

thesis advanced by Krausz. Narratives do not favor either singularism or multiplism and can ultimately reckon with both. But second, and more important, the narrative framework allows a blending, and when necessary even reconciliation, of the present and the past, of the scrutinizing and the scrutinized self, thus creating a more compelling (because more comprehensive) conception of self-identity. One can infer from Krausz's examples that such a conception of identity allows for moral responsibility while also allowing for the agency of the individuals in question, giving them the ability to be actively involved in the construction of their selfhood.

Yet there are also some serious difficulties that the narrativist view of self-identity poses. For instance, when a person posits a prior narrative self from the vantage of the present, we are dealing with a circular interpretation: The self who interprets himself in the past and the self who is interpreted are intended as one and the same entity. Since there is, as Krausz maintains, no self in the past prior to the interpretation, the interpretation institutes the past self in much the same way in which declarative utterances institute a state of affairs. To say, "I declare war on France" leads to the creation of a state of war with France. Prior to the speech act, there is no war. By this logic, however, if the interpretation creates the self, a different interpretation would also institute a different self. What is, then, the connection between the two selves—the positing and the posited ones? Krausz's answer to this query takes advantage of the detachability of a singularist or multiplist interpretation from a particular ontological position. Take, for instance, constructivism: A singularist-constructivist view of self-identity would not entertain the notion of a preexisting self—an "essence" or a "daimon," as other philosophers would prefer to call it—awaiting to be discovered, even though it would insist on a particular posited self as accurately represented from the perspective of the self conducting the process of inquiry. A multiplist-constructivist would be laxer in criteria of admissibility and accept instead several possible selves to be reconstructed. The independence of interpretive ideals from a particular ontology does not, however, resolve other difficult issues. Specifically, the main disadvantage of the singularist-constructivist approach is that it limits severely the space for ethical self-reflection. A self understood in terms of a singularist conception of interpretation would be blind to options, immune to responsibility, and impervious to change. Conversely, a self understood in terms of a multiplist-constructivist conception is similarly impaired from a moral and ethical perspective: Such a self cannot help but have a hard time making decisions, choosing among several possibilities, actualizing potentialities, and so on. In

either case, self-transformation, which is fundamentally an ethical and moral project, becomes a difficult proposition. Is the solution, then, a return to a realist ontology?

Krausz's response to this dilemma is a particularly compelling and ingenuous one, as it rests not on direct reckoning with the difficulty involved, but on an oblique, yet more effective, reflection on it via the discussion of the Vedantic view of the Supreme Self. This Vedantic soteriology recognizes no duality subject-object, or self-other, and demands that self-realization be based on overcoming individuality in the name of a Supreme Self (p. 105). The Supreme Self has no identity conditions—it cannot be described or circumscribed. In Krausz's terms, the Supreme Self is uninterpretable (p. 110). The Vedantic soteriology, then, is a litmus test for the link between interpretation and self-identity, insofar as it reveals the limits of the former. The book, in fact, ends with this observation, and the terseness of the last sentence in this volume—"Such is one limit of interpretation" (p. 121)—should not deceive the reader into assuming that the claim is unimportant. Krausz has long been concerned with the limits of interpretive activity, but this particular limit (for the interpretation of self-identity) has major consequences for how we, along with the author, come to view selfhood: as a constant negotiation of narrative versions, indeed as a perpetual narrative transaction between the individual constructing his or her identity, historical and socio-cultural circumstances, and a relevant community. Depending on how these variables come together in particular cases, singularist or multiplist approaches will be not just more or less adequate, but simply more compelling, or even acceptable. Krausz's book, with its thorough and detailed investigation of the process of interpretation, leads us to this important conclusion while also offering along the way several other enlightening discussions of how interpretation reaches its limits in other domains, from art to law and politics. This is a serious and fascinating book, and its readership will extend not just across disciplines, but also beyond them to anyone interested in how we make sense of complex and intriguing phenomena.

ANDREEA DECIU RITTOI
English Department
Carnegie Mellon University

DOUGLAS, MARY. *Thinking in Circles: An Essay in Ring Composition*. Yale University Press, 2007. xv + 169 pp., 15 b&w illus., \$28.00 cloth.

In this careful and insightful study, the late Mary Douglas considers the formal literary patterning

known variously as ring composition, *chiasmus*, or palindromic structure—in which the first part is a mirrored complement to the second part and moves from the outer ends toward the center. Informed by both Scriptural and classical tradition, and building upon the contributions of Robert Lowth (1753), W. A. van Otterlo (1948), and J. W. Welsh and D. B. McKinlay (1999), she has developed seven conventions by which the structure can be identified. She applies these to five well-known texts: the story of Abraham and Isaac and the Book of Numbers from the Old Testament, the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* from classical literature, and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Her work is a major contribution to the study of the structure, which has needed clearly stated, objective standards.

