

# Recherche littéraire Literary Research





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# Recherche littéraire/Literary Research

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## **Recherche littéraire / Literary Research**

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As a publication of the International Comparative Literature Association, the bilingual journal Recherche littéraire / Literary Research has the mission of informing comparative literature scholars worldwide of recent contributions to the field. To that end, it publishes reviews of noteworthy books on comparative topics as well as review essays discussing recent research developments in particular sub-fields of the discipline. RL/LR publishes comparative literary scholarship by invitation only.

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## **EDITORIAL**



## Comparative Poetics: A Path towards Renewal?

It is a small miracle that the 2020 issue of *Literary Research* could be compiled at all in the stressful days of the COVID-19 global pandemic. At the outset, then, I wish to sincerely thank all our authors for their strong determination. This allowed us to assemble a volume of contributions spanning a vast range of geographical, historical and disciplinary areas related to the field of comparative poetics.

The first section of this issue comprises four scholarly essays emphasizing the nuances of cultural diversity in our contemporary world. In her essay, “POST-ID: Five Lessons in Post-Identity Politics from the Postcolony,” Chantal Zabus astutely examines the multiple reconfigurations of identities in the (post)colonial world, as they undermine the assumed superiority of the English language. Drawing from diverse African, Asian and middle-eastern material, Zabus convincingly dissects what she calls the cultural “striated allegiances” of diasporic identities (49). She subsequently extends her linguistic argument to include non-binary conceptions of sexual and gender identities. The Calibanistic rejection of the father / Prospero language Zabus alludes to at the beginning of her essay is echoed in Chris Thurman’s article about the problematic reception of the Bard’s works in contemporary South Africa. In his essay, “Kunene and the Swan: Two Approaches to Biography, History and Shakespeare in South African Theatre,” Thurman contrasts John Kani’s *Kunene and the King*, a play strongly indebted to *King Lear*, to *Swan Song*, a solo-performance piece by a young female South African playwright, Buhle Ngaba. The latter contains references to *Julius Caesar* and, through the figure of Ophelia, *Hamlet*. While Kani’s work, performed both in England and South Africa, offers a rigid view of South Africa as predicated on a neatly defined black / white divide, *Swan Song* foregrounds a more subtle depiction of fluid female identities in post-apartheid South Africa. In “Boom and Bust: The Global Novel of Ireland (2007) and India (2008),” Janet Wilson examines two novels from countries that are rarely compared: she provides insightful close-reading analyses of *The Gathering* (2007) by Irish writer Anne Enright and of *The White Tiger* (2008) by

Indian novelist Aravind Adiga, two works that won the Booker Prize. As she puts it in her conclusion, these two novels invite us to reconsider the “transnational global imaginary” (113), as “the displacement of crucial images of nationhood associated with the pre-neoliberal economy and postcolonial nation in these novels reflects their particular moment in time” (113). In his essay « Joseph de Guignes et John Barrow face à la Chine impériale, ou les illusions des *hommes du lointain* (1793–1812) », Jacques Marx explores the differences that typified British and French cultural relations with China at the turn of the eighteenth century, through the lens of travel guides and the literary reactions they triggered.

The second section of the journal contains two review essays, exploring markedly different topics. In her capacity as the Chair of the ICLA research committee on comparative gender studies, Liedeke Plate surveys the recent trends of this vast field in her review essay entitled “Comparative Gender Studies: Where We Are Now.” As she points out, gender is now increasingly considered intersectionally, i.e. “as always intersecting with other social categories” (150). In this, she recalls Chantal Zabus’s discussion of gender outside the traditional male / female binary template. In her erudite essay, Plate considers advances in gynocritical scholarship and masculinist studies. She also deals with the necessity of queering translation to reflect nuances of gender in different cultures, as well as transgender issues. In “From Climate Crises to Crises of Language: Redefining Magical Realism in the Anthropocene,” Eugene Arva discusses Ben Holgate’s recent publication on ecocriticism and the magic realist aesthetic. Holgate elucidates the ways in which magical realism, as a mode of writing, can powerfully express the magnitude of environmental crises. In doing so, Holgate extends the postcolonial corpus generally associated with magical realism to include Chinese material. As Arva concludes: “...precolonial cultures have something to teach industrial and post-industrial societies: that refusing to acknowledge the agency of the non-human and the environment, as well as their interdependence, will come at the West’s own peril” (185).

The third section, assembling some thirty book reviews, spans a similarly wide geographical and temporal terrain. David O’Donnell’s review of *The Bloomsbury Companion to Modernist Literature* opens this section by focusing on a literary movement generally associated with the early decades of the twentieth century. However, as the editors of this companion indicate, modernist elements survive in today’s age. The section ends at the dawn of our new century with Michelle Keown’s

discussion of Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey's most recent book, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, which concentrates on our future planetary challenges. Between these two poles, the reader will find reviews of books dealing with various topics traditionally associated with comparative poetics. Issues related to literary history, literary theory, literature and music, literature and religion, world literature, literature and diaspora, cosmopolitanism, globalization, Indigenous and (post)colonial poetics are thus placed in productive conversation. This clearly evidences the persistent wealth of comparative literary studies.

As always, I wish to convey words of thanks to all those colleagues and friends who made this issue of *Literary Research* possible: the editorial team of the Brussels branch of Peter Lang, Professor Dorothy Figueira, the immediate past editor, our advisory board and my efficient editorial assistants. Needless to say, *Literary Research* owes its longevity to the generous financial support of ICLA. However, in the painful circumstances of today's global pandemic, I would also wish to conclude on a note of optimism addressed to all our colleagues, their family, and friends. Like Verlaine, who pleaded for "Music before all else," I deeply believe in the transformative power inherent in the combination of literature and music. Therefore, as I conclude this editorial penned in times of crisis, please allow me to allude to the intermedial mood of healing so incisively expressed in Richard Strauss' famous Lied, "Morgen!" The words of John Henry Mackay's poem, "Und Morgen wird die Sonne wieder scheinen," kept haunting me as I edited this issue of a journal meant to celebrate the vigor of comparative poetics. I hope, dear readers, that when you discover these autumn leaves, the prophetic promise underlying Strauss' radiant Lied will have become a reality.

Marc Maufort

Brussels, June 2020



## ÉDITORIAL





## La poétique comparatiste : un chemin vers le renouveau ?

Qu'il ait été possible de composer le numéro de 2020 de *Recherche littéraire* dans le contexte difficile de l'épidémie mondiale de la COVID-19 tient du miracle. D'emblée, je souhaite remercier très sincèrement tous les participants à ce volume pour leur ténacité, qui nous a permis de concevoir un ensemble de contributions couvrant un grand nombre de champs géographiques, historiques et disciplinaires associés au domaine de la poétique comparatiste.

