boundaries

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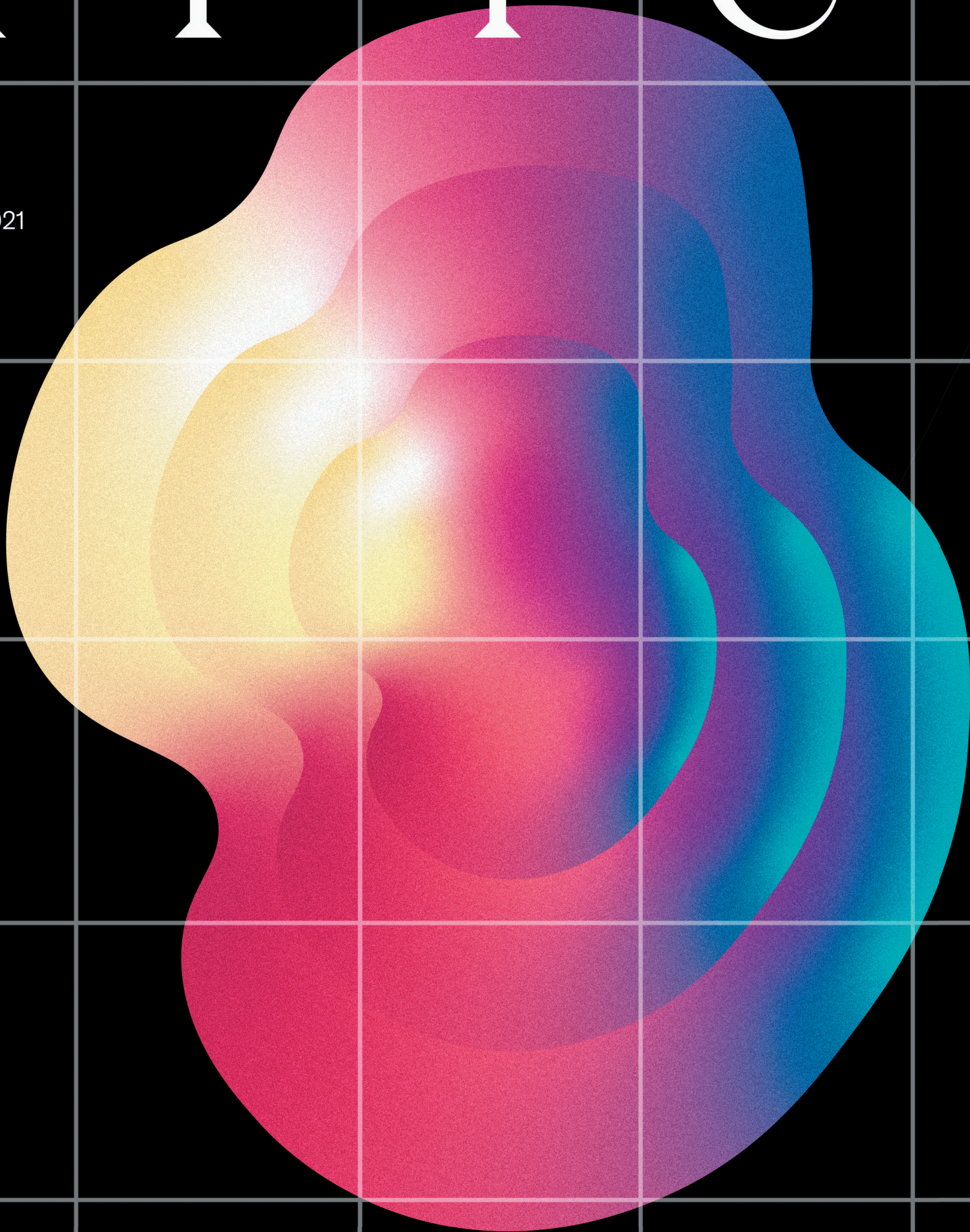

THE KELVINGROVE REVIEW

The Kelvingrove Review 18
Boundaries

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‘What is it that separates the atmosphere from the water? Is it air or is it water?’

- Leonardo Da Vinci

Artist Statement

by Lucille Mona Ling

Lucille Mona Ling, born and raised in Berlin, is currently studying a joint honours degree in Philosophy and History of Art at the University of Glasgow. Philosophical thinking deeply influences her visual and written work.

Where does one body end and the other begin? The cover for 'Boundaries' attempts to merge the myriad meanings of the word by balancing the precarious dialectic relationship between physical/mental;natural/artificial and external/internal boundaries.The organic, colourful shape at its centre represents natural forms containing shapes within itself, compartmentalised like organs in our bodies.

Additionally, the colours blend into one another, blurring the lines between where one colour ceases to be itself and becomes the other. Just like the boundary between water and atmosphere the relationship between the colours becomes ambiguous. Their particles diffuse into one another like through a membrane. Boundaries not only separate, but they also unite, by creating a liminal space, where two colliding entities conclude in being themselves and enter a shared, enigmatic, and vague territory.

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letter from the editors

'[L]et's dig into the fresh energy of new boundaries'.

- Erik Pevernagie

The eighteenth issue of *The Kelvingrove Review* was compiled under unusual circumstances. For some time now due to COVID-19, people around the world have been adjusting to their new reality, overwhelmed by limitations, insecurity and doubt. Our issue was composed in the midst of this. Whilst the journal is based in the University of Glasgow, for the most part of the year, we were not. Respective members of the editorial board tuned in to Zoom calls from various locations across Britain and Europe, across different time zones; we had never met before we embarked upon the issue, and we have never physically been in a room together. The rules were different, therefore we wanted to publish a different issue, appropriate for these remarkable times.

One fact was evident during this pandemic, the resilience of the individual. Despite isolation and restriction, people continued to be creative and productive, they adapted and looked for new ways to be as innovative and prolific as before. Our theme for this year's edition, 'Boundaries', reflects this duality of the situation. Boundaries convey this notion of restriction as they define limits and conventions, however, they can also inspire rebellion and liberation. Thus, this year, we wanted to break boundaries and present a new, fresh, and revolutionary edition of *The Kelvingrove Review*, an issue that marks the revival of the journal as it has been out of circulation since 2018. The aim was to delimit, to liberate, to set the precedent for a freer idea of what a 'review journal' might look like.

Thankfully, the nature of an online publication is flexible and can morph itself to the most unprecedented of situations. This year's *Kelvingrove Review* is longer than past issues, comprised of fourteen reviews in total. We included reviews of film and fiction, as well as the traditionally reviewed academic texts. We incorporated a diary piece which creatively explored the idea of 'Boundaries' in a context more personal to the author. We have featured a creative response and worked closely with our illustrations and graphics designer to create a coherent, finished item which aesthetically reflects the richness of the writing. Reading and interpretation, family and human nature, censorship and political repression, reality and illusion, and religion and the cosmos are only some of the topics covered in this year's journal.

We have a few people to thank. Acknowledgements must be paid to Victoria Miguel and Elena

Dardano, who helped massively in the initial conceptualisation and editing stages of the journal, and without whom the resulting issue would look very different. We are very grateful to Lucille Ling, for her hard work in bringing the issue together beautifully, something we can really be proud of sending out into the world. Thanks are also due to the publishers and film production studios who kindly sent us the titles for review, and to the College of Arts Graduate School, who have provided wonderful assistance throughout. Last but not least, we would like to thank our contributors, for their commitment and creativity, and for making the editorial process a smooth one.

The issue has been a pleasure to compile, and we hope it will be a pleasure to read.

The Editors, 2020/21

Kristina Astrom,

Christina Konstantinou,

Fiona Paterson,

& Liudmila Tomanek.

02

non-fiction

On Essays - Montaigne to the Present

Edited by Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy

Calum Weir and Diarmid Sullivan

On Essays – Montaigne to the Present is a volume of seventeen essays and the detail in which its subject matter is explored far exceeds our ability to account for it in a comparatively short review; having little alternative, it makes sense to respond to this volume, as its editors suggest, in an apparently desultory manner and follow only whatever diaphanous webbing happens to form.

DS: Loosely speaking, I would say that this volume is best construed as offering a co-ordinated reaction to the institutionalisation of the essay. Most of our readers will have experience with a certain, narrow definition of the essay that is commonplace in universities—a genre of the essay that has evolved in concert with the institutional pressures of rubrics and formal guidelines, which is to say nothing of the extraneous political trends and pressures that exert themselves in universities. But, as Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy remark, this institutionalisation of the essay—the increased tendency to regard the form as the sole preserve of universities—has crabbed its ability to articulate itself to public discourse and runs the risk of hiving off serious thought and intellectual discussion inside the walls of the institution. The editors make clear a peculiar irony entailed by the institutionalisation of the essay (a historically provisional and haphazard form) in the twentieth century:

> *One of the oddities of the essay is that it begins as a literary genre of tentativeness and resistance to institutionalized knowledge, but is now most commonly written as the standard mode of instruction and assessment and usual genre of school and undergraduate writing, especially in the humanities. (29).*

This irony is leveraged throughout the volume by its contributors; it works to corrode a rigid, institutional definition of the essay, revising this in favour of 'a form which allows for both detachment and political force; for serious attention to ephemeral details of life and culture; and for the improvisational hazarding of judgements, arguments, and ideas' (29). While most essays in this volume are, set in these terms, relatively orthodox works of historicist criticism, the venturesome range of topics and the subtle, imaginative lines of thought taken ought to effectively quell any such gripe on this count.

It is interesting how, almost without exception, the essays in this volume subscribe to the essay as a form of experiential writing, as an autobiographical exercise as much as a discursive one. This is a dominant current of many pieces in this volume. In each case, adopting this simple stance enables an often fruitful corrosion of the genre of the essay into other forms that might be bracketed as 'life-writing'— abrogating the partitions, for instance, between the essay and letters, diaries, memoirs, or autobiographical fiction. For me, what this volume does particularly well, even if it is *sotto voce*, is to resuscitate the importance of experience and proposition in the composition of essays as a rebuke to the institutional culture of objectivity and certainty to which we are long-accustomed. I recognise in my own writing, as I am sure yourself or some of our readers will, a certain bashfulness, or indiscretion, associated with including material drawn from experience or subjective matter; sometimes you find yourself adopting bizarre verbal constructions as a means of navigating this unease. An inevitable consequence of institutionalising the essay has been that it teaches us to associate our own subjectivity, ultimately, with a culture of fear. Anne Carson writes peerlessly about an unease with her own selfhood intruding upon her writing, an unease internalised from her academic background. In *Economy of the Unlost* (1999), Carson describes academic writing as consisting of a fretful process of dashing back and forth between the 'windowless monad' of subjectivity and the 'landscape of science and fact' (Carson 1999: vii). There is much in these essays, with the stress on proposition, liminality, and experience as primary events in the essay, that remind me of Carson's account of academic composition:

> *And yet, you know as well as I, thought finds itself in this room in its best moments—locked inside its own pressures, fishing up facts of the landscape from notes or memory as well as it may—vibrating (as Mallarmé would say) with their disappearance (ibid: vii).*

If I were to venture to frame this collection for readers, and what they stand to gain, it would be in Carson's terms: that too often we have pushed ourselves—or been pushed out—into that darkening landscape of facticity and objective scrutiny and from which, in time, through habit or custom, we have forgotten to return. I was wondering if you had similar experiences of these essays, and if you wanted to elaborate on any of this?

CW: I agree, and I love the image of the essay genre as a landscape, either wild or tamed, which

chimes with my experience of the volume. It is surprising how little time or space is dedicated to conceptualising the essay in schools, colleges, and universities. But that is not to say that the essay is completely reified or politically inert. Adorno writes powerfully about the essay form as a form of resistance and a form of freedom. In 'The Essay as Form' he describes the German 'Versuch' (to attempt or essay) as combining the sense of hitting the bullseye, with the knowledge that the attempt is only ever provisional and fragmentary. The essay 'starts not with Adam and Eve but with what it wants to talk about' (Adorno 1991: 4). In other words, essays do not have a pre-determined origin or fixed endpoint; they unfold according to a logic that is determined by the particularity of the concepts and material they approach. There is an ethics of non-violence and intellectual openness in Adorno's subject-object dialectic, as well as a theory about the essay's radical ability to disrupt categories, classifications, and established boundaries.

Adorno's valorisation of essay form is an intriguing point of reference for Karshan and Murphy's *On Essays*, a collection of essays that embrace Adorno's conception of the essay's errancy and openness. Unlike Adorno's essay, Karshan and Murphy's volume does, however, have a fixed point of origin: Montaigne. It is fitting, therefore, that Karshan opens the volume with an essay entitled 'What is an Essay? Thirteen Answers from Virginia Woolf'. Here, Karshan sets in motion the two organising principles of the volume. One is chronological (from Montaigne to the present). The other appeals to the wide range of metaphors essayists have used to describe their compositions; the essay can be an attempt or a trial (from the French essai), an experiment, a valuation, a weighing-up, a ramble, a taste, and so on. Each chapter pursues one or more of the essay's metaphors or threads of images.

Karshan traces and illustrates thirteen of these at work in Woolf's brilliant essay 'Street Haunting', a story in which Woolf ventures 'among the quotations that bear the wisdom of the past' (Karshan 2020: 34) as much as through the wintry London streets; the flâneuse's essaying becomes an encapsulation of the genre's (and Woolf's reading of the genre's) miscellaneous themes, traditions, and motifs. Woolf's three pilgrimages to Montaigne's tower, in 1931, 1937, and 1938, provide a strong illustrative example of Woolf's 'lifelong reverence' (37) for Montaigne, which forms the framework for Karshan's elegant reading of Woolf's materiality of writing (the talismanic importance of the pencil, the study, the bookshop, etc. to essay-writing). On the surface, Woolf's essay is about formal beauty and the eye; the 'central oyster of perceptiveness' (Woolf 2009: 178). These surface illusions are quickly broken as Woolf, or her persona, ventures out the door and is forced to confront 'her own middle-class complacency' (49). The compressed history of essayistic free association here, which Karshan traces to explore the ethics and politics surrounding Woolf's rapid sequence of encounters in 'Street Haunting', includes Joseph Addison, Thomas De Quincey, William Hazlitt's 'The Indian Jugglers', Aldous Huxley, and Sigmund Freud. If this is not dazzling enough, it is followed by Warren Boutcher's chapter, which is a broad,

panoramic history of the miscellaneous and encyclopaedic forms in essay writing. A very impressive range, but I'm still none the wiser as to the question, what is an essay?