The book begins with a survey of archaic literary forms that set events or groups of words in parallel. These include the ring composition of the Gathas of Zoroaster of the thirteenth to the tenth century, ancient Chinese tropes, and Old Testament parallelisms. Discussion about the exegetical function of ring composition, which both controls and expands meaning by tying it to the construct, and about what is necessary for a text to qualify as a ring composition culminates in a provisional setting forth of four criteria: the text must be divided in halves, with a clear mid-turn that links the middle to the beginning and end, and have smaller rings within the larger ones. Eventually, Douglas settles upon seven conventions, which she takes from the large ring form style evident in the literature of the eastern Mediterranean of the eighth to the fourth centuries. She lists them as (1) the exposition, (2) the split into halves, (3) the central place that connects beginning and end, (4) the parallel series, (5) the ending, (6) the latch, and (7) the smaller rings within larger ones. In chapters 4, 5, 10, and 11, she develops the parallel series, central place, ending, and latch criteria, respectively. The central place is especially important, as ring composition condenses its message at the mid-turn. The reader who misses the ring also misses the deeper meaning of the whole work. In fact, it can be argued that the central place inspires the whole work.

To demonstrate how the structure is crafted, Douglas gives examples, drawing each inward to its center. Because it is small, the Genesis 22 story of Abraham and Isaac is particularly helpful. The parallels are easy to see, and lead to Abraham's "Here I am" at the center. Douglas explains how an understanding of the parallels changes the reader's perception of the event, because loving fathers and sons frame the story. Reading the parallel changes the mood from anguish and suspense: Abraham is no longer in agony, God is not seen as unkind, and Isaac is not afraid. For her second offering, Douglas details the composition of the Book of Numbers, which em-

ploys alternation to accomplish the fourth convention. Repeated movement between the laws and the narratives serves to divide the book into identifiable sections where the parallels occur. The central place in chapters 16 and 17 holds three groups—the congregation of Israel, the Levites, and the tribes—the same that were present in the exposition. Douglas argues that the mid-turn of this work is interested in protecting the status of the Aaronite priests. In her Old Testament exploration, she is following the track of several researchers who have discovered that the sacred authors centered their important words. She points to the early Jewish scholars who knew ring composition, and cites writing in parallelisms as part of the Semitic tradition. It was also a classical tradition.

The *Iliad's* chiasm, like that of the Book of Numbers, implicates alternation, which Cedric Whitman noticed in his groundbreaking study, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Harvard University Press, 1958). The days and nights are clearly marked units of structure that contain smaller rings within the larger ones. Douglas inspects Whitman's construct and concurs with his conclusion that the work is a ring composition. Here I would like to add something to her fine study, because she stops after identifying the fourth night as the center, without bringing the work to its epicenter. Framed by the night embassy to Achilles and the nighttime Doloneia, Book Ten scopes further inward: The parallels include sleep (lines 1–4) and not letting sleep seize any man (192–193), Agamemnon's sending Menelaus to wake up Arias and Idomeneus (53–54) and Nestor's sending Diomedes to wake up Arias and Phyleus (175–176), Nestor's question about night prowling (82–85) and Odysseus's question about night prowling (141–142), Agamemnon's first concern about the sentinels (99) and his desire to go to the sentinels (127), Agamemnon's assumption that the sentinels have gone to sleep (98–99) and Nestor's assumption that Menelaus is asleep (114–118), and finally Nestor's naming Agamemnon by his patronym (103) and his naming Diomedes and Megeles by their patronyms (109–110). This places lines 104–108 as the mid-turn of the *Iliad*, where Nestor addresses Agamemnon as *anax andron*, "lord of men," as he was named at the opening: "Surely not all his purposes will Zeus the counselor fulfill for Hector, all that I imagine now he hopes; but I think he will labor among troubles more numerous even than ours, if Achilles turns his heart from grievous anger" (trans. A. T. Murray, Rev. William F. Wyatt [Harvard University Press, 1999], p. 457). The passage foretells the end of the story and touches back to the beginning by recalling Achilles's anger, perhaps permitting an authorial voice to emerge through Nestor's "I imagine." It signals a mood change from down to up for the Achaeans at the mid-turn word 'turns,'

and references sleep close by, which connects to sleep at the beginning and end of this palindrome of night.