La première section de ce numéro contient quatre articles scientifiques qui mettent en relief les nuances de la diversité culturelle dans notre monde contemporain. Dans son essai, « POST-ID : Five Lessons in Post-Identity Politics from the Postcolony », Chantal Zabus examine de façon subtile comment les multiples reconfigurations identitaires du monde (post)colonial contestent la soi-disant supériorité de la langue anglaise. Elle analyse de façon convaincante ce qu'elle appelle les allégeances culturelles striées des identités diasporiques (49). Elle élargit ensuite son argumentation linguistique pour inclure les conceptions non-binaires des identités sexuelles et genrées. Le rejet de la langue du père / Prospéro par le monstre Caliban auquel Zabus fait allusion au début de son article trouve un écho dans l'article que Chris Thurman consacre à la réception problématique des oeuvres de Shakespeare dans l'Afrique du Sud contemporaine. Dans son essai intitulé « Kunene and the Swan : Two Approaches to Biography, History and Shakespeare in South African Theatre », Thurman met en contraste la pièce de John Kani, *Kunene and the King*, fortement inspirée par *Le roi Lear*, avec le monologue théâtral d'une jeune artiste sud-africaine, Buhle Ngaba. Ce monologue contient des références à *Jules César* ainsi qu'à *Hamlet*, à travers la figure d'Ophélie. Si la pièce de Kani, qui fut représentée à la fois en Afrique du Sud et en Angleterre, révèle une conception rigide de l'Afrique du Sud articulée sur une division trop nette entre cultures occidentale et africaine, *Swan Song* déploie une vision subtile de la fluidité des identités féminines dans l'Afrique du Sud de l'après-apartheid. Dans « Boom and Bust : The

Global Novel of Ireland (2007) and India (2008) », Janet Wilson se penche sur deux romans de cultures rarement comparées : elle nous offre ainsi des analyses textuelles pénétrantes de *The Gathering* (2007), écrit par la romancière irlandaise Anne Enright, et de *The White Tiger* (2008) du romancier indien Aravind Adiga, deux œuvres couronnées par le prestigieux Booker Prize. Comme Wilson l'indique dans sa conclusion, ces deux romans nous invitent à reconsidérer le « transnational global imaginary » (113), dès lors que « the displacement of crucial images of nationhood associated with the pre-neoliberal economy and postcolonial nation in these novels reflects their particular moment in time » (113). Dans son essai « Joseph de Guignes et John Barrow face à la Chine impériale, ou les illusions des *hommes du lointain* (1793–1812) », Jacques Marx explore les différences qui caractérisèrent les relations culturelles entre la France, l'Angleterre et la Chine à la fin du dix-huitième siècle à travers une analyse des guides de voyages et des réactions littéraires qu'ils suscitèrent.

La seconde section de la revue nous fait découvrir deux essais critiques qui traitent de sujets très différents. En tant que Présidente du Comité de recherche de l'AIRC sur les études genrées comparatistes, Liedeke Plate nous propose un aperçu des récentes tendances de recherche de ce vaste domaine dans son essai critique intitulé « Comparative Gender Studies : Where We Are Now ». Comme elle le souligne, le genre est de plus en plus considéré dans une perspective intersectionnelle, « as always intersecting with other social categories » (150). De ce point de vue, cet article rappelle l'analyse de Chantal Zabus de la notion de genre en dehors du modèle traditionnel binaire: masculin / féminin. Dans cet article érudit, Plate prend en compte les travaux récents effectués dans les domaines de la gynocritique et des études de la masculinité. Elle insiste également sur la nécessité d'adapter la traduction afin de reproduire les nuances liées au genre dans différentes cultures. Elle se concentre en outre sur des thématiques transgenrées. Dans « From Climate Crises to Crises of Language : Redefining Magical Realism in the Anthropocene, » Eugene Arva se penche sur la publication récente de Ben Holgate relative au lien entre l'écocritique et l'esthétique du réalisme magique. Comme le montre Arva, Holgate clarifie les façons dont le réalisme magique, en tant que mode d'écriture, exprime avec force l'ampleur des crises environnementales de notre époque. Dans son étude, Holgate élargit le corpus postcolonial généralement associé au réalisme magique pour y inclure des œuvres littéraires chinoises. Arva conclut : « ... precolonial

cultures have something to teach industrial and post-industrial societies: that refusing to acknowledge the agency of the non-human and the environment, as well as their interdependence, will come at the West's own peril » (185).

La troisième section de la revue, qui rassemble une trentaine de comptes rendus, couvre un champ géographique et temporel tout aussi vaste. Le compte rendu de *The Bloomsbury Companion to Modernist Literature* rédigé par David O'Donnell ouvre cette section en se focalisant sur un mouvement littéraire généralement associé aux premières décennies du vingtième siècle. Toutefois, comme le montrent les éditeurs de ce volume, des éléments modernistes persistent à notre époque. Cette même section se termine à l'aube de notre nouveau siècle, avec le compte rendu livré par Michelle Keown du dernier livre d'Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, qui traite des enjeux de notre futur planétaire. Entre les deux pôles de ces ouvrages, le lecteur trouvera des comptes rendus de livres consacrés à des sujets traditionnellement associés à la poétique comparatiste. Sont ainsi placées en conversation des thématiques relatives à l'histoire littéraire, la théorie littéraire, la littérature et la musique, la littérature et la religion, la littérature-monde, la littérature et la diaspora, le cosmopolitisme, la globalisation ainsi que les études (post)coloniales et indigènes. Cette section met donc bien en évidence la richesse sans cesse renouvelée de la littérature comparée.

Comme chaque année, je tiens à remercier tous les collègues et amis qui m'ont aidé à la réalisation de ce numéro de *Recherche littéraire* : l'équipe éditoriale de Peter Lang à Bruxelles, Dorothy Figueira, la rédactrice qui m'a précédé, notre Comité consultatif, ainsi que mes efficaces assistants de rédaction. Il va sans dire que *Recherche littéraire* doit sa longévité au soutien financier généreux de l'AILC. Toutefois, dans les circonstances douloureuses de la pandémie que nous vivons actuellement, je souhaiterais également terminer sur une note d'optimisme adressée à tous nos collègues, leurs familles et amis. Comme Verlaine, qui plaidait pour « De la musique avant toute chose », je crois profondément au pouvoir de transformation de la conjonction entre littérature et musique. C'est pourquoi, en concluant cet éditorial écrit en temps de crise, je désirerais faire allusion à l'atmosphère de régénération et de renouveau si remarquablement exprimée par le célèbre Lied de Richard Strauss, « Morgen ! ». Les mots du poème de John Henry Mackay, « Und Morgen wird die Sonne wieder scheinen » n'ont cessé de me hanter alors que j'étais ce numéro d'une revue destinée à célébrer la vigueur de la poétique

comparatiste. J'espère, chères lectrices et chers lecteurs, que lorsque vous découvrirez ces pages, ces « feuilles » d'automne, la promesse prophétique qui sous-tend le Lied radieux de Strauss sera devenue une réalité.

Marc Maufort

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**ARTICLES DE RECHERCHE / ARTICLES**



# Post-ID: Five Lessons in Post-Identity Politics from the Postcolony

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It's not the assertion of identity that's important; it's the assertion of non-identity.

Michel Foucault (qtd. in Macey xv)

No, an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the indeterminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures.

Jacques Derrida (28)

## Introduction: I-dentity Politics and Intersectionality

In English, the word “I-dentity” contains the first pronoun “I” which is often contested because it is linked to the emergence of what Dror Wahrman has called the “modern self,” that is, “an essential core of selfhood characterized by psychological depth, or interiority, which is the bedrock of unique, expressive individual identity” (Wahrman xi). Admittedly, Wahrman was discussing England in the long eighteenth century, that is, with an eye to the West. If one looks at this western “I” with a naked eye, one is struck by its anorexic slimness, for it is the thinnest pronoun in the English language; it stands tall, thin, erect, and dominant. Yet, it is not necessarily used with the same fervor in other languages, such as Chinese. In Yu Ouyang’s novel *The English Class* (2010), the Chinese immigrant protagonist reflects, as he is made to learn English in Melbourne, Australia:

It seems strange that in English you always say “I” do this or “I” do that but in Chinese you could write a whole story without using a single “I” as if the

word “I” did not exist. But of course if “I” write the story, “I” do not have to assert “I’s” presence every time the “I” appears.