DS: Absolutely, I feel as though the thoroughgoing accounts of the multivalency of the essay— practically every essay includes some etymological retracing of the term — have the odd, countervailing effect of militating against a definition of what constitutes an essay. Readers hoping for some stable definition of the essay may quickly learn that this volume's interest is not in narrowing terms but in pluralising them. And yet, although the concerns of this volume are profoundly literary and deal primarily with the essay as it existed in remote historical periods, there is a sense that the historical definitions offered cut across the rigidly maintained boundaries of historical periods and somehow articulate themselves to our own contemporary writing practices. It is interesting you mention Hazlitt's superb 'The Indian Jugglers'; in a volume replete with definitions and redefinitions of the essay, I incline most towards the one given in Gregory Dart's essay, in a section discussing Hazlitt's 'The Letter-Bell' alongside Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight':

> *More than any other literary form (with the possible exception of the blank verse conversation poem) what [the Romantic essay] aspires to is not so much thought's distillate but its process of fermentation—the manner in which ideas resonate and communicate with one another. (181).*

What a beautiful way to articulate the indeterminacy of the Romantic essay, and by extension the essay genre: the essay as fermentation. Dart's figure of the process of fermentation for writing is suggestive of Geoffrey Hill's line: 'How studiously one cultivates the sugars of decay' (Hill 2013: 144). Rather than offer the reader only what has been eventually distilled out of its material, the Romantic essayist includes this sundry material and ferments these ideas together, illustrating a gradual and sometimes volatile development. According to Dart, cross-pollination with the Romantic lyric, and the lyric's concern with everyday expression, grants Romantic essayists, like Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, or Thomas De Quincey, a certain flexibility as regards meaning, which remains propositional rather than aggregational in Romantic writing. Like the Romantic lyric, the movement most characteristic of the Romantic essay, according to Dart, is to begin with particulars, with the stuff of the everyday experience, and move towards more abstract thought by a knotty process of indirection and irruption. The process, again like the Romantic lyric, is as open to failure as it is to success. In the moments where this contingent process succeeds the reader experiences the marvellous decomposition of the essay's initial everyday components into the sugars of abstract thought and revelation. The Romantic essay, as it ferments ideas together, is 'a lyrical medium, but one that is continually being interrupted by the most prosaic, and pragmatic, of concerns.' (180). Ultimately, this figures the composition of the essay as a discursive and curious search through disparate, heteroclite materials for

patterns and correspondences that were otherwise hidden. I found this account of the process of essay writing especially compelling. But how about yourself?

CW: Yes, the processes of decomposition and fermentation are intriguing metaphors here. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that in alchemy fermentation describes a supposed internal change in the composition of metals, which was how Chaucer used it. In 'Of Sticks and Stones: Essay, Experience, and Experiment' Kathryn Murphy traces the emergence of the association of the essay with the scientific experiment in the seventeenth century. That Murphy is one of the best writers of academic essays in English studies today alone makes this chapter worth reading.

She opens with a series of sketches: Boswell's famous account of Samuel Johnson kicking a stone in refutation of Bishop Berkeley's idealism, Zeno's beating of a servant for committing theft (the servant claims he was compelled by fate, to which Zeno responds so is he), Diogenes's response to Zeno's claim that there is no motion (he stood up and began walking). These sketches, that counter philosophical abstraction with bodily experience (79), culminate in a reading of Montaigne's kidney stones in 'Of Experience'. Montaigne's stones here are apposite to Hill's 'sugars of decay'; writing is figured in terms of gestation but also paradox: the non-verbal argument becomes a prompt for verbal elaboration, and individual, idiosyncratic experience (Montaigne's body makes and accretes the kidney stones) becomes a 'question of transmission of thoughts and inclinations' (he inherited the stones from his father), (85).

The identification of 'essay' and 'experience' with the 'experiment' and 'experimental' has an amazingly complex history. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer accuse Francis Bacon (the first person in England to publish works entitled 'essays') of instrumentalising knowledge to dominate nature and of neutralising the experimental, which is open-ended, with the strict controls of the experiment (Goehr 2008:108–135). Murphy's reading of Bacon, the 'figurehead of the emergence of experimental philosophy' (88), is at least partially a rebuke to Adorno: Bacon's essays retain the Montaignian 'experiential observation, the garnerings of the particular lived life', but it is 'experience schooled and cooled into the impersonal' (89). In a beautiful series of manoeuvres, Murphy reads Bacon and Robert Boyle's essays for their Adornian essayistic qualities; the way they draw attention to their own mediations and formally experiment with the reading experience. It is a lovely point that runs through 'Of Stick and Stones' which describes how, when reading essays, we do not experience another's pain, but we do experience reading about it. And that is what an essay is: an experience. A lovely point, which is also embedded in a chapter that acts as a seriously strong exploration of the essay genre's association with science and scientific methods. Following Murphy's chapter, in 'Time and the Essay' Markman Ellis describes his own experiment in which he read one issue of *The Spectator* each day for one year

and nine months. The result is a fascinating account of both the materiality of print culture in the early eighteenth century (most of the paper used for *The Spectator* was recycled and the daily production required they use two printing houses) as well as Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's 'intellectual project' (100) which envisioned *The Spectator* as 'ushering philosophy from the closed scholarly world of closets and libraries, schools and colleges into a new life dwelling in clubs and assemblies, at tea-table and coffee-houses' (103). For Ellis, the paper's unpredictable 'parade of topics' (105), which form a wonderfully Joycean list, stress the essay's playful, provisional miscellaneity. But he also detects 'circadian and infradian rhythms' (106) in which Saturday's papers take on a more serious topic before the Sunday break and congruences emerge between the essays and the seasons. For readers interested in essays, print culture, and the materiality of text, I would highly recommend Ellis's approach to daily time through the 'Penny Papers'. And this insistence, on the tension in the literary essay between the academic and the everyday, the reclusive and the social, the disposability of the present and the recovery of the past, lends to the volume much of its fascination. Would you agree?

DS: I would say this is undoubtedly the case; several times I found that the authors of these pieces were lending definition to ideas that I had only half-intuited, if at all. György Lukács—whose opinions, alongside Adorno's, recur throughout these essays—suggested that the essay was above all a Socratic form, based on dialogue with another. Appropriately enough, our own response to these essays takes the form of a dialogic essay, a conversation between friends. Entering a conversation with another through essay, especially a writer with whom we may have no connection and may no longer be living, is not only to strike up a dialogue, but a kind of filiation. I suppose I am thinking here of the remarks to this effect in Jacques Derrida's *The Work of Mourning* (2001), where Derrida's writing is innately conscious of a conversation underway between oneself and the other in oneself, retained even after they have passed away, and of the desire to let that other speak in their own words; there is a manner in which the essay form, an ongoing conversation, is also a vessel for other voices, to allow others to speak in their own voice and to add your own to theirs.

Derrida's writing in the immediate wake of the loss of a friend, which combines essayistic composition with oracular, eulogistic qualities, resembles what Tom F. Wright's piece in this collection calls, in a beautiful coinage, 'the voiced essay'—regrettably, post-structuralist essays are not much considered in this volume. Wright's piece argues that there emerged in the nineteenth century a form of essay that sought to combine written and oracular forms of address: 'a form explained not only by its didacticism or suggestively sermonic qualities but by its engagement with orality on the level of style and idea' (208). For Wright the best practitioners of this were Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, although, to my mind, this applies equally to John Ruskin, whose essayistic style contains considerable 'oral residue' and is heavily inflected by the English sermon tradition. Where the 'voiced essay'

deviates from its precursor the Romantic essay, and perhaps from this essay, is in its inclination to public address, imagining itself not just as a private conversation but a public one. Indeed, in this respect, Ruskin's writing is a particularly fascinating blend of hectoring public and coded private address. I can certainly see a place for Derrida's writing on loss and friendship in all this though—perhaps it is something to explore after this piece. This would be essay-writing figured as a vessel for conversation, for dialogue with others, with friends, and/or with the dead, those we have lost or may never have known, to summon up other voices into this medium and allow them to be heard—to make our writing, as Ruskin said apropos of ancient ruins, 'voiceful'.

It is a shame this conversation has to end here—

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Book Traces: Nineteenth-Century Readers and the Future of the Library

By Andrew M. Stauffer

Kevin Gallagher

A study of the physical impact readers have on texts, whether it be annotations, inscriptions, their own poetical contributions, or even remnants of flowers and plants, *Book Traces* offers a somewhat novel, but important, approach to book and reading history. Yet it also looks to the future: early on in his introduction, Andrew Stauffer makes the case for *Book Traces* functioning as, among other things, a defence of 'the value of the physical, circulating collections of nineteenth-century volumes in academic libraries' (3). He adds that it is 'the vulnerability of those printed books – both their material fragility and their institutional precarity in the digital age,' which underpins the contributions he hopes 'to make to the history of reading and library policy' (ibid.). It is difficult, then, to miss the irony in the fact that this review is being carried out via e-book, circumstanced by the global Coronavirus pandemic. However, the electronic nature of the text (coupled with the excellent user interface provided by Ebooks.com) does not detract from what is a thought-provoking and vital study in historical reading and personal editing practices. Most importantly, Stauffer uses this study to mould a thesis as to the future of non-rare collections which are held within libraries and archives, encouraging us to '*open every book* […] before print collections are stored away and managed down for good' (133).

Despite this somewhat hyperbolic call-to-archives, Stauffer is not a literary Luddite in any sense; indeed, as he notes, were it not for access to e-books such as 'Google Books, HathiTrust, and large-scale genealogical sites like Ancestry.com […] the task of unearthing histories' behind discovered annotations would have been 'too daunting' (25). The theme of discovery, especially the idea of 'guided

serendipity' (3), resonates throughout Stauffer's introduction, and the five chapters which follow. Drawing initially on Pierre Foucault and Alan Liu, Stauffer's introduction not only positions his study as a vital contribution in literary scholarship, but also to memory, cultural and historical studies. Each chapter adopts a thematic case study, and while Stauffer maintains that he is not attempting to offer a comprehensive examination of nineteenth-century marginalia, annotation, or the ephemera discovered inside books, he does succeed in opening a window onto such practices among 'primarily female, middle-class' white Americans (19-20). This scope is not accidental: as Stauffer explains, just as 'all libraries and archives have an element of randomness,' so they also 'reflect the structures of power – economic, cultural, linguistic, racial, sexual – that determined what would not be preserved, what was excluded, what was passed over, and what was not passed on' (133). Of course, this is not an earth-shattering revelation: anyone familiar with nineteenth-century literary studies will recognise the influence that Charles Mudie's circulating library, for example, had on defining cultural standards.[1]

Stauffer does, however, bring a fresh perspective to reading habits of these 'white, upper-middle-class families' (ibid.), and the opening chapter, taking collected editions of Felicia Hemans as its primary focus, provides a perfect opening for the discussion on 'marginalia, sentimentality, nostalgia, and poetry […being] wound inextricably together in the nineteenth century' (16). Given that Hemans is recognised as a poet 'working within a Christian framework,' who continually 'shapes a language of endless longing and appeal directed towards a variously named divine order' (35), the nature of readerly responses that Stauffer documents are not unexpected. In poems which deal variously with 'God, heaven, the virgin, departed spirits, mother, home, and love,' many of Hemans' readers in the mid-nineteenth century regarded her texts as quasi-scriptural and when 'parted from a loved person through death or absence, find themselves in prayer amid her lyrics' (35). Perhaps the most powerful example of this is the identification of a 'poem written in pencil on the rear free endpaper' of an 1834 edition of *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans* (24). Identifying the same hand on the title page of the book, where the inscription 'Ellen Pierrepont / 1846' appears, Stauffer (and his team of graduate students) delve deeper into this poem and Pierrepont's annotations. This allows Stauffer to posit conclusions as to the motivating factors behind certain annotations, and while, unavoidably, some of these interpretations are speculatively subjective, they do underline the central argument that literature, and poetry especially, was a dynamic medium in the nineteenth century. By analysing texts rich with marginalia, as opposed to the pristine, rare copies normally reserved for special collections, Stauffer ascertains that we may 'begin to see

1 For an excellent evaluation on Mudie's library, see Katz, Peter J., 'Redefining the Republic of Letters: The Literary Public and Mudie's Circulating Library' in *Journal of Victorian Culture* 22:3, 2017.

nineteenth-century sentimental poetry through the eyes of those to whom it most frequently mattered, those ordinary readers whose reactions shaped the way poetry was written and used throughout this bookish century' (42).

'Gardens of Verse', the book's second chapter, examines the nineteenth-century practice of inserting flowers between the pages of books, an act which Stauffer notes: 'shaped the writing, publishing, and reading of verse as parts of a continuous network of interaction' (47). 'The pressed flower,' it is reasoned, 'assumes an emblematic, lyrical status in its own right, in dialogue with the poetry on the printed page and with the structure of the book in which it was placed' (50). This chapter offers an intriguing perspective on the dynamics of textual interactions, not just between readers and texts, but between readers, texts, authors and publishers: 'poets wrote knowing that these practices were part of the field of reception; publishers and illustrators designed books that called them forth and echoed them' (48). This is evidenced by the taxonomy of 'Anglo-American sentimental flower books' that are listed on page eighty-four, which indicate the popularity of such texts throughout the century (particularly in the Victorian era). As may be guessed, Wordsworth's collections are popular destinations for flowers stems, petals and leaves, yet Stauffer recognises that there is a more powerful significance than simply sentimentality at play: 'vitality and death, preservation and loss, beauty and decay: botanical material plucked or gathered and then placed in books by readers incarnates some of the same contradictory impulses that organised nineteenth-century poetry in the Romantic tradition (63).

In the case studies presented in chapter three, Stauffer turns to examples which 'all involve at least two hands: they were each inscribed by a different pair of lovers, with marks of flirtation, longing, affection, and loss, in explicit dialogue with nineteenth-century poems that engaged their attention' (83). Annotative conversations are presented as nineteenth-century social-media forebears, especially in the example which closes the chapter, taken from a copy of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Poems and Ballads* (1891), which belonged to a Jane Chapman Slaughter. Here we have a number of poems annotated by Slaughter and (apparently) her one-time lover, John H. Adamson, who the title page suggests was the book's owner before Slaughter. The marginalia reveal the intimate communication between Slaughter and Adamson, as well as later entries when Slaughter returned to re-evaluate her previous thoughts. For Stauffer, such examples strike at the heart of one of *Book Traces'* aims, as they illustrate the power of books as cultural and historical artefacts, 'as layered sites of production' (111), capable of providing 'epiphanic moments of reading and recognition' (90).

Considering the importance of texts as material objects continues into the following chapter, 'Velveteen Rabbits: Sentiment and the Transfiguration of Books'. Here, Stauffer looks to move 'beyond poetry to think more broadly about investment and damage in the realm of books, and about the implications of Romantic modes of object attachment that have shaped our bibliographic inheritance from

the nineteenth century' (114). Stauffer presents a strong case for not only the preservation of non-rare books in libraries, but also calls for a re-evaluation to the rationale traditionally applied when libraries are selecting books for their own collections (140). He also returns to his opening gambit concerning the premise of 'guided serendipity', recognising that 'librarians rightly object to fantasy narratives of serendipity and discovery, in which researchers elide the work done by library professionals in acquiring, cataloguing, preserving, and making accessible materials' (141). However, Stauffer's study should not be misconceived as an attack on libraries in any sense; rather, he offers a challenge to libraries, students and readers, to rethink what texts may offer, other than simply just their printed content.

