather than the grim blueprints of Georg Lukács, nor should I have looked forward to forests of gumps busily creating runcible spoons instead of the bold production of political meaning. As impious as a pie in the face, hope springs eternal. In a few sentences, I found a quiet echo of the old Lecerle. He approves, for example, of the way “[p]oetry subverts the norms insofar as they are embedded in language and allows the subject to play with them” (918). But will there still be poetry study as poetry study? Will there still be dance? Will new choreographers respond to internal inspiration, or will they merely respond to directives laid down by the state? Instead of Busby Berkeley, I got a picture of the dreary West Coast city, with its Maoist zombies passing out the Little Red Book. I understood that critics were to become cagey bees, industriously forcing meaning out of texts, making the texts blab enlightened sentences about progress.

I didn’t like seeing Lecerle subjugate the arts to political metanarratives, and I didn’t understand his total silence on humor. In *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Mary Ann Glendon explains that “the National Socialist regime’s efforts to turn Germany’s renowned education system into a mechanism for indoctrinating the young with the government’s program” was part of what drove the framers of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 to make a few remarks on aesthetics, including “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts . . .” (159, 313). This remark implies that students should be introduced to the arts (worldwide), so that they too can spin their own narratives, interrupt others, and enjoy such things as freedom of the mind. I hoped that Lecerle would provide a rationale for this freedom and for humor too (joking as a universal human right). But since 1994 Lecerle’s critical priorities have changed. Instead of rusing against rules, we are to lay them down for new generations, who will be forced into the procrustean bed of progressive politics. There was always an uneasy tension between Marxism and nonsense in Lecerle’s work. This seems to have been resolved in favor of Marxism. What a shame it did not go the other way.

*Kirby Olson*

State University of New York, Delhi