(Ouyang 55)

This skinny, almost ghostly “I,” which can disappear in some languages or leave only a trace like the grin of the fading Cheshire Cat, is twinned to a Derridean “phantasmatic” modern self.

This modern self was, however, at some point, inexorably embedded in identity politics. Identity politics may be said to emanate in the western world from the second half of the twentieth century. More particularly, the 1960s bear witness to the emergence of identitarian social movements, which galvanized into action against injustice to a particular group’s identity. Among these movements, we number the third-wave women’s movement, the US Civil Rights movement, and the gay and lesbian movement, as well as nationalist and postcolonial movements, even as these groupings fought against each other and did not always recognize that they were subjected to the same mechanisms of oppression, as for instance, civil rights and LGBT+ rights.<sup>1</sup>

Central to the practice of identity politics are, according to Vasiliki Neofotistos, “the notions of sameness and difference, and thus the anthropological study of identity politics involves the study of the politics of difference” (n.p.). Somewhat paradoxically, western identity politics places the individual within a group against a common adversary so that the individual’s difference is erased. The erasure of difference is already at work in the very etymology of “i-identity,” from the Latin *idem-unitas*, that is, “sameness” and “oneness” rolled into one.

Identity politics, even in its receding garb, was dealt a cruel blow by intersectionality, as it crystallized in the 1990s. Admittedly, the figurehead of the movement, Kimberlé W. Crenshaw was addressing, in her 1991 article, “women of color” in the United States of America. Earlier attempts at an intersectional approach were made in the Global South, as in nineteenth-century colonial India by Savitribai Phule,<sup>2</sup> but without spelling its name. Despite its controversial point of origin, intersectionality is generally seen as a late-twentieth-century research

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<sup>1</sup> LGBT+ is here a shortcut for the ever-expanding LGBPTQI2A+ (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Pansexual-Transgender-Queer-Intersex-Two-Spirit-Others).

<sup>2</sup> <https://indiaresists.com/six-reasons-every-indian-feminist-remember-savitribai-phule/> Accessed 11 Dec. 2019.



paradigm, crisscrossing race, gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity, in response to 1960s identity politics. By the early twenty-first century, intersectionality had been taken up not only by scholars but also by policy advocates and activists in various locations. But it has also been found guilty by association. Intersectionality has been accused of breaking “groups into even-smaller sub-groups” (Collins and Bilge 127).

In addition to the clash with intersectionality, another reason for the pending demise of identity politics is the nation-state’s fragmentation, not only because of its shifting of policies from social welfare to a neoliberal economy but also possibly because the recognition of the nation-state has engendered exacerbated forms of nationalism, as Eriksen, and Belmi *et al* have shown. But the potential deconstruction of national identities can also generate dangerous forms of sub-identities.

I here aim to attest to the demise of identity politics, not so much in its feuds with intersectionality as in the rise of multiple postcolonial subjectivities, as they are capable of constructing themselves from one situation to the next or from one moment to the next. I plan to do so under the extreme vetting of postcolonial literatures and cultures, from the African continent to Australasia and, in the process, I aim to develop the idea of a “post-ID” world.

The rise of multiple identities is most verifiable in the postcolonial, dismantling nation-state. Subjects in the postcolony, as Achille Mbembe reminds us, “have to have marked ability to manage not just a single identity, but several—flexible enough to negotiate as and when necessary” (Mbembe 104). The negotiation of multiple identities or, in the African context, what Masolo has called “open-ended personhoods” has thus been a token of the postcolony.

Within or outside of the postcolony, the hyphen that used to link the nation and the state has turned into a slash, pointing towards what Appadurai called “disjuncture” (Appadurai 14). This hyphenated entity fails to combine the political entity of the state and the cultural entity of the nation, where its members can recognize themselves around the use of a common descent (and a common foe) or of the same language. The mother tongue and the monolingual paradigm, which came into being in late eighteenth-century Europe and was instrumented in producing

a homogeneous nation-state is now being ousted by postcolonial “linguaging.”<sup>3</sup>

## I. Accented Identities: Linguaging in the Postcolony

Caliban’s curse in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*—“You taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / for learning me your language!” (1.2.362–64) – came to reflect postcolonial writers’ concerns with linguistic decolonization as of roughly the 1960s. Caliban’s mother, Sycorax, allegedly a witch, was banished from Algiers and delivered her child, Caliban, somewhere on a non-descript island in the Caribbean. That makes Caliban a second-generation immigrant of sorts on Prospero’s island, who spoke a language that Shakespeare never identifies; could it be his mother’s Arabic or possibly Amazigh? Yet he did learn the language of Prospero, possibly Milanese. This linguistic “profit,” implied in one of the most famous curses in literature, reveals tensions between the language received from mothers or other mothers and that received from Prospero as father imago.

In cursing Prospero’s father tongue, the Calibanic writer does violence to it through a series of dis-cursive tricks. In order to understand these tricks, we need to go back to the interdependence of language, culture and identity, which is more commonly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. This hypothesis (from Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf writing in the 1950s) holds that one’s worldview depends on one’s linguistic frame of reference and that the world is organized by the linguistic systems in our minds (Carroll; Mandelbaum). The structure of the “native” language is therefore thought to impact the “native” speakers’ perception and categorization of experience. The emphasis is here clearly on “nativity,” itself predicated on the “mother” in the mother tongue.

In the heyday of postcolonial theory, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was ousted by a new conception of language as a human construct available to “real” people. In other words, a language no longer points to one worldview and one linguistic identity; what is more, in its new transgressive usage, it no longer expresses the interests of the nation-state. In the case of English, it is no longer the language of one specific community or ethnicity. English is now spoken by more Calibans than

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<sup>3</sup> I here borrow the term from Rey Chow.

Prosperos; that is, it is spoken by a higher number of non-native speakers than native speakers. It has been appropriated by the unruly barbarians, who have introduced a new rhythm and a new tempo.

Such rhythms undermine the authority of English, which is minorized, especially in novels staging cross-cultural encounters. For instance, in *Afternoon Raag* (1993), Indian novelist Amit Chaudhuri's protagonist overhears British girls and ponders: "[they spoke] in a rapid language that I hardly followed" (Chaudhuri 69). For all their "putative sovereignty," these "native speakers" become, as Rey Chow put it in another context, "audible or discernible only when there are non-native speakers present" (Chow 58–59). While English has come to stay in India, it is, after the official language, Hindi, an associate language in a multilingual state, which boasts the largest number of second-language English speakers in the world.

After learning lessons in Arabic at the mosque, Rey Chow, who grew up in Hong Kong in the 1970s, remembers running the risk of penalties if caught speaking Cantonese on "English-speaking days" at the Anglo-Chinese secondary school she attended. Moreover, like any Hong Kong child, she had to navigate between Cantonese and the officialized Mandarin or *Putongha*. In *Not Like a Native Speaker* (2014), Rey Chow sees the native speaker as "the last bastion" remaining after "the epistemic break" that caused a minority of people (say, the English) to impose their tongue, which a majority will speak as "an external graft" (Chow 41). English thus emerges as only "a variant in an in / finite series" which hosts "any number of fits and misfits between the speaker and the prosthesis" (Chow 42), a word Chow knowingly borrows from Jacques Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other or the Prosthetics of Origins*. Besides "having an accent," as Chow puts it, perhaps in the double sense of possessing and taming it as well as being saddled with it, one can also "write with an accent."