The accelerated changes in libraries brought around by the pandemic of 2020/21 means that the challenges Stauffer highlights will require even closer consideration and scrutiny. *Book Traces*, at the very least, offers us a platform to begin thinking about these.

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The Early Fiction of Muriel Spark

By James Bailey

Steven Harvie

James Bailey's new monograph, *The Early Fiction of Muriel Spark*, is a welcome and refreshing contribution to the well-trodden ground of Spark criticism. Spark produced twenty-two novels from 1957 to 2004. Bailey chooses to foreground the period between the 50s to the early 70s, claiming that the condensed timeframe 'affords an opportunity to trace formative instances in Spark's development' into a deceptively subversive, anti-realist writer, as well as allowing more space 'to consider how her fiction came to intersect with newly emerging ideas concerning postmodernism, metafiction, metatheatre and the *nouveau roman*' (26). [1] As such, it breathes new life into a field of discourse that, according to Bailey, tends to pigeonhole Spark and her writing within narrow critical confines. Indeed, a sense of irony emerges as Bailey's analysis of the way women in Spark's fiction are trapped or 'ensnared' by patriarchal structures of power mirrors the ways in which Spark's own authorial identity has been distorted or exaggerated by a critical consensus, casting Spark and her work in terms both reactionary and restrictive. That sense is particularly pronounced during Bailey's re-evaluation of Spark's much lauded and beguiling 1970 novella, *The Driver's Seat*. Bailey's study, then, offers an intervention and a corrective to the popular or mainstream interpretive frameworks that have dominated prior Spark criticism. Some of the ideas and

1 While it may seem questionable to characterise work over a decade into Spark's career as 'early', we must remember this covers only the first half of Spark's oeuvre. In any case, it is clear Bailey understands this period as the most experimental, with Spark testing out different formal and stylistic strategies – a writer finding her voice(s), as it were, in the early stages of a long and prolific career.

arguments here were first put forward in Bailey's 2014 paper, 'Salutary Scars: The "Disorienting" Fictions of Muriel Spark', and Bailey has since expanded the scope to produce this compelling, original and important monograph.

At the outset, Bailey reviews the history and trajectory of Spark criticism over five decades in order to then make a case for 'desegregating' Spark from the overriding arguments attached to them (4). [2] He explains that

> Spark has been (and indeed continues to be) discussed in limited terms as a rather cruel Catholic comic novelist, whose literary experiments – however complex, outlandish or confrontational – are nevertheless reducible to a narrowly didactic God-game played out between an all-powerful author, 'indifferent to creation', and an ensemble of thinly drawn caricatures (5).

While Catholicism constitutes an important part of Spark's identity, and appears throughout her fiction as a thematic concern, Bailey is nonetheless right to acknowledge the way in which theological readings of Spark's work have for decades set the terms within which Spark and her work can be discussed. The problem is not the critical framework itself, for which much fruitful and significant work has been done (see Ruth Whittaker's *The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark*), but the tendency of this single strain of Spark criticism to exert undue influence on interpretation at the expense of other, alternative approaches to Spark's work. 'By returning continuously to the familiar analogy between the author and God as the ultimate hinterland of interpretation', argues Bailey, 'such criticism precludes considerations of how Spark's literary innovations might facilitate more nuanced instances of gendered social critique' or 'interrogate the functioning of power and personal identity in the increasingly postmodern consumer culture in which they were written' (66). For Bailey, then, moving away from (or beyond) the critical parameters of theology allows Spark's work to be appreciated from a variety of angles, one of which reclaims or foregrounds the extent to which Spark is a *woman* writer 'whose literary innovations have arguably energised the interrogations of female agency (or the lack thereof) that figure so prominently within her work' (28).

The main point of departure for Bailey is the focus for many critics on Spark's apparent use (and abuse) of narrative omniscience, in which Spark, through the use of metalepsis and prolepsis, demonstrates narratively the folly of human will against the pre-ordained divine script of God; this explains, for example, the 'thinly drawn caricatures' that populate Spark's fiction, and the cruelty with which their futures are foretold. [3] Instead, 'as a valuable alternative to the familiar model of Sparkian omniscience', Bailey draws attention to Sparkian motifs such as 'the ghostly (or perhaps haunted) narrator',

2 'Desegregation' here is a reference to Spark's own controversially titled address (later turned into an essay) first given to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York City, 1970.

3 The argument outlined here is not the only way critics have approached Spark's fiction through a religious lens, but it is certainly the most crude and influential.

'the detached observer', 'the frustrated voyeur', and 'the postmodernist attention to surfaces over depths' (20). In doing so, Bailey offers fresh and exciting readings of Spark's early work, including her only play, *Doctors of Philosophy* (1963), alongside short stories and the novels.

Bailey's analysis of Spark's first novel, *The Comforters* (1957) – in which the protagonist, Caroline Rose, slowly realises she is a character in a novel – complicates the otherwise simple readings of its metafictional playfulness as a kind of 'God-game' between Caroline and her creator. Indeed, the synopsis just given belies the depth of a novel 'rather too simply' described as 'a story of a heroine "trapped within a novel"' (44). Bailey adds nuance to longstanding readings of *The Comforters* by drawing our attention to how the ontological levels within the text shift in different directions.The narrative represents not a static script around which Caroline navigates and eventually ascends, but rather the *process* of fictionalising. 'In place of any clear distinction between reality/fiction, life/role or person/character', Bailey argues, *The Comforters* depicts 'ontological diminishment (or 'flattening') *by degrees'* (ibid.). While 'the respective behaviours of the Baron, Laurence and Eleanor indicate a gradual descent into fiction', 'Caroline's critical awareness of both the conventions of storytelling and the voiceof the Typing Ghost suggest a steady *ascent* towards ontological richness' (ibid.). Bailey encourages us to see in the text a far more dynamic and profound engagement with fictionality, representation and realism than has so far been considered.

The Driver's Seat is subject to a similar kind of re-evaluation, alongside a deeper consideration of the relationship between Spark and the *nouveau roman*. [4] Bailey rightly complains that 'critical commentary on the author's relationship to the *nouveau roman* has tended – perhaps ironically – to stop short at the surface, resting upon the aesthetic similarities' between Spark's novels from the early to mid-1970s and the fictions of Allain Robbe-Grillet, the most prominent pioneer of the French new novel/anti-novel (106). Bailey's study pays closer attention to Robbe-Grillet's influence, questioning whether '[Spark's] work might offer a deeper commentary, be it direct or implicit, on the theories and practices of the 'new novelists' (106). Indeed, Bailey shows how *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (1960) and *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965) contain reservations about the representational implications of the *nouveau roman* aesthetic: 'in both [novels], the *nouveau roman* is invoked, only to be rejected, as if in disgust, by both the narrator and the central character' (131). There is a sinister resemblance, for example, between the hollow, listless and bureaucratic speech from Adolf Eichmann in the famous televised trial as depicted in *The Mandelbaum Gate*, and the stylistic tendencies of *nouveau roman* narrators. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's seminal studies on the 'banality of evil', Bailey suggests that

Spark implies a dangerous closeness between the aesthetics of the *nouveau roman* and the

4 The *nouveau roman* is a type of fiction that emerged in the 1950s in France, characterised by a lack of emotion, character psychology or recognisable plot, with a narrative focus instead on 'objective' description.

'fascism of representation' which underpinned the Third Reich.

According to Bailey, *The Driver's Seat* 'constitutes an attempt to engage with, and ultimately confront, the anti-novel's aura of objectification and dehumanisation from the inside out' (131). By refocussing his interpretation of Spark's most beguiling text in relation to the *nouveau roman*, he critiques typical readings of *The Driver's Seat* in which 'critics have clung faithfully to the received and revered image of the author as a Catholic novelist', understanding the gruesome denouement of Lise's rape as a kind of divine punishment for daring to take control of her narrative. For Bailey, the narrator of *The Driver's Seat* assumes no such position of authority and in fact behaves 'more like a stalker than a deity' and as such 'is necessarily situated within the diegesis, *loitering with intent within* the same storyworld inhabited by Lise, rather than surveying her actions from a lofty diegetic remove' (145). Through an impressive and precise close reading, aided by manuscript materials of the text, Bailey makes a convincing case for understanding *The Driver's Seat* as 'not simply the story of a woman determined to assert control over her life by plotting its end', but as a text engaged with 'narrative mediation, epistemological impotence and […] a specifically *masculine* anxiety to penetrate the mystery of the female Other' (147-8).

There is much more to be said about Bailey's strong contribution to Spark criticism, not least of which is his original use of archival material from the McFarlin Library. Bailey selects a variety of manuscript materials to support his arguments, including unpublished short stories, scrapped sections from novels, and the research materials and other ephemera related to Spark's compositional *process*. *The Early Fiction of Muriel Spark* is a highly valuable addition to Spark studies, recommended for students as well as seasoned scholars, and anyone interested in post-war woman's writing.

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Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age

By David Damrosch

Gareth Hughes

It is fitting that Comparative Literature, a discipline that thrives on reinterpreting narratives and finding new connections, should have no definitive account of its history. Both Comparative Literature's origins and purposes are subject to continual debates and revisions: Susan Bassnett and Gayatri Spivak pronounced it dead or at least dying, with the former advocating for its absorption into Translation Studies, and the latter seeing its outdated methods as obstructing a truly planetary criticism. [1] David Damrosch is no harbinger of doom; he neither tolls the death knell for the discipline nor calls for a complete overhaul. This latest contribution to the debate is simultaneously a robust defence of Comparative Literature's place in the scholarly landscape, and a timely criticism of its shortcomings and entrenched habits. The question often posed to Comparative Literature is one of survival: how to ensure the continuing relevance of comparative criticism when the object of study – world literature – is so vast and increasingly difficult to define? This book attempts to pin down the essence of the comparative approach while offering a few signposts toward its future.

Somewhat refreshingly, Damrosch avoids starting his tour of the discipline with its foundation within universities. Instead, the first stop takes in the personal libraries of Gottfried Herder and Germaine de Staël, two eighteenth-century writers who sparked wider discussion of literature across boundaries of class, nation,

1 See Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

and gender. Herder's collection of folk poems gathered from several countries, *Volkslieder*, and de Staël's politically charged literary salons, represented great advances in the popularisation of literature, but also inaugurated a mode of reading that encompassed multiple languages and literatures. Emphasising Herder and de Staël's cosmopolitanism, Damrosch claims an implicit politics of anti-despotism for the discipline, but the risk of excessive idealism is counterbalanced by his attention to national contexts, noting that Herder's project was one of nation-building as well as transnational connections. It is for this reason that 'a dismissively antinationalist stance can't do justice to the internationalism of many national literatures' (208). This exacting and historicising approach to interactions within and between national literatures, coupled with an unwillingness to simply prescribe comparatism as a panacea for nationalist inwardness, makes *Comparing the Literatures* a sprawling and compelling human story.

Commencing with these two figures, Damrosch stakes the political ground for the discipline. Yet he also draws attention to their peripherality in relation to centres of power and cultural influence, thereby establishing a common thread woven throughout the book: the theme of the outsider. For de Staël, literary criticism and political discussion were ways of asserting herself as a woman in the predominantly male public sphere, as well as means of coping with her social ostracisation from Paris during the reign of Napoleon. Exile becomes a refrain throughout the history of comparative scholarship, none more so than for Erich Auerbach, whose *Mimesis* (1946) still stands as a seminal comparative work. The tale of this German-Jewish academic who sought refuge from the Nazi regime in Istanbul is well-known in the field, and his time there is memorably illuminated elsewhere by Emily Apter as an emblematic instance of scholarly interdisciplinarity and 'global *translatio*' (Apter 2011: 41). Yet Damrosch reminds us that although discussion of Auerbach often centres around this period, we may forget that his exile did not end there, and that his eventual resettlement in the U.S. was certainly not a homecoming. The discipline has been shaped considerably by many European scholars who moved to the U.S., not least among them Paul de Man, whose case Damrosch uses to amplify the internal contradictions of literary theory in practice. Respected in his time as a practitioner of deconstructive analysis, the posthumous discovery of a cache of letters revealing his contributions to anti-Semitic publications during the war sent a shockwave reverberating throughout the academic world. The last word is given to a former student of de Man's, Barbara Johnson, who writes that although his materialist conception of language remains valuable, 'he did nothing to unseat the traditional white male author from his hiding place behind the impersonality of the universal subject, the subject supposed to be without gender, race, or history' (as cited in Damrosch: 142). It is a reminder that the comparative critic's posture of self-effacement and non-belonging does not always align with the discipline's egalitarian and cosmopolitan ideals.

The prominence of continental philosophy has led to a persistently Eurocentric

and strangely 'Amerifugal' focus in the field. U.S. Comparative Literature departments still primarily favour European literatures, languages, and theories, while neglecting homegrown authors and indigenous literary cultures of the Americas. This can partly be explained by departmental rigidity, so for Damrosch 'the time has come to abandon this all too neat division of territory' (175), urging greater interdisciplinarity and a wider scope of available theory. While many texts from long-neglected traditions around the world are slowly coming into critical view, the same cannot be said for scholarship and poetics from those traditions, resulting in a situation described by Revathi Krishnaswamy as 'world lit without world lit crit' (as cited in Damrosch: 145). Pushing back against the narrow conceptions of theory in the Euro-American academic sphere, Damrosch puts forward Vālmīki's *Rāmāyana,* an epic Sanskrit poem, as a ripe candidate for wider theoretical application, as it enshrines poetry as an immediate ethical response to suffering in nature: 'in the Sanskrit tradition, poetry is not an artifact but an activity' (154). For Damrosch, the application of theory should cut both ways; the theory itself is modified through interaction with the text. Attempting to fix theory as immutable will 'distort as much as it reveals' (126). These unpredictable dynamics call for a judicious and contextually anchored use of theory, a sentiment that actually echoes some of the figures most associated with the rise of postcolonial thought and deconstruction; Edward Said was concerned that theory had exhausted itself, and Spivak observed that excessive deconstruction can stifle its original disruptive potential. This is not to say that the available tools are redundant; Damrosch's reading of Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* ('The Cloud Messenger') combines both Anandavardhana's social poetics of Sanskrit, and Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance,* seeing the hero's message to his far-away beloved as illustrative of 'deconstructive themes of the deferral and self-cancellation of meaning' (160). Critical theory and traditional scholarship can co-exist and work to mutual benefit.