A particularly beneficial insight seems to be Douglas's use of Nelson Goodman's distinction between analog and digital systems in *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Hackett, 1976). She stresses the primacy of the analog—or whole idea or line of thought—over the digital—discrete letters finely differentiated. This insistence may be the result of her concentration on the exclusively analog ring form of the eastern Mediterranean. As the construct progressed through time, however, it became more reductive, which is evident in later classical and medieval writings. The *Aeneid*, for example, which duplicates the *Iliad*'s reliance on alternation to define parallel units, changes to digital at its epicenter between books six and seven, as described earlier. Not surprisingly the key word that distinguishes this change is *somni*, “of sleep.” In the Middle Ages, perhaps influenced by the popularity of the *Aeneid*, this type of reduction became known as “the minor arts.”

Douglas has arranged her book in a ring, which she diagrams. A chapter ten T. S. Eliot excerpt centering the letter *b* is matched by Isaac's chapter two Old Testament question, “Where is the lamb?” This is accompanied by the hints that “the parallel points across the diagram” and is “validated. As the bard,” which might be recast as the word *is* validated (see ‘be’) as the *b* and *ard* (perhaps a pun for ‘art’) immediately following it (p. 25). This artful wordplay is validating not only the letter *b* in the center of a palindrome across the book, but its analog, not the Old Testament lamb, but Christ, the New Testament Lamb. In the center of the book, which is chapter 6, words from Eliot's poem reappear sprinkled within the text: *the end* and *the beginning*, *right* and *left*, and others, along with hints to the poem's palindrome, to its author, to the letter *b*, or the Lamb, with the name *Christie*.

In tackling the question of why the ring structure has appeared in different ages and cultures, Douglas cites two theories: the philologist Roman Jakobson's idea that “a faculty for creating or recognizing these correspondences lies inherent in the relationship among language, grammar, and the brain” (p. 72) and a general notion that having been invented, it was found to be so useful and satisfying that it spread. She agrees with Jakobson that writing in parallels is a natural phenomenon, but sees ring composition simply as a desire to return the text to its beginning, and not necessarily, as has also been proposed, implicated in the mystery of creation itself.

To Douglas, ring composition is a demanding construction that generates a high style of writing. She observes that complex conventions “fulfill a role in validating a message,” noting “religious doctrine

tends to be under challenge^d,” and skeptics to “be alert to contest it,” again perhaps a pun on the *b* as art. “No wonder,” she says, “that religious themes should inspire very elegant writing and, in their high periods, unsurpassed literary and artistic technique” (p. 27).

If, as Douglas believes, “the well-crafted composition is its own authentication” (p. 27), she has achieved the very end that she has been describing. The ring of her book is a tribute to Eliot and an important contribution to the study of compositional form. In setting forth the rules of this elusive patterning, she has made a brilliant discovery—not of the structure itself, but of its mechanics.

SISTER LUCIA TREANOR, F. S. E.
Department of English
Grand Valley State University

NUTTALL, SARAH, ed. *Beautiful/Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics*. Duke University Press, 2007. 416 pp., 112 color + 14 b&w illus., \$27.95 paper.

Western intellectuals have failed—until recently—to find a beauty concept in the cultures of Africa's indigenous peoples. For example, David Hume in his essay “Of National Characters” (1748) said that “Negroes” were “naturally inferior to Whites” and possessed “no arts,” hence no beauty. Echoing this point (racist, to be sure), Immanuel Kant said in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1763) that “the Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling,” and, as such, they are incapable of experiencing beauty. Even mid-twentieth-century cultural anthropologists like E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Clyde Kluckhohn, and B. Malinowski could not find a significant beauty concept in the ethnic groups they studied (such as the Azande and the Nuer for Evans-Pritchard). Eurocentrism blinded these intellectuals: in the case of Hume and Kant a view of beauty (as pleasure) assumed to be universal, and in the instance of the anthropologists a European interpretative framework imposed on African cultures.

Transcultural aestheticians as different as Wilfried van Damme from the Netherlands and Orlando Hernández from Cuba are teaching us that no single culture, no matter how popular it may be, owns the intellectual rights to the concept of beauty. On the contrary, they argue that beauty arises in the conceptual lives of human beings on the springs of culture. African American scholar Kariamú Welsh-Asante had the right idea about beauty when in 1993 she commented on the works of her husband, Molefi Asante: “All definitions of aesthetics [and beauty] are autobiographical” (*The African Aesthetic: Keeper of the Traditions* [Greenwood, 1993],