### **Writing with an Accent**

Our present-day world hosts about 7,000 different languages (some say 6,000 or 5,000); over 5,000 "race" or ethnic groups; over 12,000 diverse cultures; and some 190 independent nation-states (as opposed to 70 or 90 in 1930, Gallaher *et al* 20). Most of these id-entities experienced the trauma of colonization and are thus presently faced with decolonization. When "the Empire writes back to the centre," as Salman Rushdie and

then Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin famously put it, it does not so much “write back” with a vengeance as “with an accent.” The methods used to *write with an accent* and to convey ideological variance cover a myriad of devices, which I have loosely designated as “indigenization” (Zabus *The African Palimpsest*). The Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand transliterates calques from Urdu and Punjabi; Raja Rao, for his part, uses sanskritized, Kannada-flavored English; they have indigenized English; these are textual antecedents to Salman Rushdie’s relishing concept of the chutnification of English.

“Writing with an accent” is also how the Iranian-born, American writer Taghi Modarresi described what he called his “translation” from Farsi into English of his own Persian novels such as *The Pilgrim’s Rules of Etiquette* (1989). Phrases like “nobody chopped any chives for him”; “dust be on their heads”; “trying to be the bean in every soup”; or “he didn’t possess any more than a sigh” clearly suggest another language than English and hint at the author’s double legacy – Farsi and English.<sup>4</sup> This accented English points to a double identity, an accented identity. This is the written equivalent of “the xenophone,” that is, the sounds in speech that is not native to the language being spoken, and which Rey Chow has elevated to encompass “the emergent languaging domain” (Chow 59). However, this postcolonial languaging condition went at first through a phase of miserabilist dispossession, when the mother tongue cried out to be rescued from the encroaching hold of the father tongue.

In order to understand this first phase, I here zero in on Ijò in Nigeria to show that the mother tongue in these early days of dispossession is acutely felt as a language lost and difficult to retrieve. In his one and only novel, *The Voice* (1964), Nigerian Gabriel Okara wrote:

“Shuffling feet turned Okolo’s head to the door. He saw three men standing silent, opening not their mouths. ‘Who are you people be?’ Okolo asked. The people opened not their mouths. ‘If you are coming-in people be, then come in’ (Okara 26). Okara arranged to have English constantly suggest Ijò, his mother tongue. As I have ascertained, with help from Gabriel Okara, who acted as native linguistic informant, Okara has been faithful to his mother-tongue as a site of nativity and pure origin. But what if this mother tongue itself is “not really monolingual, homogeneous and fully familiar?” asks Yasemin Yildiz (67) in relation to

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<sup>4</sup> See my discussion in Zabus, *The African Palimpsest*, xvii-xviii.

Adorno. Okara's mother tongue is Ijò but he could not write in it. He is faithful to an absent mother, as it were.

The mother tongue is often deemed itself "faithful," as in Nobel Laureate Czeslaw Miłosz's poem, "Faithful Mother Tongue" (1968):

Faithful mother tongue  
 I have been serving you.  
 Every night, I used to set before you little bowls of colours  
 so you could have your birch, your cricket, your finch  
 as preserved in my memory.

Miłosz's mother tongue appears as an exacting matron, who pulls the threads of filial memory, which in turn modulates into the speaker's faithful representation of the native land but he cautions, his mother tongue, Polish, is also "a tongue of the debased," "a tongue of informers" (Miłosz 90). During the same decade, in 1964 in the Nigerian postcolony, Okara's mother tongue is equated with the mother land desecrated by the sons of the greedy and corrupt postcolony.

Okara does not, however, translate Ijò into English in that he does not aim at recoding the original according to the norms of the target language; he indigenizes; more specifically, he relexifies:

"Shuffling feet turned Okolo's head to the door" (Okara 70)

Ijò: *Sísírí sísírí wẹ̀nibudàmọ̀ Òkòlọ̀ tẹ̀bẹ̀ wàìmọ̀ wáribuọ̀ diamẹ̀\**

Shuffling moving-feet Okolo's head turned door faced

(Zabus, *The African Palimpsest* 138)

In this Ijoized English, such morpho-syntactic innovations as the postponement of the verb or of the negative can be traced to Ijò syntactical patterns. The syntax is here so altered that a counter-value system is created that jeopardizes the English logocentric relation between word and referent, signifier and signified. Additionally, the "Ear of the Other," as Derrida called it (*l'oreille de l'autre*) has always complicated the language-identity nexus, as for instance in the way the French phrase *Allemands* in Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma's novel, *Monnè, outrages, défis* (1990) was thought to designate "messengers of Allah" in Mali during the Second World War.

Does that mean that English is losing credence or disappearing? Ironically, it could be argued that Okara's experiment helped recirculate

English at the expense of a micro-language like Ijò condemned to orality. In this form of linguistic violence, the African tongue falls prey to a textual glottophagia. English ‘devours’ the African etymons and morphemes, which now function as the linguistic debris of a minor, possibly endangered, language. However, those, like Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), who posit English as a Killer language and predict that by 2100, 90 % of the world languages will be dead or on death row voice their distrust of English in English so that these propounders of linguistic human rights soon become tangled up in an inevitable dialectics.

Kenyan writer and activist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o who, with his colleagues, called in the 1960s for the dissolution of the English Department in Nairobi, when English identity was to be ousted by a pristine Kikuyu identity, is now calling for globalectics. The “globalectical imagination” entails a move away from monolingualism, monoliterature, and monoculturalism and away from the “view of literatures (languages and cultures) relating to each other in terms of a hierarchy or power”; hence the globalectical imagination “assumes that any center is the center of the world.” Yet, languages are hierarchized, and if they are thought to be equal, some of them are more equal than others. If, for Ngũgĩ, translation emerges as “the language of languages” (Ngũgĩ 61), Bowman warns, along with Rey Chow, that translation immediately problematizes “the ontological hierarchy of languages” (Bowman 155). Since Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o prescribed in 1986 that African literatures should be written in indigenous languages, African writers and theoreticians like Njabulo S. Ndebele and Evan Maina Mwangi have been skeptical. Mwangi reckons that, even if “no one can disagree with Ngũgĩ’s appeal for the promotion and preservation of Africa’s indigenous languages,” it is possible to express one’s identity in any language (Mwangi 225).

Ngũgĩ made the original rallying call for the use of indigenous languages in the 1960s. Okara wrote *The Voice* immediately after Nigerian independence, in the mid-1960s, when doing textual violence to English was a necessary form of linguistic decolonization. This was, with hindsight, a time when the cleavage was conveniently binary: English / African language; colonized / colonizer; mother tongue / other tongue. But after independence ran its course, the European language resurfaced in unexpected ways and writers became unfaithful to their mother tongue.

## **Abjected Mother Tongues**

The formerly dominant European languages like English or French may, in some contexts, appear race-neutral or beyond ethnicities. For instance, English was de-emphasized in favor of Malay (*Bahasa Melayu*) after Malaysia's independence in 1957. In Article 160 of the Constitution, a Malay is defined as "a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom" and is domiciled in Malaysia (Art. 160 sec. 2). However, during the ten-year transition period that ensued, English was positioned, as Michelle O'Brien contends, "as an ostensibly race-neutral medium since it did not 'belong' to any of Malaysia's three dominant racial groups" (O'Brien 2), that is, the Malay / Bumiputra, Chinese, and Indian groups. For the Malay female writer Shirley Geok-lin Lim, "Malay [is] an abjected mother-tongue" (qtd. in Gunew 60), another(ed) tongue. Lim favors the univocity of English and objects to the "too many names, too many identities, too many languages" in Malaysia (and Singapore for that matter) against what she reads as "canonical English literature's relatively univocal approach to identity construction" (Lim 20, 16).