Generally speaking, Damrosch heeds his own advice, citing literary theorists to both clarify arguments and provoke new conversations. The only area of theory that is somewhat neglected, despite being one of growing interest and urgency, is eco-criticism. It therefore seems like a missed opportunity to have not teased out the ecological resonances from the *Rāmāyana* and the *Meghadūta*. Yet as Damrosch argues, rather than impose the framework first, it is incumbent on today's comparatists to attend to the texts on their own terms rather than forcibly fit them into current frames of interpretation. Thus, a critical sensitivity to the most important contextual determinant – language itself – becomes even more pressing. Time was when Comparative Literature was the exclusive domain of a certain kind of polyglot; mastering at least three languages was a requirement, and the old linguistic snobbery is neatly demonstrated here by one of Damrosch's former classmates, who after a de Man seminar in the 1970s, remarked of the professor's Belgian accent that 'his French really isn't that good' (174). The era of Comparative Literature's haughtiness towards monoglots,

bilinguists, and speakers of non-metropolitan dialects, is thankfully over, but Damrosch makes a welcome case for possessing intermediate knowledge of a language, and for continuing to study languages at postgraduate level and beyond, rather than expecting fluency from the get-go. The use of translations is also now widely accepted; Lawrence Venuti's arguments against instrumentalism and Bassnett's identification of the cultural turn in Translation Studies are rightly recognised as underscoring the value of translation and translators to literature. More intriguing still is the translingual writing exemplified by the work of Japanese-German writer Yoko Tawada, for whom 'a reflective semifluency may have advantages over naïve native fluency' (184). Comparative Literature is well-suited to exploring the questions raised by texts that inhabit this zone between cultures.

Throughout the book, Damrosch navigates a dazzling array of media with ease, from a comparison of J. R. R. Tolkien's high fantasy and Gabriel García Márquez's magical realism, to the restaging of Ovid using the *Grand Theft Auto* and *Halo* video games. The proliferation of these immersive fictional universes makes the range of material facing new comparatists quite daunting. But he reiterates that the best comparative work stems from the curiosity to venture outside of one's prior expertise, the sagacity to respect and reinvent traditions, and the desire to expand the conversation. He singles out Frances W. Pritchett's work on Igbo literature as exemplary of this spirit, driven by dilettantism in the most positive sense of the original Italian: *diletto* or 'delight'. This is something we scholars of world literatures, or indeed academics from any discipline who are curious about what comparison can do, would do well to remember.

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Translating Nature: Cross-Cultural Histories of Early Modern Science

Edited by Marroquín Arredondo, Jaime and Bauer, Ralph

Rachel Harris-Huffman

Translating Nature: Cross-Cultural Histories of Early Modern Science is a fascinating volume composed of eleven chapters/essays examining the ways in which indigenous and Iberian colonial epistemologies travelled from the Americas to Europe in the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century. Each essay does so through the close examination of a particular text or topic and its linguistic and hermeneutic movements.

The main text is divided into four sections of thematically linked chapters: Part I. 'Amerindian Knowledge and Spain's New World,' Part II. 'Amerindian Knowledge in the Atlantic World', Part III. 'American Nature and the Politics of Translation', and Part IV. 'Translation in the Transoceanic Enlightenment'. The first two parts focus on the translation and appropriation of indigenous American epistemologies by European audiences, while the latter two broaden the volume's scope beyond Iberian perspectives and the Atlantic.

While essays make up the core of the text, they are bookended by an editor's introduction which deftly defines the historical, philosophical, and socio-political context of the volume, as well as its major players, and a reflective afterword by William Eamon discussing the performative, often illusory nature of translation. Some readers may be tempted to skip these peritexts, but they are worthwhile, especially for those who come to this collection without an orientation to the Iberian conquest of the Americas and the subsequent intercultural exchanges, as familiarity with these topics is assumed in the essays. It is also helpful, particularly in the latter two parts, to come to this volume with some knowledge of the history of science from the classical Greek philosophical

traditions descended from Pliny, Aristotle, and Epicurus, to Enlightenment thinkers including Francis Bacon, Renee Descartes, and Immanuel Kant.

Notably, in the introduction, Ralph Bauer and Jaime Marroquín Arredondo provide thoughtful acknowledgement that terms such as 'discovery' and 'New World', often used in historical accounts, are inaccurate—the lands and peoples of the Americas existed and flourished prior to the arrival of Europeans. Additionally, the editors emphasize that information in the early modern history of science was often not the result of novel discoveries but linguistic and cross-cultural translations of localised knowledge.

Both introduction and afterword note that the data-collection, translation, and transculturation practices of the indigenous interlocutors and Iberian investigators in the Americas pre-date the 'new science' methodologies of knowledge production espoused by the extolled 'father of empiricism', British philosopher, Francis Bacon. These notations exemplify one of the major arguments that is maintained throughout this collection—that while the development of modern scientific practices is often attributed to seventeenth-century Northern European Enlightenment thinkers, similar and earlier efforts of Iberian intellectuals are often overlooked. This new/old science binary is further explicated in Ralph Bauer's own chapter, satirically titled 'The Crucible of the Tropics: Alchemy, Translation, and the English Discovery of America'.

A related argument that pervades this collection's essays attempts to disprove, or at least discount, the 'Spanish Black Legend', the unfavourable view of the Spanish empire, its people and culture as cruel and intolerant, and Spanish science as 'medieval' and 'backward.' This criticism was perpetuated by non-Spanish, particularly Protestant, historians, and is often associated with the sixteenth-century anti-Protestant policies of King Philip II. This perception was particularly strong in the Americas, peaking during the Spanish-American war in 1898.

The book's first chapter, 'Sighting and Haunting of the South Sea' by Juan Pimentel, is as entertaining as it is critical and informative. The essay simultaneously relates and dismantles the fantastic account of Vasco de Balboa's 'discovery' and proclamation of ownership of the Pacific Ocean, and all the known and unknown lands within it, as chronicled by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés. It also considers a nautical map that, despite its impressive precision in the depiction of certain physical geographic bodies, inaccurately and ambiguously displays indigenous settlements. Pimental astutely uses the flaws of both records to pose questions about the reliability and intentionality of historical sources in an illustration that should be remembered throughout the rest of the text, and can extend to any human-created document or archive.

In another key essay, chapter four, 'Pictorial Knowledge on the Move', Daniela Bleichmar observes the dual meanings of 'translation' in the early modern period, referencing the first Spanish-language dictionary, Sebastián de Covarrubias' *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, which defined *traduzir* [sic]

as 'to take one thing from one place to another' and 'to turn a statement from one language into another' (100). She discusses a third definition of translation, that of interpretation, by recounting the convoluted biography of the *Codex Mendoza*, a carefully and collaboratively authored and illustrated manuscript detailing the history, economy, and culture of the Nahua people. As different translators emphasised different kinds of information (i.e. image vs text) the codex was transformed through 'mutation and multiplication […] across languages, cultural categories, space, media, time, and interpretive horizons' (117) in an international/intercultural game of epistemological telephone.

The final chapter, 'Native Engravings on the Global Enlightenment: Pedro Murillo Velarde's Sea Map and Historical Geography of the Spanish Philippines' by Ruth Hill, turns focus away from the Americas to Spanish-colonial Asia, examining Jesuit geographer Murillo Velarde's use of ethnographic methodologies. This includes interactions and collaborations with indigenous inhabitants, international merchants and missionaries occupying Manila in the eighteenth century, and the exchange of ideas via different languages, including multiple Spanish pidgins. While her discussion of Murillo Velarde's experience is interesting, the most thought provoking part of Hill's chapter is the final paragraph, where she notes, '[W]e must strive to refine our tools of analysis and expand our critical vocabularies for confronting cultural synergy and symbiosis,' and asks, '[h]ow […] might we develop a critical language that eschews presentism and at the same time engages both historians of the present and historians of the past?' (264).

This question of presentism, of attempting the presentation of an objective history without the distortion of a modern lens or the denial of contemporary cultural understandings and perspectives, leads me to this—a criticism I feel must be raised is the adherence to colonial language and narratives, whether intentional or accidental, that sometimes appears in the book's essays. For example, in chapter five, 'The Quetzal Takes Flight', Marcy Norton refers to the way in which the 'Christianization of Mesoamerica allowed and even facilitated the continued valuation of' (127) sacred symbols from pre-existing indigenous spiritual practices—a shockingly demure description of cultural erasure—without acknowledging the violence inherent in compulsory religious conversion. Ironically, later in her chapter, Norton accuses English naturalist John Ray of making a 'doctrinal barb' (146) when negatively comparing Catholic saints to pagan deities. She does acknowledge that the prejudicial attitudes of Northern European Protestants towards Spanish Catholics 'paralleled to a degree the one that Spanish authorities took towards indigenous informants' (143), but this language minimises the violence of colonialism. Similarly, Ralph Bauer diminishes Dominican Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas' criticisms of Oviedo's 'unflattering at times' depiction of indigenous Americans by likening the historian's portrayal of Amerindians as being subject to 'demonic revelations' (176), to his criticism of Spanish colonists in Hispaniola being too 'fond of adventure' (177) to settle in one place.

Committing a far less egregious but

conspicuous faux pas, in 'Local Linguistics and Indigenous Cosmologies', Sarah Rivett presents a historical critique of European views of indigenous American languages as 'barbarous,' while simultaneously and repeatedly using the European-derived moniker 'Iroquois' to refer to the self-named *Haudenosaunee* tribal confederacy. Considering Rivett's research background, this apparent irony can likely be dismissed by assuming she has chosen to use a title more familiar to the book's intended audience rather than the confederation's autonym for the sake of expediency. In numerous similar cases throughout this book, the use of out-of-date terminology can likewise be excused because of the historical context of the material.

It must be recognised that while interactions between indigenous peoples and European colonisers led to scientific and technological advancements for both groups, these efforts were accompanied by the oppression of indigenous peoples and their cultures, including their languages. While this volume is not intended to be a critique of colonialism, this history of violence cannot be extricated from narratives of early modern European exploration and conquest, and it is disingenuous to equivocate or gloss over this reality. At times, some of this collection's authors seem so intent on making a positive case for Catholic Iberian naturalists and their efforts that they commit this error.

These issues aside, *Translating Nature* illuminates both well-known and overlooked histories illustrating the importance of translation, in its many forms, in the global exchange and development of scientific knowledge. It is a volume worth reading for those interested in the historiography of early modern science, though readers should be advised to retain a conscientious scepticism of the perspectives of the collection's contributors in their presentation of these histories.

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The Cosmos in Ancient Greek Religious Experience: Sacred Space, Memory, and Cognition

By Efrosyni Boutsikas

Eirini Katsikea

When was the last time you consulted the stars? If it has been too long, reading Efrosyni Boutsikas' latest book will certainly make you feel like it; *The Cosmos in Ancient Greek Religious Experience* is remarkably akin to a stargazing experience.

Its main thesis is unequivocal: there is an important element missing from our current understanding and study of ancient ritual performance and architecture, and that is the skyscape. From within our light-polluted cities, where artificial light is ubiquitous and a centuries-old given, we tend to forget about the vital role that the elements of the sky played in our ancestors' lives, for instance, as light sources and time-keeping tools. Especially when it comes to the nocturnal ancient Greek experience, as Boutsikas poignantly highlights, 'because we do not think of the night sky, we assume the ancients did not either.' (1) Lamenting the majority of the current body of research into the ancient Greek concepts of 'landscape, space, and movement' as undertaken according to the assumed context of daylight, Boutsikas' motivation is an attempt at an enriched, multidisciplinary reconstruction of the *totality* of the environment of our ancestors (11). Her plea to researchers is to take into consideration all the evidence at their disposal, including 'the most impressive cognitive artefact' that is 'the canopy of stars in the night sky.' (2)

Informed by the science of archeoastronomy – 'the study of the sky in past societies'- and further facilitated by the discipline's new-found momentum in virtue of the application of virtual reality simulation models, the book's methodological proposal is, for all intents and purposes, the definition of 'cutting-edge' (5). It serves not only as an argument for the inclusion of a largely ignored

type of evidence, namely the night sky, but also for the utilisation of a new analytical concept of 'ritual timing', and the idea of its impact on the overall perceptual experience of the night-sky as it changes during a ritual performance (4-5). By tapping into contextual evidence and, more specifically, the non-physical evidence to be gleamed from the ancient narratives and myths embodied by ritual performance, this research differentiates itself from its probabilistic peers and predecessors. By demonstrating a repeated pattern in a data set, such research has been predominantly occupied with the advancement of the claim that the placement of Greek temples was intentionally governed by astronomical observations.

For Boutsikas' purposes, orientation data is *but one* aspect of the evidence, and the first three chapters of the book gradually embellish and illustrate this claim. For one, she argues, the patterns emerging from the available orientation data sets are weak and the criterion of orientation according to what is most commonly just one star, such as the sun, further weaken the urge to warrant meaning to these patterns. Secondly, even if we can safely warrant meaning to the patterns, the meaning seems to be superimposed, anachronistic, or incomplete. The *a posteriori* ascription of meaning onto correlations between data is not tantamount to having evidence for such a correlation, say, between a performance or architectural structure and an entity in the sky. Further, it is no use hypothesising about the deliberateness of such correlations when we can barely fathom them. For instance, probabilistic analysis of the data set of ancient temples, rather counter-intuitively, suggests that most sun-oriented structures were in fact those *not* devoted to the sun-god Apollo but to other deities, such as Hera and Zeus – a puzzling result indeed, considering that the link for which we could posit a plausible and verifiable explanation would be the exact opposite.

The experience of ancient ritual activity is much more complex than probabilistic approaches seem to suggest and assume. For Boutsikas, the ancient Greek Classical world is the perfect case study in demonstration of this, not only because their religion was rife with celestial myths and nocturnal festivals, but mainly because the presence of the skyscape permeated ancient life. For them, the observation and knowledge of the movements of the elements of the sky was part of daily life and, as a tool of both religious and agricultural timekeeping, was what made the difference between a thriving *polis* and one out of the favour of the gods. Divine offerings and consultations had their proper time and place, and for what we nowadays turn to clocks and specialists, our ancestors looked to the sky. The in-depth analysis of Apolline cults and festivals in chapter four informs us that at the famous oracle on Delphi celebratory dates, such as Apollo's birthday, the start of operations of consultation were carefully timed to coincide with the visibility of Delphinus' major events in the night sky. The constellation, linked with Apollo through the foundational myth of the sanctuary of Delphi, is further argued to have been what the Athenian delegation watched the sky for, a sign of permission to depart for Delphi each year. Considering these suggestions, Boutsikas urges

us to understand the constellation as a possible Panhellenic marker for participation at the oracle's events.

