
that one is not important, except insofar as one's example can serve to elucidate a more widespread human trait and make readers feel a little less lonely and freakish."

CAMP GROUNDS: Style and Homosexuality. Ed. by David Bergman. Univ. of Mass. 312 pp. \$45

"To talk about camp is to betray it," wrote Susan Sontag in 1964. Sontag then proceeded to betray it at length, defining camp as "a certain sort of aestheticism" that elevates objects "not in terms of Beauty, but in terms of degree of artifice, of stylization." Camp offers a chance to be serious about the frivolous (e.g., Tiffany lamps) and frivolous about the serious ("Swan Lake"). Even though "homosexuals . . . constitute the vanguard—and the most articulate audience—of Camp," Sontag wrote, "Camp taste is much more than homosexual taste." As a purely aesthetic phenomenon, camp remains "disengaged, depoliticized, or at least, apolitical."

For nearly 30 years, academics considered Sontag's "Notes on Camp" the last word on the subject. But in today's world of cultural studies, gay studies, and women's studies, new interpretations of camp are emerging. Bergman, a professor of English at Towson State University, and most of the essayists he includes in *Camp Grounds*, believe Sontag failed to fully grasp the essential connection between camp and "homosexual culture." Far more than simply a type of aestheticism, camp has a subversive, or even emancipatory, potential: It represents a form of protest against conventional gender roles. Camp works by "drawing attention to the artifice of the gender system through exaggeration, parody, and juxtaposition," writes Bergman.

While the most obvious example of the politically subversive potential of camp remains the drag queen and his/her exaggerated feminine mannerisms, the essays here bring up far more ambiguous instances. Jack Babuscio invokes camp to explain why many gay moviegoers identify not with char-

acters *in* a movie but with the personal lives of the stars themselves: Gays and those who "camp" understand how nebulous are the apparently sharp boundaries between play-acting and "acting normal." Pamela Robertson, writing about Mae West, argues that "camp enabled [her fans] to view women's everyday roles as female impersonation."

Camp Grounds is a valuable corrective to the blinkered aestheticism that Sontag's essay encouraged. Not only has camp been a useful political tool for homosexuals, but, as Bergman notes, our culture's "natural" and normative heterosexuality has always been one of camp's central targets. Unfortunately, Bergman and many of his contributing essayists often press their claims too far, ascribing to camp a political simplemindedness that looks suspiciously like the moral (or moralistic) platform of a trendy academic of the '90s. Camp can make a political statement, but it is not merely a political statement. If camp serves as a reminder to the complacent that all chosen roles are, to some degree, theatrical, the lesson should apply as much to the role of serious academic as to any other.

THE OLD MODERNS: Essays on Literature and Theory. By Denis Donoghue. Knopf. 303 pp. \$27.50

To many contemporary literary critics, the modernist tradition, with its emphasis on subjectivity and the internalization of images and events, is not only elitist and reactionary but dead, replaced by the more open, accessible, and democratic playfulness of postmodernism. Donoghue, who teaches English and American literature at New York University, begs to differ. The "interiority" of modernist writers, he argues, is an authentic and enduring realm of imaginative freedom: "Thinking, feeling, reverie: the pleasures of these are self-evident, they don't have to be judged upon their results or upon their consequence as action in the world."

In *The Old Moderns*, which contains 17 elegant essays, some previously published, Donoghue defends literary subjectivity on another front as well. Today's critics impose upon literature their own political or philosophical beliefs, often purposefully stifling the voice of the author. In fact, literary theory has hardened into such dogma that there's not much one can do with it except force