In the postmigrant German context, Feridun Zaimoğlu, a Turkish-German writer, who belongs to what Yasemin Yildiz has called "a transnational posse" (186), has used hip-hop-and-rap-imbued English to break down "the binary between one-dimensional affiliations with either Turkish or German" (189) in some sort of motherless, post-id(entity) English. Similarly, in the Rainbow island of Mauritius, the interstices between languages, religions, and ethnicities produced many mismatches: for instance, the Christian faith cannot be affixed to a single language as is the case with Hindi and Hinduism on an island where Hindus, the descendants of indentured laborers from India, constitute the religious majority and the political elite. The diasporic kinship based on ancestral ties with India logs Mauritius into "a neocolonial, island / continent relationship" with India (Ravi 88). As a result, French appears as a de-ethnicized language, and Mauritian novels by Hindu-Mauritian writers writing in French like Ananda Devi, Natacha Appanah, or Amal Sewtohul have exposed religious bigotry and given voice to the marginalized such as the Catholic mixed race and African Creoles.

Conversely, Jhumpa Lahiri who was born in England, of Bengali ancestry, and moved to the United States and has won prizes for her fiction in English, has abandoned English and written her novel *In Altre*

*Parole* (2015) in Italian. She describes herself as “a writer who doesn’t belong to any language” and asks: “How is it possible to feel exiled from a language that isn’t mine?” (Lahiri 166–67). In this almost post-postcolonial gesture, the accent definitely falls on another syllable of identity.

## II. The DNA of Identity

If identity is a “coalescence” or “a coherent kind of human social psychology,” this “coalescence” of “mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thought, and patterns of evaluation” (Appiah 105) can be broken into its constituent modes and patterns. It is now possible through taking a DNA Identity Test with the National Geographic “Genographic Project.” The test breaks down the constituent parts of where one’s ancestors have come from. The Sri-Lankan writer Rajith Savanadasa took one of these tests and reported:

As I discovered, I’m 57 % Southwest Asian (genes found in people from India, Iran, etc), another 32 % Southeast Asian and 10 % Mediterranean (in some cases the regional percentages don’t add up to a 100). [...] And the Southwest Asian genes are also shared with Tamils, which is something that a lot of Sinhalese won’t acknowledge. They won’t see we’re all partly Indian, and the Tamils would be very close to us, genetically.

(Watkins 9)

Likewise, Shani Mootoo, who was born in Ireland, raised in Trinidad, and then moved to Canada and explores the lives of Caribbean Indians compounded by a transnational queer Nation perspective, asked: “What is my point of origin? How far back need I go to feel properly rooted? I must be looking for an Indian Cro-Magnon” (Mootoo 64). An “Indian Cro-Magnon,” as Mootoo puts it tongue-in-cheek, is as ludicrous as the idea that “Black “Egyptians” were descendants of “white” cro-Magnon man.

### ***From Neither Black nor White to Both / And***

Among the “Egyptianists,” one numbers Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop who, in his essay on “Africa, Cradle of Humanity,” writes:

The man born in Africa was necessarily dark-skinned due to the considerable force of ultraviolet radiation in the equatorial belt. As he moved towards the



more temperate climates, this man gradually lost his pigmentation by process of selection and adaptation. It is from this perspective that the appearance of Cro-Magnon Man in Europe must be seen. [...] Therefore, Cro-Magnon did not come from anywhere. He is rather the product of mutation of the Grimaldian negroid where he was found [...].

(Anta Diop 27)

As Yehudi Webster has remarked, Diop's "efforts to identify white and black races, 5 million years ago when facial forms were surely Simian" run amok because "Egyptian and Greek civilizations cannot be classified according to the race of their builders; they were neither black nor white" (Webster 66).

Like "Blackness," itself considered today as being on the verge of a "breakdown" (Cohen), "whiteness" has its limits when applied before the entrenchment of racial classification in the nineteenth century. For instance, to talk about white early settlement in Virginia erases the British lack of self-perception as "white." In *Before the Mayflower*, historian Lerone Bennett wrote that "legal documents identified whites [in the seventeenth century] as Englishmen and / or Christians. The word white, with its burden of arrogance and biological pride, developed late in the century, as a direct result of slavery and the organized debasement of blacks" (Bennett 40). The notion of "racial classification," that is, the attempt to create a hierarchy of races, originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with e.g. Georges Cuvier, Carl Von Linnaeus, Arthur de Gobineau. Despite the potential furthering of classification in interventions like Anthias's and Anthias and Yuval-Davis', all agree on the difficulties encountered in finding unambiguous labels and often use the case of the US census, itself the dubious result of the first mathematical conjectures produced by IBM's famous punch cards, which also served to improve aerial bombing efficiency.

In that regard, Melinda Mills cannot remember, for the 2010 US Census, what choice she made: "Did I write in 'biracial' under the 'some other race' option? Or check 'white' and 'black' as I usually identify?" (Mills ix). Being from Saint Thomas in the United States Virgin Islands, which is part of unincorporated territory in the Caribbean Sea, she has white and black parentage. While inhabiting a "'black + white=brown body," she finds it "ironic to claim whiteness without contestation" (xii) and cannot claim being "biracial" either as it is "more than 'black and white'" (ix). She further distinguishes between different ways in which

US multiracial people “border patrol” themselves; her interviewees challenge the “two-and-only two’ race logic” and reveal a spectrum of shades from “vanilla whiteness” or “‘peach’ [...] honorary white” to “optional people of color” and “white people of color” (Mills 175, 169). Mills’ efforts at dismantling US pigmentocracy and highlighting common failures at authenticity tests may be seen as being part of a movement “after race” (Gilroy) and that of “relationality,” a thinking concurrent with intersectionality which rejects “either / or binary thinking, opposing blacks to whites, for instance,” and “embraces a *both / and* frame” (Collins and Bilge 24, italics in original). But even the both / and frame cannot conveniently accommodate such protean multiracial identities such as Hispanics, for instance, and those exposed by Mills’ qualitative research. Meanwhile, Iranians and other Middle-easterners in post-9/11 United States face potential reclassification “out of ‘the white box’” (Maghbouleh 105).

The in-betweenness of Mills’ interviewees is dramatized in a scene in Michele Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) during which Boy Savage, who can pass as white, is trying to enroll his light-skinned Jamaican daughter, Clare, in a New York City high school. When asked about his “race” and he replies “white ... of course,” the female educator catches on with his equivocation and ventriloquizes her husband, a “Christian” physician, when she tells Boy: “He would call you white chocolate. ... I don’t want to be cruel, Mr. Savage, but we have no room for lies in our system. No place for in-betweens” (Cliff 99). Yet, in-betweenness points to the borders of “race,” which have become so elusive that some countries such as France and Brazil have done away – albeit controversially – with the word “race” in their jurisdiction.<sup>5</sup>

If “race” has been considered by some as a subset of ethnicity, “race” has also been enlarged upon to incorporate the notion of “ethnicity” which, to e.g. Ali Rattansi, comprises “language, religion, notions of a common origin, codes of kinship, marriage, and dress, forms of cuisine, and so forth” (Rattansi 257). Regardless of whether race or ethnicity came first, it is worth remembering that so-called African “tribes,” in colonial terminology, did not perceive themselves as ethnic groups. Such is the case with the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria before the 1960s Biafran

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<sup>5</sup> In Brazil, the claim not to have “races” dates back to the 1930s; a law, passed in 2018, removed the word “race” from France’s 1958 constitution. Both countries have, however, have been faulted for “disappearing” some categories.

war gave them political awareness and self-perception as Igbo. Such a claim is corroborated in Chinua Achebe's short story, "The Sacrificial Egg" (1959), which documents the plague of smallpox in Umuru, a palm-oil port in pre-independence Nigeria. The protagonist Julius Obi's thoughts serve as a conduit for Achebe's portrayal of the Igbo as "forest peoples" as opposed to "the other half of the world who lived by the great rivers," especially the Anambra (Igbo: *Ányim Oma Mbala*) which throws itself into the Niger River and is released into the Atlantic. When Justus Obi calls "the riverain folk" *Olu* or "alien," he is referring to Central as opposed to western clans (Achebe 1–2). War or conflict as in the Biafran War in Nigeria can force identity onto peoples who otherwise had no such self-perception.