Boutsikas would like us to appreciate that what united them was the human experience. In particular, ritual experience and collective memory, are intricately connected to the time and place wherein they occur, a specific context through which specific memories can be accessed, enriched, or generated. What catalyses this process of extended and embodied human cognition are the myths and narratives that are re-enacted in ritual, blending 'time, landscape, and memory'; ritual, fed by myth and the cognitive environment, feeds memory, and assists in remembrance (111). For Boutsikas, the temples and ritual structures of the ancient Greeks speak to the fact that our ancestors were not only aware of the importance and impact of landscape and architectural forms to ritual experience but, importantly, that they intentionally manipulated that relationship. In the Asian Minor sanctuary of Apollo and Artemis at Klaros, a cave-like environment combined with a labyrinth layout of the crypt floor suggests an intended low-sensory 'cognitive staging' (98) of the visitor's experience of consulting the resident oracle; an 'intention to inspire contact with the divine and intensify ritual experience.' (100) Through the conditions set up by such a 'cognitive ecology', which activates and generates social and group memory and identity, an understanding of the cosmic structure is also constructed (114). It is no wonder, as Boutsikas points out, why the ancient Greek words for 'memory' (*mnemosyni*) and 'monument' (*mnemeion*) have the same etymological root.

The book's most admirable feature is its immersiveness. Despite the occasional reference to calculations with azimuths and the astronomical terminology surrounding them – for which there is a helpful glossary provided – it reads effortlessly. Boutsikas very prudently reminds her reader that her observations do not serve as definitive counterarguments or alternatives to previous and competing hypotheses. Reading this book will urge you to appreciate that our ancestors' experience was as rich as ours, if not richer, despite their lack of advanced technologies and the sensory overload of modern living. Whilst most of us continue to believe in the idea of progressive history, and tend to think of our ancestors as knowing *less* than us, this book helps us understand that their intelligence was simply calibrated differently than ours.

Given the chance, *The Cosmos in Ancient Greek Religious Experience* will incite in you a symphony of thoughts and reconsiderations and will fire up your imagination. It is sure to sit with you for days thereafter. If it does its job well, it will be with you next time you find yourself visiting an ancient ritual structure looking up and around: to the sky, the horizon, and the *totality* of it all.

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Being Posthuman: Ontologies of the Future

By Zahi Zalloua

Heather Annan

In recent years transhumanism, which encourages human biotransformation and improvement, has moved forward onto the centre stage in ethical discussion. Technological advances have led to concerns that human/machine boundaries will dissipate. However, *Being Posthuman* by Zahi Zalloua emphasises that these ethical issues of drawing and preserving boundaries between the 'human' and the 'non-human' are not new or exclusive to modern technological concerns, they are historically prevalent and have predominantly contributed to the unethical treatment of groups deemed to be non-human. Zalloua claims that the only way for us to promote the ethical treatment of these groups that we have harmed, and continue to harm, is to tear down this wall of human/non-human distinction that separates us, and in doing so to become posthuman.

Being Posthuman provides a psychoanalytic perspective on these human/non-human boundaries, considering why they were drawn and why they persist even in the face of logical inconsistencies and serious ethical fallout. He argues that trauma is the psychoanalytic root for the creation and maintenance of these distinctions and that the creation of the human is an exercise in exclusion. The human preservation of a sense of superiority is reliant upon the existence of distinct 'others' over whom to hold superiority. This psychoanalytic perspective is complimented by an examination of a variety of philosophical and cultural sources, ranging from *Nausea* to *Black Mirror*, which showcase human perceptions at the cusp of these human/non-human borders.

Chapter one, 'Cyborgs', begins by examining issues surrounding human technological enhancements. The cyborg presents a unique case for human/non-human

boundaries as it possesses elements of both. Zalloua highlights both the transhumanist position, that cyborgs should be integrated into the human category, as 'human+', and the competing bioconservative position, that cyborgs should be considered non-human in order to preserve the current human ontology as they threaten our 'biological commons' (42). [1] He then suggests, however, that cyborgs exist in the space between the two boundaries, as posthuman beings, stubbornly refusing to come down on either side. Zalloua claims that 'the cyborg delights in "irony" and "perversity", and readily avows its partiality, making no pretension to completeness or mastery' (38). It is in this way that Zalloua views the cyborg as ontologically incomplete as it 'identifies with its monstrosity' (41). This suspended duality, belonging to both and to neither group simultaneously, pressures the boundaries between the human and the non-human, showing that they are not entirely sufficient.

Zalloua then considers the potential social implications of cyborgs. A major benefit is the removal of stereotypes and attitudes towards those with perceived physical differences, typically seen in stereotypes of gender or disability. However, a serious drawback is the potential privatisation of our cultural and natural resources, as access to these upgrades will likely be limited to those wealthy enough to afford them. Therefore, an individual's socioeconomic status might determine whether they are considered human, human+, or non-human. While this issue is already problematic enough, Zalloua warns that this could also lead to continued increases in socioeconomic discrepancy as those who cannot afford upgrades lose access to employment opportunities and fall further behind. While these issues seem like those of a futuristic fantasy, Zalloua compares this situation to smartphone ownership, which he views as a contemporary form of human extension.

Chapter two, 'Animals', considers the boundaries between humans and non-human animals. Zalloua emphasises the strangeness of this distinction as we acknowledge ourselves to be animals while still separating ourselves from animals. This separation is often justified by the idea that humans possess the unique capacity to reason whereas animals do not. Zalloua dismisses this idea as an anthropocentric delusion, suggesting that this capacity is only valued since we possess it. Furthermore, the fact that we only accept a capacity to reason which imitates our own excludes animals and designates them as inferior by definition. Zalloua highlights ownership of pets as an example of this inferior designation since pets are owned as property by humans. He discusses the issues of animal rights and how these rights are assigned to some but not all animals, suggesting that our human centrism is so intense that we assign animals rights based on how many human-like qualities we perceive them to have. Pets' rights are an extension of the owner's human rights and also because they are commonly subject to anthropomorphism, increasing their human-like status. Zalloua claims that the continuation

1 Biological commons provide a natural link between all humans. They allow for a shared sense of human identity through the universal possession of organic bodies.

of this human/non-human animal distinction leads to the mistreatment and suffering of animals in a way which we would consider monstrous toward humans. He provides the example of the treatment and slaughter of livestock, whose entire existence is dedicated to being part of a factory process for the benefit of humans. Why is it the case that we acknowledge that humans are 'animals' and yet allow the suffering of non-human animals in a way that we would not allow for humans? Zalloua claims that the continuation of this unethical treatment stems from our psychoanalytic root: fear of trauma. Acknowledging these non-human animals as equals means acknowledging the weight of the suffering that we have caused. Thus the boundary of human/non-human animal distinction produces denial, and denial maintains the boundary.

Chapter three, 'Object Fever', considers the boundaries between the 'object' and the 'subject'. Again, Zalloua emphasises that posthumanism diminishes the divides between the human and non-human by stating that 'being posthuman acknowledges that the subject is an object' (129). However, he proceeds by investigating whether a posthumanist need necessarily remove the subject/object distinction altogether. He introduces two main theories in this discussion: Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology (OOO) and Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT). Zalloua rejects both of these theories, claiming that they lead to 'object fever', described as 'the maddening compulsion to attend to all that is nonsubject, to all that is before and beyond the subject' (116). He claims that the antidote to object fever is for the subject to be considered after the object, allowing for a distinct subject to be perceived as it is altered by the presence of and interaction with objects. Whilst Zalloua wishes to reduce human superiority over non-human objects, the removal of the subject altogether would be unsuitable, as this would prioritise an objective reality free from the subject and so would contend with psychoanalysis.

Chapter four, 'Black Being', considers the implementation and persistence of racial boundaries, particularly those which separate 'black' from 'white'. Zalloua identifies these boundaries as a white construct – implemented in order to create a more exclusive definition of 'human' by excluding black individuals and labelling them with what he calls 'blackness', a designation of the 'inhuman'. Once again, this designation is cyclical as this initial 'inhuman' labelling condoned atrocities such as enslavement, which in turn reinforced the white illusion of black individuals as objects, non-human 'things' which could be owned. This provided a delusive white defence for terrible actions committed against fellow humans. Thus, humancentric ontologies have not only been utilised to preserve the concept of 'human', by excluding animals and objects, but also to manipulate this concept, by excluding other human beings, in order to secure power.

Zalloua argues that this designation of 'blackness' to the 'inhuman' has been, and still continues to be, so harmful that no redistribution of rights could amend the ever-continuing damage. He points to the mass incarceration of young black men in America as an example that modern slavery has simply changed its face

'from the plantation to the prison-industrial complex' (126). He claims that white attempts to consider issues of inequality, such as uproars caused by police brutality, are often unhelpful as they lead primarily to spectacle, and falsely imply that injustice is not a common occurrence. This diminishes the underlying oppression faced by black individuals on a daily basis. He claims that the only way to resolve this issue and to provide true equality is to remove the human/non-human boundaries that created this distinction in the first place. However, this is no light consideration, as the removal of these boundaries threatens the removal of their history. This would potentially diminish the weight of past injustices and the endurance of those who have been oppressed, forcibly removing identities and heritages in order to fix the future behaviour of the aggressors.

Being Posthuman provides an open discussion of these important topics free from dogmatic command, considering multiple perspectives, while still periodically reinforcing Zalloua's posthumanist viewpoint and its advantages. This allows for the creation of an ideologically inclusive platform which has the potential to encourage further discussion and literary response from the intended academic readership. The continuation of academic discourse on posthumanist considerations highlights their importance and may increasingly extend their generality to non-academic audiences. The issues discussed here must be considered by a general audience if we are to embrace posthumanist ideology and start taking steps away from the ethical problems caused by anthropocentrism.

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A Biography of Loneliness: The History of an Emotion

By Fay Bound Alberti

Wansah Alshammari

The twenty-first century has given rise to concerns of loneliness becoming an epidemic, yet surprisingly, its history has not been closely examined. 'Studies suggest somewhere between 30 and 50 per cent of those surveyed in Britain and North America feel lonely. In fact, Britain has been termed the "loneliness capital of Europe"' (2). Fay Bound Alberti's *A Biography of Loneliness* comes to examine the history of this rising issue.

In *A Biography of Loneliness*, Alberti states that the recent developments in modern life have heightened the need for an examination of loneliness. Although loneliness manifested itself as both a concept and an acknowledged experience in the nineteenth century, Alberti argues in her book that loneliness is a child of present-day secularism, the capitalist system and neoliberalism. It is largely because 'Neoliberalism encourages privatization, deregulation, and competition, in all areas, including health and care' (230). Alberti's argument throughout the book is that the language of loneliness emanates from modern developments in the scientific, industrial and philosophical domains and as a result of society's increased focus on the individual over the collective. In *A Biography of Loneliness*, Alberti asks the very intriguing question of how loneliness transformed into a modern epidemic through the passage of time, providing a careful examination of the term 'loneliness' as an emotional condition that is historically situated. She defines loneliness as 'a conscious, cognitive feeling of estrangement or social separation from meaningful others; an emotional lack that concerns a person's place in the world' (5). The term also encompasses a group of emotions and not a single state or emotion: 'I describe loneliness as an emotion 'cluster', a blend of

different emotions that might range from anger, resentment, and sorrow to jealousy, shame, and self-pity' (6).

Methodologically, *A Biography of Loneliness* offers new ways of understanding the multi-faceted conceptualisation of loneliness. Tracing the concept of loneliness from its eighteenth-century manifestations up to the present, Alberti utilises various representations of such 'emotional cluster[s]' in literary works, in diaries and correspondence of famous individuals, and in philosophical works and biographies. Her book provides a novel examination of social media, aging, bereavement, refugees and homelessness. In Alberti's view, these issues inevitably lead to a sense of loneliness, and her examination of them reveals that loneliness is an embedded emotional state in modern life. Moreover, her findings illustrate that it has varied interpretations based on social background, experience, gender, class and ethnicity.

A Biography of Loneliness constitutes nine chapters. The first chapter sets out a convincing argument that contextualises the concept of loneliness within its historical background. Chapter two discusses the difficult life that Sylvia Plath led and how loneliness framed her life from childhood to adulthood up to the point that it became a 'disease of the blood' (40). Abandonment by her father, mother, friends and partner manifested itself as a pervasive theme in Plath's letters and journals. Alberti not only negotiates these social aspects that affected Plath's life but also explores Plath's mental illness, which, she argues, resulted in a particular state of loneliness. Alberti is convinced that Plath had chronic loneliness from her early life, and this manifested in her work as a craving for community and emotional connection. This chapter naturally leads Alberti, in chapter three, to discuss the significance of others during the course of romantic love, without whom life appears to become impossible.

In this chapter, Alberti discusses the significance of others to the sense of loneliness. Without the company of others, an individual is destined to think of himself/herself as incomplete, and this emotional state could create an inescapable sense of loneliness during the lack of others. In other words, '[w]ithout that significant other, the threat of lack suggests, we will be forever "separated, having one side only"' (82). To support her claim, Alberti applies the idea of the soulmate to the *Twilight* series and to *Wuthering Heights*, two literary examples in which the idea of a lover or a soulmate is the main focus. In *Wuthering Heights*, with the loss of Catherine, Heathcliff found it pointless to survive. Alberti also suggests that *Wuthering Heights* and the *Twilight* books not only identify female expectations in relationships but also the importance of the 'other'. They illustrate how the loss of that 'other' causes an individual to feel separated and to suffer from loneliness. If someone finds his/her soulmate and they live a happy life together, when one dies and leaves the other, the widow(er) is destined to loneliness, as Alberti explores in the fourth chapter. Here, she examines loneliness and the widowed by analysing two case studies: the diaries of Thomas Turner and Queen Victoria's biography. According to Alberti, Turner's experience of loneliness is slightly different from the modern conception of loneliness as

melancholic alienation. His experience is framed within the belief of God's existence, politeness, civic identity and diary keeping: 'Turner was supported in his grief by a conviction that God's will is always right' (234). Meanwhile, Queen Victoria's widowhood comprises a remarkable story that vastly differs from that of Turner, as her continuing grief over her husband's passing informed the extensive expression of loss and loneliness: 'Unlike Turner's, Queen Victoria's writing is filled with references to the specific loneliness of a widow, and the creation of a space that nothing and nobody (not even a sense of God) could fill' (100). Alberti rightly suggests that the widowed experience of loneliness depends on varied aspects of lived experience, ranging from family, networks and friendships to whether there was love between the spouses. She then turns to the question of what happens if the widow(er) seeks new relationships and communication through social media. Indeed, the influence of social media on loneliness, not only on those widowed but also on the new millennial generation, is remarkable, as presented in chapter five. Social media constitutes an online community that breeds connectedness and, like a real-life community, it has the capacity to furnish individuals with information and support. However, physical experience and touch are often lacking. Thus this lack of physical contact leads to heightened loneliness among social media users, especially young adults, as making relationships and networking in real life becomes more difficult.

