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The Gray Book (review)

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Aris Fioretos, *The Gray Book*

(Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 152 pp.

The absence-of-color gray and the semiotics of the absence-of-quantity zero are the lead actors in Fioretos's play with words and moods. His text is situated in a region beyond criticism and this side of literature, neither fiction nor fact, but not as not one and not the other—more like a ghost story in which there are neither ghosts nor terrified, a tragedy of tears without sorrow: things forgotten but still felt in a memory that cannot recollect. It is a rare form of writing inspired by passages that Fioretos quotes and folds into his text like veins in marble: Homer and Beckett, Bataille and Edgar Poe, Jane Austen and Kafka, and a Miguel de Unamuno I've never heard of—"a book densely, downy in duplicity," says Fioretos, "thus unclouding and expelling; the double-dealing demonry of / gray / that matches semblances and parity with disparity . . . explaining that you don't get anywhere by calling things names." There remains for us, the readers, to follow behind, apprehensive like blind men tapping their world into existence. This is not a book of narratives. It leads nowhere and offers no information. Rather than reading it, one feels it, thinks it, while struggling to remember where in the flow of gray text one can find oneself as other than a mirror image clouded by the familiarity of unrecognized thoughts.

—*Wayne Andersen*

Victoria E. Bonnel and Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn*

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 350 pp.

This is an uneven, but in places suggestive, collection of papers on the present status of the concept of culture and cultural analysis in the historical sciences. There is an overall anxiety, a bit excessive, about intellectual "fashion," and being left behind by it—missing a "turn." Nevertheless, the pieces by Richard Biernacki on "method and metaphor," by Margaret Jacob (despite a certain sourness