### ***Identities under Occupation: The Limits of Whiteness***

Sara Ahmed has contended that whiteness is not reducible to white skin, but is "a regime, a 'straightening' device, an effect of what coheres, of what allows certain bodies to move with comfort through space and so inhabit the world as if it were home" (Ahmed 135–36). By alluding to Whites' alleged comfort in "mov[ing] [...] through space," Ahmed is talking about space on earth. What about space out there? The world is now entering a non-anthropocentric phase of war. War is now both *macro-cosmic* (outer-spatial, climate-based, atmospheric) and *micro-cosmic* (inter-spatial, neurological, cybernetic). Against this canvas of unprecedented planetary violence, whiteness in military parlance is synonymous with "civilian": red means foe; blue means friend; and white means civilian, so that White Afghans refers to Afghan civilians. In that sense, Mike Hill reasons, whiteness is treated as "a local (and temporary) condition of military inactivity" (Hill 223). Additionally, war in the "aerial empire" is forcing scholars and strategists alike to rethink the boundaries of what it means to be a human being in a post-human world.

In its post-human vision, Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* straddles the human / non-human boundaries by foregrounding Egyptian-born Antar, a computer programmer. From his apartment in near-future Manhattan, Antar sees on his screen a former colleague (Murugan)'s illegible bar-coded identity card from a holograph generated by his computer Ava, which gently swivels on him its laser-guided surveillance camera "eye." While on leave in Calcutta in the 1990s, Murugan had disappeared while on an obsessive quest for the real-life,

1902 Nobel Prize winner for medicine, Ronald Ross, himself researching malaria transmission in British-occupied India. This foray into machine / human interface also helps connect Antar's hyperobjective world with the allegedly primitive Victorian Indian culture. Hence the post-postcolonial "joke" on British scientific "discovery": "[Ronald Ross] thinks he is doing experiments on the malaria parasite. And all the time it's him who is the experiment on the malaria parasite. But Ronnie never gets it; not to the end of his life" (Ghosh 78). Viral transmission is then re-read as AI data transmission through algorithms. What Ghosh names the "malaria vector" (77) thus enables Antar, an almost augmented cyberagent, not only to time-travel but also to dissolve the binaries of East / West, colonizer / colonized subject, science / religion, and human / nonhuman.<sup>6</sup>

On the greener side of the fence, where Ghosh's green data do not obtain, Andean anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena has put forward a "pluriversal politics," which includes other-than-human actors, whom she terms "earth beings," such as rocks, and points towards the posthuman "in which responsibilities are extended beyond traditional Western conceptions of the 'human'" (de la Cadena 334–70). After all, three million years ago there was no Homo Sapiens in the world, as Harari almost nostalgically reminds us in *Sapiens*. The Indigenous movements of First Nations worldwide, from North America to Australasia, have in that respect offered a blueprint for survival in the face of planetary apocalypse.

Outside of aerial occupation, Israeli anthropologist Smadar Lavie has explored what happens when military occupation on earth forcibly divides a people. The Mzeina Bedouin, a tribe of approximately 5,000 people, is the largest of the South Sinai Ṭawara intertribal alliance. During the Arab-Israeli conflict, the South Sinai shifted hands five times under Egyptian and Israeli rule. Lavie observes that this constant military occupation "precluded for the Mzeina the identity that both turn-of-the-century travelers' accounts and contemporary nostalgic literature or media accounts inscribed for the Bedouin: fierce romantic nomads on loping camels in the vast desert" (Lavie 6). As a result, their Bedouin identity has been cast as an allegory and their identitarian DNA has been somewhat cloned. The literary means which the Mzeinis use to express that allegorical identity is performance or mime, whereby each creative

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<sup>6</sup> See Hill for a deeper analysis in relation to the US and NATO forces' initiatives such as Human Terrain Systems (HTS) and COIN (Contemporary Counterinsurgency).

individual “plays a character based on his or her own identity: the Sheikh, the Madwoman, the Ex-Smuggler, the Old Woman, the Fool, the Symbolic Battle Coordinator, and the One Who Writes Us.” Embedded in these performances, Lavie concludes, is “the poetics of military occupation” (7). The result is that, in their mimetic theatre, the Mzeinis can only represent themselves.

Besides, the pending disappearance of whiteness to designate the “white race” falls into step with attempts to dislodge the apparently “universal epistemological power” of whiteness (Wiegman 150) so that in a not so distant future, one may no longer be “white by definition.” In her book of the same name, Virginia R. Dominguez examines “social classification” among Louisiana’s Creoles, who can choose from “a large number of potential identities by ancestry alone” (Dominguez 263). Because such individuals inevitably cross borders, they “manipulate criteria of classification” (xiv). Likewise, in Puerto Rico, similar shifts in the social composition of the population could not have occurred “if whiteness had been based on the principle of purity of white ancestry” (275). Interestingly, Dominguez wrote her 1993 book from Jerusalem where, as a “non-Jew in a Jewish state,” she was struck by the questions in Israel’s fourth national census: are you, the form asked, “(1) Jewish, (2) Moslem, (3) Greek Orthodox, (4) Latin, (5) Catholic, (6) Christian—other (specify), (7) Druze, (8) other (specify)?” Alongside four Christian denominations, one finds Islam and a movement that broke off from Islam, the Druze community that calls itself in Arabic *muwahhidūn* or “unitarians.” Among these questions, which avoid the obvious one – “Are you Arab?” –, “the secular Jew, Jewish by ancestry,” as Dominguez observes, “finds it difficult not to check off the box identifying him as Jewish” (xiii). Both religious and lay classifications are wrought with paradox, which points to an endless deferral of identification and, in the long term, a move outside of the naming of identity.

### III. Religious “Allegiances”

Raymonda Tawil, a Palestinian writer and journalist, published her memoirs, *My Home, My Prison* in 1978. Born into an urban bourgeois Christian family, she became after 1948, the year of Al-Nakbah or the Catastrophe, a citizen of the Israeli State. She then engaged with local modes of sociability and solidarity, an international network of resistance, as well as both Palestinian grassroots movements and Israeli

leftist groups. Because of her politics of solidarity and dialogue, she was accused of dealing with the Zionist enemy. In her philanthropy, she warns against “both fetishizing the production of a Manichean colonial epistemology that posits the self against its Other, Palestinians against Zionists, victims against oppressors.” Defying binaries, Tawil redefines “the mythic codification of the Jewish diaspora by calling the Palestinians ‘the new Jews’” (Tawil 77).