The following chapters continue Alberti's investigation of loneliness by examining some groups that are at risk of marginalisation in society, including elderly people, the homeless and refugees. Chapter six covers the subject of older people who suffer from physical and mental loneliness, arguing that there is a disconnect between what older people look for – support and companionship – and what they receive in reality. Digital technologies such as social media, Alberti concludes, do not in fact mitigate the sense of loneliness among the elderly compared with the younger generation. Chapter seven explores what loneliness means to individuals who do not have a place or home to belong to, namely, the homeless, and refugees. While homeless individuals are generally ignored by people and, consequently, suffer from loneliness, for refugees, loneliness is not only a mental state but also a physical condition: 'It produces a series of visceral and embodied reactions that might range from fear and resentment to anger and sadness' (177).

The final two chapters present more critical information about loneliness. Chapter eight discusses the body and embodied loneliness in the context of the material world, as Alberti suggests that the body produces feelings and emotions which can be communicated through body language. If loneliness is a physical experience, then sensory feelings and engagement become important. She concludes that bereavement and aging could limit one's social life and lessen the degree of companionship. Chapter nine introduces a positive view on how loneliness is connected to creativity in the writing of William Wordsworth and Virginia Woolf. Alberti suggests that such writers expressed a desire for loneliness in their works, as loneliness helps them in the creative

process. For a romantic poet such as Wordsworth loneliness could offer him 'isolation, a divine communion with nature' (207), but for the novelist Woolf 'the internal need to be alone to create' (213) is important, 'not to write necessarily, but to think about writing, especially when a new project was taking shape' (214).

Alberti's book argues that loneliness is an urgent matter: those who are lonely have a 30% higher chance of dying early than those who are not lonely. Her study interacts with *A History of Solitude* by David Vincent, published in 2020, as Vincent's similar approach covers a wide history of primary materials, incorporating poetry and internet manifestations of solitude. *A Biography of Loneliness* appeals to the general reader as well as the specialist in its provision of a new approach to history and to the nature of loneliness as an 'emotional cluster'. It is an important contribution to the history of emotion and is essential reading to those who are interested in literary and cultural understanding and representation of emotions.

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03

fiction

Summer

By Ali Smith

Kaiyue He

Summer (2020) is an extraordinary accomplishment by Man Booker Prize Finalist Ali Smith. Alongside Autumn (2016), Winter (2017), and Spring (2019), *Summer* is the last novel of her dazzling Seasonal Quartet. It has an oil painting, Early July Tunnel (2006), by David Hockney as its cover, and the Italian filmmaker Lorenza Mazzetti's Self Portrait (2010) as its inside cover. 'Summer' symbolises the imagined ending that we, as a community, are heading towards together.

Summer narrates the story of Sacha Greenlaw's family. Sacha is a sixteen-year-old girl whose hand is scarred by the broken superglued glass of an egg-timer; the mischief made by her thirteen-year-old brother Robert. Sacha and Robert live with their mother Grace, who brags about playing Hermione in The Winter's Tale and her acting past. Their father Jeff faces a financial crisis and lives next door with his girlfriend, Ashley, a political activist who has recently lost her voice in the process of writing a book about lexicons. Sacha's family is visited by Arthur and his ex-girlfriend Charlotte. They have kindly taken Sacha to A&E for treatment of her injured hand and brought her home. Arthur currently lives with Elizabeth, the one-hundred-and-four-year-old Daniel Gluck's neighbour's daughter, who has looked after Daniel for a long time. In Daniel's reminiscence, he recalls the story of his sister Hannah, whose another name is Adrienne Albert, and her child. It turns out that Arthur is Daniel's biological son, and Sacha and Robert are Hannah's offspring.

Summer narrates the reunion of broken families and the loss of home for immigrants, indicating the boundary within and outside houses. Arthur used to work for SA4A, 'the company that bus whole busloads of homeless

people' from other cities into London, and now runs his website 'Art in Nature' (Smith 2020: 105). Charlotte lives with Arthur's aged aunt Iris at his dead mother's old house in Cornwall. They provide accommodation for many illegal immigrants, who are recently released by the SA4A Immigration Removal Centre, in this huge house during the pandemic. Sacha is empathetic towards homeless people and writes letters to a Vietnamese immigrant and prisoner Hero, who receives help from Charlotte. His identity as an immigrant is compared by Sacha to that of a swift since the arrival and the departure of swifts mark the start and the end of summer (Smith 2020: 119).

The life story of Lorenza Mazzetti is brought into *Summer.* Lorenza lived with her twin sister Paola, their father's sister Nina and her husband Robert Einstein, 'who was a cousin of Albert Einstein and their slightly older cousins, Luce and Anna Maria' in Tuscany (Smith 2020: 256). In 1944, the Nazi officers 'killed all the Einsteins they could find – Nina and her daughters' and kept Lorenza and her sister alive, 'because their surname wasn't Einstein' (Smith 2020: 256). Their uncle Robert Einstein committed suicide not long afterwards. Lorenza moved to London as an immigrant, found a place in the Slade School of Art and later became one of the founders of the Free Cinema movement. *Summer* exists in the first song that the English and Scottish soldiers taught a group of shell-shocked young children, who sat beside the graves of Lorenza's family in Italy, 'You Are My Sunshine' (Smith 2020: 264). Its existence represents that of art, which reminds us of our being and purpose and our memory of past sorrows in the summer of 1976, 1940, and 1914 (Smith 2020: 286).

Lorenza's films K (Metamorphosis) (1954) and Together (1956) feature prominently in Summer. In the opening scene, the image of a man carrying two suitcases and dancing along a narrow path amid a landscape of ruined houses in K (Metamorphosis), transmits a message of hope and resilience (Smith 2020: 6). Likewise, Together spreads the idea of summer: 'The English word for summer comes from the Old English *sumor*, from the proto-indo-european root *sam,* meaning both *one* and *together*' (Smith 2020: 263). It narrates the story of two deaf-mutes talking with each other in sign language in the bomb-blasted street of postwar East London, with a group of naughty children who 'march behind the men like a mock parade' (Smith 2020: 126). This film heals the trauma caused by the Holocaust and bomb attacks by highlighting the importance of a community with a shared future for human beings.

Summer is rich in literary allusions. Its epigraphs include quotations from Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941), Charles Dickens's *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848), Stanley Kubrick's 1968 interview with *Playboy*, Edwin Morgan's *'One Fine Day'*, and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1623). Echoing these quotations, *Summer* deals with the themes of time and continuity, past sorrows and forgiveness, and indifference and hope. Smith makes 'a merry tale come out of a sad one', as she engages with resources and texts about internment in the UK during two World Wars and news of everyday life in the UK's Immigration Removal Centres (Smith 2020: 284).

The tension between alienation and reconciliation is central to *Summer.* Smith highlights the boundary between immigrants and the locals, government and the public, and different groups of people classified by 'religion, ethnicity, sexuality, intellectual or political dissent' (Smith 2020: 4). She also notes the current crises presented by the borders between countries (Brexit), life and death (Covid-19 and the Holocaust), seasons and global warming (the wildfires in Australia), and private and public comments (online bullying in social media). To present her criticism through her craft, Smith mentions different forms of art and uses different figures of speech. Symbolically, she criticises Boris Johnson's reference of Muslim women as the Royal Mail letterbox in an article published in the *Evening Standard*. Smith also compares the real mask to the mask of celebrities and politicians on television, and the emission of carbon dioxide to a tea cosy. These metaphors indicate her critique of Islamophobia, the hypocrisy of celebrity culture and the crisis of global warming. Franz Kafka's metamorphosis is applied by her as 'a powerful act of accusation against the daily grind that makes us indifferent to past, present and future injustice' (Smith 2020: 260).

Time is the central concept that motivates Smith to write *Summer,* as she remarks in her 2020 interview with David Robinson: 'Time passes, and times pass. Nothing's forever, and a lot is at stake […] We need to feel the urgency one way or another, and work communally for the better imagined, if we really want the happy ending' (Robinson 2020). Smith, moreover, breaks out of the constraints of the traditional concept of time by using non-chronological narration and invoking Einstein's theory of special relativity. 'Time is dimensional', remarks Robert (Smith 2020: 47). He reads and constantly refers to Andrew Robinson's *Einstein on the Run* (2019), recalling Einstein's sojourn as a violinist and political refugee in a hut of Roughton Heath in 1933. Smith looks to past sorrows and injustice during WWII and to current issues, such as Brexit, a topic she interrogated in *Autumn*. Her character Sacha 'mistakenly' uses her own saying – forgiveness 'is the only way to reverse the irreversible flow of history' – as a quotation by Hannah Arendt, author of *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), in her school essay about forgiveness to 'mark one week since Brexit' (Smith 2020: 8). Her quotation reminds us that forgiveness is the inner light that we can supply against the vast darkness.

Although *Summer* inspires the reader to reflect upon history and current events, it is simple but subtle, humorous but sarcastic, rich but easy to follow. Broken families find love between brothers and sisters, and between lovers and friends by supplying help and love to immigrants and strangers. At last, heroism defeats indifference. Love triumphs over hatred and malice. Forgiveness heals trauma. Reconciliation is reached through art across boundaries.

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Girl, Woman, Other

By Bernardine Evaristo

Laura Scott

Bernardine Evaristo's eighth novel, *Girl, Woman, Other*, was published to critical acclaim in 2019. That year, it shared the Man Booker Prize with Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* in the first double-win since the rules of the prize were changed to prevent two novels from winning in 1992 (Flood 2019: para. 2 of 17). This came in the same year that the four Turner Prize nominees requested that the judging panel split the prize between them. This perhaps suggests a shift towards a less hierarchical evaluation of literature and art and away from 'a bygone binary age of winners and losers' (Gompertz 2019: para. 5 of 5). After Evaristo's joint win with Atwood, Shaun Ley, a reporter for the BBC, described the winners as 'Margaret Atwood and another author' (O'Connor 2019: para. 1 of 6). Evaristo remarked that the BBC had 'quickly and casually […] removed my name from history' (Evaristo 2019) in a thoughtless slight towards the first ever black, female winner of the Booker Prize. This makes startlingly clear the need for novels such as Evaristo's which are deeply involved in the representation of black females and non-binary individuals. In a 2020 report on diversity in the publishing industry by Goldsmiths University, Evaristo remarks that there has been a 'huge absence of the voices of people of colour in literature' (Evaristo 2020: 4). Ley's callous oversight not only elides Evaristo's achievement, but contributes to a lack of visibility of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) people as publishers, readers, and writers which the very success of *Girl, Woman, Other* opposes. Evaristo's portrayal of twelve unmistakably individual but connected characters aims to represent the wealth of black women in the UK whose voices are similarly underrepresented.

Structured in four chapters of three

sections each with a final section bringing most of the voices from the novel together, *Girl, Woman, Other* is a rich tapestry of portraits, each triptych a representation of the ties that bind people together. The novel is framed by the opening night of *The Last Amazon of Dahomey* at the National Theatre, a play written and directed by Amma Bonsu, the narrator of the novel's opening section. Amma's nervous walk through London and the play's afterparty function as a framing device bringing together twelve disparate voices which combine to create a dynamic portrait of black British womanhood. The 'free-flowing, prose poetry style […] dubbed "fusion-fiction"' (Tepper and Evaristo 2019: para. 2 of 14) which Evaristo utilises in many of her novels mixes the fluidity of stylistic devices. This provides a sense of connection from one chapter to the next which mirrors how the characters themselves are linked together. *Girl, Woman, Other*'s strength is in its moving and skillful character portraiture. Evaristo's characters are from completely different walks of life: Amma and her best friend Dominique are radical lesbian feminist playwrights, while Amma's childhood friend Shirley is a 'boring heterosexual suburban schoolteacher' (425). Shirley's gifted student Carole goes on to be the vice president of a bank in London while her classmate LaTisha has three children and works in a supermarket. These characters are all connected, though some more than others, as some 'simply visit the same theatre on the same night, or argue with each other on Twitter' (Frazer-Carroll 2019: para. 2 of 11). The result is a striking set of character studies which, facilitated through the structural framing of Amma's play, provides an ode to coincidence, connectedness, and personal relationships.

Girl, Woman, Other is impressive in its scope, a project whose wide range of starkly different voices calls attention to the inability to define black womanhood homogeneously. Grace and Hattie's experiences as black women on a farm in Northumbria in the 1900s differ starkly from Yazz, whose privileged upbringing amongst a liberal intellectual elite in London has given her the confidence to use her unique voice. The result, however, is that the novel's breadth sometimes comes at the expense of depth. After the initial chapter, there is little more to learn about Amma, Yazz, or Dominique; the reader is left to await their return until they come together in the novel's final chapter. Evaristo never delves into the relationship between Yazz and Dominique in any depth, nor allows any of the simmering resentment between Shirley and Dominique to come to the surface. Somewhat unsatisfyingly, Shirley never finds out about Winsome's relationship with her husband. Similarly, while Carole and LaTisha are friends at school, there is no meeting between them after their paths diverge; LaTisha does not attend the play, and her story is left dangling like a loose thread by the end of her section. There is a missed opportunity to delve into Bummi's attraction to women after her second marriage, much as the chance to look deeper into Freddy and Carole's relationship is missed. Indeed, there is little resolution for anyone but Hattie and Penelope. Their meeting in the epilogue resolves decades of wondering and makes clear Evaristo's inclusion of Penelope's — seemingly only very peripherally connected — chapter

earlier in the novel. Even Amma's success is left in doubt as she mourns that her night at the National may have been the 'pinnacle of my career' (434).

Evaristo's novel is a masterclass in weaving a polyvocal tapestry of contemporary black Britain. Its only drawback is that Evaristo's characters are so compelling, and often so subtly connected, that the reader finishes the novel wishing they knew more about them. This is, however, perhaps not the ultimate purpose of Evaristo's work, as she aims to show the reader a series of snapshots rather than spelling out the meaning of each relationship depicted. The sheer range of Evaristo's work is unmistakably a symptom of the intersectional feminism advocated by the novel. Amma and Dominique's radical black feminism is based on Evaristo's early career when, for a ten-year period before she began writing novels, she lived as a radical black lesbian theatre company director. Evaristo acknowledges that, at this point of her life, she was 'very angry as a woman' (Thorpe 2020: para. 2 of 13). Indeed, it asks pressing questions about feminism, gender, sexuality, and race. *Girl, Woman, Other* does not make any attempt to shy away from uncomfortable conversations, and deals with them with Evaristo's characteristic dark humour, evident from earlier works such as *Blonde Roots* (2009), in which a European slave is branded with the initials of her African master, K.K.K. The most striking example of this in *Girl, Woman, Other* comes from Morgan, a non-binary Twitter activist whose journey to wokeness is one laden with missteps. Morgan's girlfriend, Bibi, herself transgender, has no problem with indelicately correcting their mistakes, stating that she will 'hit the next person who confuses transsexual with transgender, I swear!' (318). Indeed, Morgan and Hattie's sections provide important contributions to fluid gender identities — Morgan's identification as agender is an inherent denial of binary gender categories, and advocates not just for crossing boundaries, but for the possibility of erasing them entirely. These questions come to a head as Dominique talks about her feminist arts festival specifically for 'women-born-women as opposed to women-born-men' (437). In response to the festival, Morgan, aided by her million followers, starts a twitter campaign 'severely damaging [Dominique's] reputation' (ibid.). Morgan's argument amounts to a questioning of how intersectional Dominique's feminism is and why it has not expanded conceptually to include trans women. This intersectional stance is voiced — albeit somewhat parodically — by Yazz, who asserts that Amma's '*women's* politics [...] will become redundant, and by the way, I'm humanitarian, which is on a much higher plane than feminism' (39).