This statement resonates with Theodor Adorno’s “Fremdwörter sind die Juden der Sprache” in *Minima Moralia* (1945). These *Fremdwörter* referred to the German words of foreign derivation as the Jews of language in the sense in which “Jews are deemed unchangeably and irredeemably foreign by Antisemites” (Yildiz 84–85). Tawil, who is not in dialogue with Adorno, noted:

Any person of conscience—Jew or Christian—should acknowledge this injustice, whereby the persecuted survivors of Nazi concentration camps were given a home by making the Palestinians homeless. “We are like you,” I told my Jewish listeners. “We Palestinians are the Jews of the Arab World.”

(Tawil 201)

Reflecting on Tawil’s incentive to examine Jewish “privatization of pain,” Khader concludes: “In short, Tawil reconfigures Levantine subject positions, allowing for an ethical universalization of the experience of pain, while also inverting the traditional signifiers of Jewish history to prevent the exploitative commodification of Auschwitz or Al-Nakbah” (Khader 127). Palestine, the “land without a people for a people without a land,” as the 1947 Zionist project had it, has been claimed by postcolonial theory on the grounds that Israel was fashioned as a settler colonial project and in that sense, is not different from Canada, the United States or South Africa. “What makes Israel unique,” opines Gershon Shafir, “is that it is a belated settler colony which was launched in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and, even more so, that it continues the colonization through which it was formed into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries” (Shafir 339). In that respect, Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani’s work, especially his *Palestinian Resistance Literature under the Occupation 1948–1968* (1986), and his short life (he was thirty-six when he was assassinated in Beirut) testify to the status of refugee-cum-*homo sacer*, which Giorgio Agamben has identified as “a limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state” (Agamben 134) in a post-national world.

Admittedly, Raymonda Tawil's memoir was written in 1978, a few months before the fourteenth session of the Palestine National Council held in Damascus, Syria, that is, at a time when the questioning of the very foundational narratives of Palestinian identity, struggle, and national unity was not the same as today. Recalling how an Israeli-Moroccan soldier defended the villagers of Kalkilya after the 1967 war and scolded his troopers' humiliating tactics – "You people don't have a heart! Don't you have a home, a family? Is this Judaism? You ought to remember Auschwitz?" (Tawil 100) –, Tawil emphasizes the common humanity of Israelis and Palestinians. In pointing to the slipperiness of identities under occupation, Tawil anticipates Edward Said's humanistic vision of Palestine and Israel trapped in a Self / Other binary.

The Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai, who was raised in Germany under the name Ludwig Pfeuffer, speaking both German and Hebrew, was the first poet to write in colloquial Hebrew. In "Lamentation for Those Who Die in War," he penned the following verses:

A flag loses contact with reality and flies off.  
 A window display of beautiful women's  
 Dresses in blue and white. And everything  
 In three languages: Hebrew Arabic Death.

(Bloch and Michell 123).

Here, the third term in this triglossia is death while Hebrew and Arabic are locked in a deadly combat over religion. The third term or "third code" is not always synonymous with death, as one recalls that Franz Kafka, torn between Yiddish, the oral mother tongue, and *Hoch Deutsch* (High German), settled for the de-territorialized German of Prague (Deleuze and Guattari). Kafka settled for a third ground outside of identitarian binaries, as if to champion a fertile DNA compost of impurities.

### **Deadly Identities**

According to Amin Maalouf, the Christian, Arabic-speaking, Lebanese-born French author, one cannot have several identities. Born in Beirut in 1949, Maalouf has lived in France since 1976, one year after the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War. He was elected to the *Académie française* in 2011. His country of origin, Lebanon, is composed

of an Islamic and a Christian community, each of those divided in sub-communities and each of these sub-communities has attempted to impose its own perception of the nation-state.

Maalouf writes that he does not feel “half-French, half-Lebanese”: “The identity cannot be compartmentalized; it cannot be split in halves or thirds, nor have any clearly defined set of boundaries. I do not have several identities; I only have one, made of all the elements that have shaped its unique proportions” (“A New Concept” n.p.). Despite this disclaimer, Maalouf does not believe in a monolithic identity, but in an identitarian conglomerate of what he called “allegiances.” Individuals may murder in the name of a single and singular identity, when one of these composite “allegiances” like religion – but it could be a nation or a language – is threatened. Likewise, MacLean and Webber have argued that “[m]ost people would assert that their identity consists of clear-cut elements, including religion, sex, sect, nationality (possibly double), ethnicity and language; some would add to this list profession and class” (156–73). Taking as her cue Peter Zima’s work on *Subjectivity and Identity* (2015), Hanan Ibrahim has analyzed Maalouf’s *Deadly Identities* as evincing the belief that “a neurotic obsession with a singular aspect of identity is evidence of psychic loss that is conducive to violence” (Ibrahim 842).

Maalouf illustrates his distrust of the one, single “allegiance” in his novel, *Ports of Call*, originally written in French (1991). Maalouf follows a young couple: a Muslim man and a Jewish woman, who had a daughter, Nadia, who is both Muslim and Jewish:

I, her father, am Muslim, at least on paper; her mother is Jewish, at least in theory. With us, religion is transmitted through the father; among Jews, through the mother. Therefore, according to the Muslims, Nadia was Muslim; according to the Jews, she was Jewish. She herself might have chosen one or the other, or neither, she chose to be both at once. [...] She was proud of all the bloodlines that had converged in her, roads of conquest or exile from central Asia, Anatolia, the Ukraine, Arabia, Bessarabia, Armenia, Bavaria. [...] She refused to divide out her blood, her soul.

(*Ports of Call* 13)

In Maalouf’s historical novel, *Leo the African* (1994), the protagonist Muhammad Ibnul Wazzan embraces what could be labelled a phantasmatic, circumstantial identity, what Ibrahim calls “an evolving identity” (842). Wazzan addresses his son thus: “[...] you will hear my mouth speaking Arabic and Turkish [...] because I own all the languages



and all the prayers but I do not belong to any of them. [...] In Rome, I was only the son of the African, and in Africa, you will be the son of the Roman” (*Leo the African* 398; qtd. in Ibrahim 842). In *In An Antique Land* (1992), the already quoted Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh points to the enmeshment of Jewish and Arab identities through the Arabic script, the name “Allah” as a pre-Islamic deity, and the enabling mosaic of Middle-eastern cultures. Following Ben Yiju, the Jewish merchant of medieval Cairo, and his “friends,” Ghosh remarks:

[they] were all orthodox, observant Jews, strongly aware of their distinctive *religious identity*. But they were also part of the Arabic-speaking world, and the everyday language of their religious life was one shared with the Muslims of that region: when they invoked the name of God in their writings it was usually as Allah, and more often than not their invocations were in Arabic forms, such as inshā’ allāh and al-ḥamdul-illāh. Distinct though their faith was, it was still a part of the religious world of the Middle East—and that world was being turned upside down by the Sūfis, the mystics of Islam.

(Ghosh 261, my emphasis)

Even though Ghosh only hints at “the religious world of the Middle East,” he, like Maalouf, warns against the Jewish / Arab divide.