Girl, Woman, Other is, then, a novel of our times which aims to highlight women who are 'the kind of character that [haven't] really appeared in fiction at

all' (Tepper and Evaristo 2019: para. 6 of 14). Reflective of contemporary political and cultural discourse surrounding racial and gender identity, Evaristo's work is a sorely needed contribution to the literary representation of black women and non-binary individuals whom, as Evaristo opines, are underrepresented in literature and the publishing industry. Unlike Amma, Evaristo does not take her win as a measure of having sold out — but rather, as an opportunity to achieve change from within the upper echelons of prize-winning authors. Evaristo states that she has 'not compromised [her] politics or [her] creativity' (Thorpe 2020: para. 8 of 13) in winning the Booker Prize; the unapologetic, sometimes uncomfortable, and often funny language structured by her unique style of prose poetry exemplifies this. Evaristo's work is, however, often uncomfortable by necessity; there is no hope of moving forward unless we address that which continues to hold us back. With *Girl, Woman, Other*, Bernardine Evaristo has made herself a household name which it would be foolish to forget.

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(ISBN: 9780241984994), 452 pp.

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04

films

Ucho/The Ear

Directed by Karel Kachyňa

Emilia Cooke

Whilst making some initial rough sketches as I was watching *Ucho,* I was reminded of how artistic materials and paper can impose certain boundaries on one another. My creative response depicts random parts of Ludvík and Anna's wallpaper in various mediums, such as lino-print, graphite rubbings and pencil sketches. I have used the montage-based technique of overlaying to disrupt each element of the piece, despite the layers depicting more-or-less the same image: the wallpaper. This creative response explores the ideas of positive and negative space, and how we can use graphic lines and functional design to simultaneously blur and disturb certain boundaries.

r (1970/1990)

Ucho/The Ear

Directed by Karel Kachyňa

James Mennie

'Who would be sitting in a car with the headlights off?' asks Anna (Jiřina Bohdalová), wife of a deputy minister, Ludvík (Radoslav Brzobohatý), in the Czechoslovak Communist government. Having just returned to their villa after a reception at Prague Castle, the seat of the president, they notice a government-issue car watching them, its occupants barely attempting seclusion and parking underneath a nearby streetlamp. Anna's naivety may have struck contemporary Czech audiences as surprising. Surprising not only in having not recognised the operations of the secret police, but further in how openly the film gestures towards the repressive atmosphere left in the wake of the Prague Spring of 1968. [1] Indeed, no audience could have registered this surprise as Karel Kachyňa's *The Ear* [Ucho] (1970) was pulled from release by the authorities even before its first public screening. The film's polemics profoundly reside in this heightened and uncomfortable sense of proximity to character and events. Its dark paranoid world both locks the viewer into the centre of Anna and Ludvík's dysfunctional marriage but also, was filmed only streets away from a garrison of occupying troops. Given its stark depiction of the terrifying frustration and ceaseless anxiety of life and work under totalitarianism, by the end of the film, no viewer would be left in doubt as to the intentions of the men in the car.

The Ear works successfully as both scathing political parable and unnerving home invasion movie. Kachyňa and screenwriter, Jan Procházka, deftly weave in and out of these seemingly disparate modes through their

1 From January to August 1968, the rapidly liberalising satellite of Czechoslovakia was 'normalised' back under Soviet control by an invasion of Warsaw Pact forces.

parallel narrative structure. The 'main' narrative, which takes place in the present, concerns the long dark night of the soul of Anna and Ludvík's marriage. As they discover their villa's electricity cut, doors thought closed now open, and room after room proving to be bugged, the couple bicker, panic, go through varying stages of inebriation and, as dawn begins to break, appear close to madness. As this narrative progresses, the film sporadically intercuts with scenes from the party they have just attended, with the analepsis planting suggestions as to why their house has come to be bugged.

Josef Illík's cinematography helps bolster the mounting sense of dread which builds in the scenes within the home. Frequently filmed from low angles in locked down shots, there is a sense of the camera having been hurriedly planted in the house, as if waiting for Anna and Ludvík to return. The detail of the power cut further lends the film's first 50 minutes an almost gothic quality. Scenes are primarily lit by cigarette lighters or candelabra, casting long shadows over the interiors and giving these early scenes a striking atmosphere. If there is a fault to be had with the mostly impeccable 90-minute pacing of the film it is that *The Ear* loses much of its mounting momentum when the electricity is turned back on.

Though the tone and feel of the space in the film changes when the lights turn back on, a further layer is added to the film in evoking the quotidian existence of a junior apparatchik. In darkness, what appears to be a somewhat stately home is revealed, in the bright white light of a bulb's glare, to be a house composed of gaudy wallpaper, faux-fur rugs, formica and cheap mod cons. The house becomes like a microcosm of how society in the USSR and its satellites operated:.Behind all of the pomp and grand facades, there merely lay commercial stagnation and paranoid human relations.

Helping to flesh out this portrait of life inside the Communist government are the aforementioned interspersions of scenes from the party, nightmarishly illustrating its incomprehensible levels of bureaucracy, petty authority and social conformity. In chatting with other ministers, their wives, drunk generals and fanatical party functionaries, one of the longest discussions Ludvík endures revolves around how best to pour concrete in freezing temperatures. Perhaps this is a coded reference to the system of penal labour camps common to the Soviet Bloc, as well as a reference to the potential fate of Kosara, Ludvík's boss, who, as it is whispered into Ludvík's ear, has 'excused himself.' Uncomfortably, the majority of these shots are filmed from Ludvík's perspective, with our gaze focused on the minute shifts in facial expressions and emotions of the plotting ministers who gather around him. In these sequences, the dread is subtly filtered through language, with no party or line of dialogue being completely innocent. Does the party official who enquires on his wife's behalf 'if the house (Anna and Ludvík's) is warm enough in the winter?' have some knowledge that their home will soon be liquidated? Another nameless official encourages Ludvík to watch how poorly the waiters serve the food, commenting matter-of-factly: 'None of them is a trained waiter, they're all spies.' The presence of Franz Kafka—perhaps Prague's most famous son—is

most keenly felt in these castle scenes. Similar to the dizzying anxiety felt by Kafka's bank cashier, Josef K., in *The Trial* (1925), the terror of the arbitrary institutional forces exerted upon Ludvík is compounded by the fact he is no dissident or traitor, but an actual functionary of the state apparatus. Ultimately, the only release we are given from these claustrophobic set-pieces is when Ludvík vomits in a nearby toilet. As the film's title implies, *The Ear* is a film built on the senses. Aside from flourishes of woodwind from the soundtrack, the film works in deafening silences. The concurrent heightened attention to listening this evokes makes the viewer aware of any presence within the general feeling of absence, directing our attention to every piece of muffled dialogue, fumbled object or piece of paper burning.

The titular 'ear' is even an actual presence within the house. Even before discovering the microphones left behind in their rooms, Anna constantly addresses and goads it: 'What do you want from us? What do you want, Ear?'. The routines of their marriage are further directed by it, with Anna and Ludvík only making love on a rug in the kitchen, believing (and wrongly so) that no government would bother to bug a kitchen. The warring couple at the centre of Paweł Pawlikowski's more recent work, *Cold War* (2018), seems to echo the details of Kachyňa's couple's life under mid-century surveillance and paranoia.

However, for all its power and polemicism, *The Ear* is recognised as the unfortunate coda to the Czechoslovak New Wave. Alternatively dubbed the 'Czechoslovak Film Miracle' (Žalman 1967: 19), this period of filmmaking between 1963 and 1970—remarkably operating under the auspices of the nationalised film industry—risked censorship to deliver a number of subversive masterpieces. Mixing the avant-garde and the blackly comic, its films—such as Loves of a Blonde (Forman 1965), *Closely Watched Trains* (Menzel 1966) and *Daisies* (Chytilová 1966)—signalled an alienation towards the Communist state through a dynamic and vibrant anticipation of the freedom of expression promised by the Prague Spring. Peter Hames, for instance, asserts that 'internationally, Czechoslovak cinema provided the most visible manifestation of the intellectual ferment that developed from the mid-1960s' (Hames 2005: 3). British director Lindsay Anderson even considered that the New Wave had 'every chance of becoming the best in the world' (cited in Liehm 1974: 413). What is therefore surprising is how a film such as The Ear—perhaps the New Wave's most explicit comment on state repression and surveillance—could have been produced post-Prague Spring. Comparative to their younger contemporaries, such as Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel and Věra Chytilová, Kachyňa and Procházka enjoyed a relatively privileged position as older, established figures in the Czechoslovak film industry. Procházka's allegedly close friendship with President Antonín Novotný has been cited as a reason as to why his work was able to pass censorship more freely than the projects of his peers (Slater 1992: 164). However, following the invasion, Kachyňa was fired from his teaching position at the Prague Film Academy, the KGB accused Procházka of co-heading a dissident party, and *The Ear* was banned (Jachnin 1995:

5-6). The question of The Ear's release therefore becomes a tricky one, it having had its first public screening only months before the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and having been submitted for competition for the Palme d'Or in 1990, two decades after its production wrapped.

More recently, the film has enjoyed something of a second afterlife. In 2019, Second Run released a Blu-ray copy of the film for the first time and last summer, it was further featured as part of the Criterion Channel's programme on the Czechoslovak New Wave. This sustained interest in the film suggests something beyond the specific politics of its day. Indeed, its relevance is clear to see in the ongoing democratic backsliding occurring in the former USSR. This attests somewhat to Milan Kundera's perception of the importance of art from Central and Eastern Europe; rather than merely condemn the specifics of a given political regime, the film asserts itself 'on the strength of social and human experience of a kind people over here [the West] cannot even imagine, it offers new testimony about the human condition' (Kundera 1977: 6). Yet in the case of The Ear, this is testimony given through furtive plotting, mistakenly divulged details and frightened whispers, any sense of recognisable human conditions or relations being as shabby or brittle as the furnishings of Anna and Ludvík's rooms.

In the film's final blackly comic twist, it becomes clear that this 'act' of surveillance has posed no real threat to Anna and Ludvík; instead, it has been a barely concealed ploy to keep them obedient. This revelation exposes to the viewer the ever-present motive which has guided the film. It is less of a character study concerned with its individual protagonists and more of a simulation of the pointless and elaborate rituals of state power.

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–*Daisies [Sedmikrásky].* Dir. Věra Chytilová. Filmové Studio Barrandov, Czechoslovakia, 1966. 74 mins

–*Loves of a Blonde [Lásky jedné plavovlásky].* Dir Miloš Forman. CBK/Filmové Studio Barrandov/Sebor, Czechoslovakia, 1965. 82 mins

Hmyz/Insect

Directed by Jan Švankmajer

Kenneth Ward

The opening to Jan Švankmajer's *Insect (Hmyz,* 2018) sets up the theme of the overlap between the filmic narrative, that of a group of amateur actors putting on an adaptation of Karel and Josef Čapek's 1920s play *Pictures From the Insects' Life (Ze života hmyzu*, 1922), with the filming of *Hmyz* itself. An ageing man, Borovička (Jiří Lábus), rushes out of an apartment building in Prague wearing a dung beetle costume and carrying a script. The actor clumsily knocks into passers-by in the street before the shot cuts to him running with the film crew in view. The initial overlap between the film and its paratext is linked when one of the crew members mirrors Borovička's clumsiness and dramatically tumbles in the street. After other members of the cast of the amateur play are introduced on screen, the opening sequence abruptly cuts to a shot of Švankmajer himself, giving an apparently unscripted, interview-style address to the camera about the nature of the film.

Švankmajer's signature stop-motion animations are renowned internationally, especially in *Alice (Něco z Alenky,* 1988) and *Faust (Lekce Faust,* 1994). Born in Prague in 1934, Švankmajer studied at arts college before enrolling in the department of puppetry at Prague Academy of Performing Arts. His move into filmmaking came relatively late, at the age of 31, when he debuted with *The Last Trick (Poslední trik pana Schwarcewalldea a pana Edgara,* 1964), an animated short film that combined puppetry and stop-motion and whose opening sequence also displayed the cast and crew behind the scenes preparing for the production. Indeed, Švankmajer marks this connection in his opening monologue in *Insect.* He says: 'I direct it like an animated film or puppet theatre; as if the actors had wires attached to the head

and strings on the arms'.

The metafictional dimension of the director coming on stage in *Insect* anchors Švankmajer's surrealist work in the real, lived world in a manner that still raises doubts about the veracity of the real as presented here: did the crew member in the opening sequence of *Insect* mean to fall over? Is Švankmajer reciting a script in his opening address to the camera? Do the crew members in the background know that they are being filmed? Are they all acting as extras in this scene?

These questions generate a blurring of the lines between the real and the overtly fictional on screen in a manner which calls into question our own sense of the ontology of the real world surrounding us. Particularly when we consider the role of the director in the film: if the proprietor of the work is presented as a kind of mock-puppet, whose words, actions and gestures are being manipulated from above, then who is in control of the narrative before us? It should also be considered that the critics' response to the film after its screening at the Rotterdam Film Festival in 2018 was fairly tepid: for Jordan Mintzer of the *Hollywood Reporter*, the film's 'zaniness' is 'exhausting', and its enduring quality is that it is made by the great filmmaker Švankmajer (February 2, 2018). Likewise, Jay Weissberg of *Variety* somewhat reluctantly describes the film as a 'disappointment' while maintaining that Švankmajer remains a 'key proponent of surrealist cinema' (February 2, 2018). Meanwhile, Wendy Ide of *Screen Daily* laments that the film is unlikely to attract new audiences to Švankmajer's work (January 28, 2018). Thus, Švankmajer and his methods (which are both conveniently on show in *Insect*) are the real star attraction in the film. This could still be a self-aware device employed by Švankmajer in response to both the political and filmmaking culture he was operating in.

Keeping Švankmajer's background in puppetry in mind, there is more to it than meets the eye when the director places himself in this film. The *mise-en-abyme* effect of a film narrative about the production of a play is placed inside the even larger Russian doll of Švankmajer himself. However, the uncanny effect of puppets mimicking the appearance and behaviour of humans is ironically reflected in the imagery of the actors mimicking the insects they are supposed to be portraying in their play. Švankmajer somewhat tellingly describes the play as a socio-political satire in his opening address, which self-reflexively describes the film as well. In a work where some higher power, namely the film director, continually interjects and corrects the work of the fictional director of the play (Jaromír Dulava), this acts as a commentary on the role of a film director -such as Švankmajer himself- within the commercialised film industry. The significance of the funding of the film project comes into play here. Despite being a luminary of Czech and Slovak cinema for over six decades, Švankmajer was forced to source part of the funding for his film from a crowdfunding enterprise, Indiegogo, which contributed significantly to the project's 40 million CZK budget (around £1.3 million). In an industry largely reliant on commercial profits, Švankmajer's dependence on a loyal fanbase to source funding is a worrying indictment. Indeed, as Ide suggests, this facet may provide

a barrier to theatrical distribution given that many of those helping the crowdfunding campaign receive a copy of the film (January 28, 2018), thus further marginalising the work in a commercial sense.

Švankmajer's somewhat hyperbolic warning in his prologue to the film, that the brothers Čapek foretold the rise of the Nazis in the 1920s, is again a telling reference point. If Švankmajer is pointing to some underlying, malignant force loitering in the wings here, it is to the denigration of both the production of theatrical performances as well as that of the performances of leading politicians. There is something darker inherent in the comic tone of the film. That the theatrical performance is being put on by a bunch of hapless amateurs, to whom the insects are merely an abstract idea, offers a thinly veiled criticism of the wider political situation. Haphazardly dressed as insects, none of them seem to have any notion of what being an insect involves: indeed, the director continually reminds them of the insect they are playing, imploring them to act like their designated critter. Both Borovička and Jitka (Ivana Uhlířová), who plays the larva in the play, witness the insects coming to life. Thus, the unseen, malignant force manifests itself to some characters, and the seemingly benign develops into a greater obstacle for the individuals who witness them.

In a world increasingly dominated by populist demagogues, the ironic warning this film offers is perhaps that once-great powers, like Švankmajer himself, are waning to the point of mediocrity, but that bigger, malignant forces are lurking in the background: the greedy, profit-driven film industry and the similarly motivated political class. *Insect,* then, can be viewed as the desperate attempt of an artistic master to pass on the skills necessary to break through the mediocrity that surrounds him. If the critical reception to the film is anything to go by, however, there is still a long way to go.

Filmography

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–*Faust (Lekce Faust,* 1994), [film] dir. by Jan Švankmajer (Czech Republic/France/Great Britain: Pandora Cinema, 1994).

–*The Last Trick (Poslední trik pana Schwarcewalldea a pana Edgara,* 1964) [film] dir. by Jan Švankmajer (Prague: Krátký Film Praha; distributed by BFI Video, 2007).

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05

diary

Liminality in Cross-cultural Composition

By Kevin Leomo

Introduction

The concept of liminality is central to my work. Liminality can be described as a threshold state of transition; a space of in-betweenness; existing between and across boundaries. Liminality manifests in two key ways in my work: exploring transitional elements or spectra in sound: sound-silence, fragility-stability, and stasis-movement; as well as liminality as cross-cultural practice. The focus of this essay is on my cross-cultural practice and how I situate myself within a liminal space – existing between Western music, which my background is in, and non-Western musics, an area I have researched and collaborated with performers in on several occasions. This liminal space is also important to me on a personal level, as a person of mixed race, trying to reconcile my identities and who I am as a composer.

Liminality

The concept of liminality was first introduced by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, in his seminal 1909 work, *The Rites of Passage*. Liminality here is referred to in terms of rites of passages or ceremonial acts between two social phases. His work went largely unrecognised during the twentieth century until Victor Turner brought new light to it during the 1960s. Bjorn Thomassen's *Liminality and the Modern* (2014) further develops liminality in the field of social and political theory, building upon the groundwork laid by Gennep, and later Turner. 'Liminality refers to any "betwixt and between" situation or object, any in-between place or movement, a state of suspense, a moment of freedom between two structured world-views' (Thomassen 2014: 7).

Liminality is therefore an extremely useful concept when working between different musical practices; between cultural boundaries. These boundaries are important thresholds, full of contradictions and ambivalence; they both separate and join different places, providing a site of representation (Sharma 2009: 115). Homi K. Bhabha discusses the 'third space,' a liminal area useful for framing cross-cultural work. This third space is a 'fantastic location of cultural difference where new expressive cultural identities continually open out performatively to realign the boundaries' (Bhabha 1994: 219). As in my cross-cultural work, elements from different musical cultures are interwoven and the 'third space' can be seen as an opportunity where differences are embraced not as divisive elements, but as possibilities co-existing. In discussion of people with mixed backgrounds, anthropologist Halleh Ghorashi builds upon Bhabha's writings to describe cultural hybridity as: 'people celebrating multiple positioning by making choices about living with and within cultural difference"' (Ghorashi 2004: 334). For Ghorashi, this notion of cultural hybridity represents a dynamic and plural notion of culture, as opposed to an essentialist view of a static, monolithic notion of culture. My cross-cultural work engages with historical cultural practices which are then situated in a new context, occupying a liminal space, dynamic and alive.

Cross-cultural engagement

Having studied Western art music practices, I first encountered the notion of cross-cultural practice during my master's, when I had the opportunity to compose for Ensemble Okeanos. The ensemble is comprised of a mixture of Western and Japanese instruments – at the time, this was shakuhachi, oboe, koto, and cello. In order to write for these instruments, I undertook research into the performance practice, history, and playing techniques of the shakuhachi and koto, as well as their place in Japanese music, both traditional and contemporary. Aside from learning about these instruments' physical characteristics, I also researched the accompanying philosophies and aesthetics of Japanese music, which are ingrained in the instruments' performance practices.

In my work for Ensemble Okeanos, I attempted to bring Western and Japanese instruments together through blending their sounds in a way that was symbolic of a cross-cultural approach, engaging in dialogue between multiple cultural sources. The resulting work examined the ensemble's fundamental juxtaposition of Japanese and Western instruments to highlight their contrasts whilst also demonstrating how they could be brought together. Ghorashi states that the process of identity formation involves both sameness and difference simultaneously (ibid.: 330). Although I didn't recognise this at the time, this initial act of cross-cultural composition was also a way for me to reconcile my dual identity.

This was the first time I worked in this cross-cultural space, bringing together Western instruments and in this case, Japanese instruments. Inhabiting this liminal space between two cultural practices was extremely

fruitful and led to me to consider the value of this synthesis or bringing together of two cultures; a reflection or way for me to engage with being from two different cultures myself, embracing both these confluences of similarities and differences. Bhabha describes this intercultural experience, the 'contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures – at once the impossibility of culture's containedness and the boundary between. It is indeed something like culture's 'in-between', bafflingly both alike and different' (Bhabha 1996: 2).

I learned how a cross-cultural approach can afford a different perspective to composition, which is something I pursued further, by developing different models for cross cultural composition and collaboration.

I am interested in a repurposing of instruments or altering how performers interact with their instruments, unlearning 'traditional' training or methods of playing. Recontextualising performance practices and techniques to create different sounds has been a fruitful avenue of research for me.

Following my initial study of Japanese instruments, I went on to write a piece for solo alto flute as part of Psappha Ensemble's Composing for Flute scheme. Based on acquired knowledge of shakuhachi playing techniques, I created a recontextualisation of shakuhachi performance practice and sound production on the Western alto flute in order to demonstrate how traditional techniques can be repurposed into a new music idiom. Another example of this model was work I carried out for cello as well as string quartet, influenced by my research into Korean instruments, haegeum and geomungo, following a composition for performers from the Society for New Korean music. Similarly to the interpretation of shakuhachi on flute, I worked with cellist Emily De Simone on techniques informed by the sounds and playing methods of these two Korean instruments.

Models of cross-cultural composition		
non-Western instruments	Western instruments	mixture of Western and non-Western instruments
sketches (2019) for sho, shakuhachi, duduk, erhu, kemençe, sarangi	*Nocturne* (2017) for alto flute	*Cross Currents* (2016) for shakuhachi, oboe, koto, cello
catching the light (2020) for sitar	sketches (2019) for cello / string quartet	*The Way the Light Falls* (2018) for flute, clarinet, horn, bassoon, haegeum, geomungo

Sound and silence

My engagement with cross-cultural work has had a lasting impact on my approach to sound and silence. From my initial research into Japanese music, I learned about Zen Buddhism's close link with the shakuhachi and approaches to noise (*sawari*) and silence (*ma)*. It was eye-opening to discover these different ways of thinking about music. What I discovered about Japanese musical aesthetics reframed my compositional practice and how I thought about musical parameters such as sound, silence, space, and temporality.

My fixation with instrumental timbre has certainly been influenced by non-Western instruments' much broader colour palettes in comparison to Western ones, as well as the inclusion of a wider range of sounds. The acceptance of 'noise' or sound in addition to pure pitch contrasts with traditional Western approaches which often focus on 'purity' of tone and technique. This has manifested in my writing for Western instruments, where I seek out playing methods which create more detailed and varied sounds, as well as techniques that can be considered fragile and not necessarily reliable, which can be considered antithesis to typical Western notions. A prime example of this would be my exploration and research of multiphonics – the sounding of multiple pitches and frequencies simultaneously on instruments which normally produce single pitches – across various different instruments and how they can be exploited to create rich and fascinating sonic results.

Of course, Western composers have approached these ideas in various forms, but it was important for me to discover my own pathway through my navigation of intercultural thinking about sound. The very concept of combining or synthesising Western and non-Western instruments and associated approaches to music was very interesting to me as a way to help forge my own compositional identity whilst also considering my own mixed heritage, between East and West, situated in this liminal space between two cultural zones. In this work, I perform the role of what Victor Turner describes as a 'liminal actor' (Turner 1977: 94-113), bridging cross-cultural differences. Jasmin Mahadevan expands upon this by stating that liminal actors' culturally liminal position between two spaces allows them to be intercultural specialists; 'the permanent inhabitants of the in-between' (Mahadevan 2015: 243).

Sitar collaboration

A significant development in my practice was participation in Psappha Ensemble's Composing for Sitar Scheme. I had the opportunity to write for solo sitar – there isn't much experimental music written for sitar, so I was eager to create a work in a cross-cultural space between my Western practice and traditional Indian music.

At our first session, the sitarist Jasdeep Singh Degun informed me that we weren't going to work with notated scores, and he therefore wouldn't be playing the sketches that I had brought with me. He instead asked me to sing

what I wanted him to play, engaging with aural transmission practices rooted in classical Indian music. I was immediately forced outside of my comfort zone – which was working with notated scores; certainly not singing. I realised that in my practice as a composer relying on said scores, I hadn't devoted time to thinking about how so many musical cultures operate *without* a reliance on these written scores. In my previous cross-cultural engagements, I had benefitted from the luxury of working with musicians proficient in Western notation. While Jasdeep was of course conversant in Western notation, it was clear that my compositional process would be carried out differently.

I therefore embarked on an extremely interesting project, grappling with the challenge of working within a cross-cultural space I was less accustomed to. I had to reconcile our different musical practices, preconceptions, and approaches to music making. I had to learn to work in a way which didn't rely on notated scores, as well as adapt my compositional approach to be more inclusive of Jasdeep's musical practice of North Indian classical music. In turn, Jasdeep became more open to experimentation and incorporating sounds and techniques which he normally wouldn't utilize. Occupying this liminal space between our practices allowed for a certain type of freedom that Thomassen espouses; a freedom which 'sparks creativity and innovation, peaking in transfiguring moments of sublimity' (Thomassen 2018: 1). This process could be likened to the *inter*cultural negotiations described by Mahadevan in which 'transition takes place from two different and culture-specific negotiation scripts towards a potential intercultural script that establishes a link between previously divergent negotiation patterns' (Mahadevan 2015: 242). The concept of liminality here helps to explain this process of intercultural negotiation and collaboration.

We ended up working together closely over a period of several months. I would record sounds of other instruments or techniques such as utilizing piano strings as a proxy for the sitar and experimenting with the types of actions and sounds I wanted Jas to replicate or try out. Eventually these sounds were codified in a text score, but the main method of transmission and composing and learning the work was sonic. This different experience of performer-composer power dynamics was a crucial learning experience for me, particularly in this realm of cross-cultural work. Coming together with Jas to create a work collaboratively in a liminal space between two different musical cultures was a really special experience – I learned so much about collaborative practice and working within and between Western and non-Western musics, navigating personal and cultural boundaries, whilst considering my own personal identity.

Notation

In addition to my collaborative practice, my notational practice has been influenced by my cross-cultural engagements. I believe that it's important to use an appropriate method of notation for the context of the collaboration or the practice of the performer, as I discovered in my work with Jasdeep. I've a system of notation which tries to be less prescriptive and more

open, especially in terms of duration, rhythm, and structure, while still maintaining a high degree of control in regard to sound production and timbre, as these are key elements of my practice.

I am also interested in having notation engage with the sonic result in some way. The perception of silence and extremely quiet music can be likened to visual imagery and the concept of negative space. In the work of artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Marcia Hafif, viewers must take a closer look to attend to the minute surface detail of their paintings; one's method of attention shifts to accommodate the object being perceived. This is something that I try to capture in my approach to notation, especially in terms of simplicity; allowing the player to focus on the production of sound rather than trying to grapple with too much visual information or clutter.

This has been particularly influenced by my study of Japanese approaches to silence, or ma, which led me to study composers such as John Cage and Tōru Takemitsu, and more recently, interacting with composers from the Wandelweiser collective. Through this research, I was able to refine my approach to silence and notation. I have also begun to utilise more text-based scores, as well as further develop my practice in aural transmission and collaborative work, influenced by non-Western practices.

Conclusion

In summary, much of my recent work has involved evaluating the different influences on my practice and how their convergence has helped shape my compositional identity. A significant part of this has been my cross-cultural engagement and time spent occupying a cultural space between Western music, and musics of Japan, Korea, and India, as touched upon throughout this essay.

It's important to note that working in a cross-cultural space carries certain elements that one should be acutely aware of. Sensitivity in this space is extremely important – you *must* be aware of the value of things that you can never fully understand or understand in the ways that someone from that lived culture does. However, these collaborations are so fruitful, and should be continued to be undertaken, with the correct intention and approach.

In my work with the sitarist Jasdeep Singh Degun, we both left our comfort zones and were significantly challenged in our working methods and practice to create a work together navigating the relationship of our collaboration, as well as cultural boundaries and musical practices. Ghorashi describes this hybrid positioning as being not about a duality of cultures, but about the feeling of being different but the same – a duality is not created, but instead a potential duality is solved (Ghorashi 2004: 339).

As a person of mixed heritage, this cross-cultural journey has been important. The concept of liminality is useful in helping me describe this feeling of in betweenness – of being between two spaces: one Western, the other Asian – while often at times not feeling entirely home in either space, but rather somewhere in between.

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