In Maalouf’s most recent French-language novel, *Les désorientés* (2012) which was translated into Arabic (*Al-Tai’hoon* 2013), the middle-aged protagonist, suggestively called Adam, is surrounded by friends who embody a range of identities: Aber, the liberal Christian; Ramiz, the opportunist Muslim who settled in Amman, Jordan; Kithar, the homosexual who fled to the United States; Nai’m, the escapist Jew who sought asylum in Sao Paulo; Nidal, the eloquent Islamist; and Ramzi, the observant Christian who joined a monastery, with whom Adam will drive their car off a cliff. While Ramzi is killed on the spot, Adam falls into a coma and, according to his French girlfriend, he is “sentenced to deferral,” (*The Disoriented* 505) “like his country,” which is never identified but may be construed as Lebanon. Hanan Ibrahim has construed Adam’s deferral as “emblematic of his reluctance to commit to an identity” (837). As his coma suggests, Adam literally remains supine between closure and awakening. This positional oscillation between faith and agnosticism and the concomitant fate of suspension is suggestive of Amin Maalouf’s plea for ambivalence and deferral in identity construction.

Maalouf’s stance is admittedly a far cry from the Algerian philosopher and emblematic figure of the Islamic Reform movement in Algeria,

Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, who wrote at the beginning of the past century: “Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, and Algeria is my country” (64, my translation). Here, religion, language, and nationalism are rolled into one, while denying other identities like Lebanese Arabic-speaking Christians or Berbers using Amazigh and local variants thereof in Algeria and Morocco. Maalouf’s oeuvre aims to deconstruct the triangular stronghold of identity politics and to highlight the need to disambiguate religious, linguistic and national allegiances.

### ***Striated Identities***

By “striated identities,” we allude to Deleuze and Guattari’s 1988 premise that the (relative) smoothness of the ocean became “striated” or gridded with maps traversed with nautical charts, meridians, longitudes and other measurables that they trace back to 1440 and the onset of the great explorations. I here understand “striated” as also being gridded by various identitarian markers that complexify I-identity and gesture towards a post-identity. As a case in point, Yousafzai’s bestselling autobiography, *I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban* (2013), co-authored with journalist Christine Lamb, has engendered doubt about identity politics and the representation of Pakistani women behind *I am Malala*. Among the responses to the “I am,” we number a Pakistani teacher’s launching initiative of the “I am Not Malala Day” and Davis Guggenheim’s film, *He Named Me Malala*, which documents the aftermath of Yousafzai’s murder.

In the Guggenheim documentary, one interviewee says: “Her father wrote everything for her. That’s why she is so famous.” And another: “[Malala] is just [the name] of a character. It can be anyone. She’s a girl, she don’t [sic] know anything” (Guggenheim). Whereas the interviewees dismiss her agency by proxy, the tract *I am not Malala: I am Muslim, I am Pakistani* attempts to restore striated Pashtun identities, with adherence to Islam holding pride of place, and the nation-state coming second, while “Pashtun” points to a cluster of identities, between ethnic Afghans and Iranian natives in South Asia, spread over Afghanistan and Pakistan. As Shirin Nadira has pointed out, the Yousafzai-Lamb autobiography’s “descriptions of Pashtun identity destabilizes the narrowly-mindedly nationalist rhetoric of *I am Not Malala* and offers clearer insight into the nature of the conflict in Swat” (Nadira 19n3), a city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan.

In the United States, in the 1990s, the case of Fauziya Kassindja, an eighteen-year-old Muslim, Togolese woman refugee drummed up U.S. media attention. Upon arriving in the United States, she spent two years in four prisons and, finally, in 1996, she demonstrated to the American Board of Immigration Appeals that she had good reasons to fear *kakia* or excision (also called Female Genital Mutilation or Female Genital Cutting) in her native Togo.<sup>7</sup>

The Qur'an helps her through her exile. But her sense of identity is shaped by a three-tiered allegiance, which she details in her prison-memoir, *Do They Hear You when you Cry?* (1998). Kassindja is first Tchamba-Koussountou through her father's tribe; then Muslim; and third, a member of the Kpalimé community in northern Togo, near the Ghanaian border. She is also a full-fledged member of her extended family, which, along with religion, is "what keeps people in [her] community together" and includes "[a]nyone related to [her] by blood, tribe or marriage" as well as "friends" (Kassindja 75, 101). As a child, she spoke Tchamba, Koussountou, Dendi, Hausa, Twi, and English, which made her the obvious candidate to be later schooled in English-speaking Ghana. But these striated allegiances did not go down smoothly with US Customs when she entered the United States via Germany from French-speaking Togo yet speaking the English language of Ghana. After many tribulations, she is now American.

All diasporic identities share these multiple, striated allegiances. In theorizing diaspora, Stuart Hall has reminded us of the old, imperialist and hegemonic definition of diaspora as "those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must return, even if it means pushing the other people into the sea" (*Theorizing* 244). Stuart Hall is exemplary of this tendency initiated in the 1990s in diaspora studies of conceiving the diasporic experience "not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite difference, by hybridity" (Hall "Cultural" 235; qtd. in Smith 257). Thus, the concept of "hybrid identities" was ushered in. Fauziya Kassindja, as many Afrosporic women fleeing persecution or, simply poverty, or a nexus of oppressing factors, find a second or third or superordinate lease on life in diasporic western cities. But queer desire,

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<sup>7</sup> See Zabus, *Between Rites and Rights*, 221-34.

as Gayatri Gopinath holds, “reorients the traditionally backward-looking glance of diaspora” (Gopinath 3). It further grids the identity nexus.

#### IV. Sexual Dissidence

What Gopinath calls “queer desire” further skews the notion of a stable identity. Diriye Osman, who is originally Somali but has lived in Kenya and currently lives in London, writes about his alter ego in a short story, “The Other (Wo)man” (2013): “He didn’t belong to just one society. [...] He was Somali first, Muslim second, gay third” (137). In the process, this forward-looking queer desire also obfuscates the family, which is to be left behind as one of the providers of identitarian allegiance. However, British Muslim communities may not provide the help Osman and his alter ego may seek in that they are incongruously aligned with the British New Right. What Ali Rattansi has called “incongruous alliances” also extends to the anti-semitism that ties “the black nationalism of the African-American Louis Farrakhan and elements of the white American extreme right—anti-Semitism being one of the uniting political strands—and in South Africa, not so long ago, between sections of the Zulu population and white right-wing groups, each demanding separate ‘homelands’” (Rattansi 257).

#### *Shifty Labels*

These shifty alliances point to the very incongruousness of identity politics and the need to acknowledge “grey zones” in the oppressor / oppressed divide and in any other convenient binary. Also, such movements or groupings like members of the Nation of Islam, orthodox Jews or Wahabite Muslims often assert their masculinities at the expense of women and sexual dissidents. Oddly, some Palestinian males lay claim to a similar prowess. An instance may be found in Yuval-Davis and Anthias’ recounting of a popular, male Palestinian saying of the 1980s which referred to the higher birthrates among the Palestinian population: “The Israelis beat us at the borders but we beat them in the bedrooms” (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 8).

In Nigerian novelist Elnathan John’s *Born on a Tuesday* (2015), Islam takes on various ideological hues. Malam Abdul-Nur takes advantage of the hospitalization of his protector, the benevolent Sheikh ruling over

Sokoto in Northern Nigeria, to harangue the crowds against Shia and burn down their mosques, thereby creating a cleavage between the Sunni and the Shia. As soon as Abdul-Nur becomes the radical Islamist leader of *boko haram* (although this movement is never named), he treats his wife as a “donkey” and “forces things into her ... into her ... anus! Candles. Bottles. He flogs her with the tyre whip when they are doing it. Some days she faints” (John 149). By dwelling on Abdul-Nur’s harsh sexual and religious practices, Elnathan John hints at gender trouble in handling masculinity but also at an islamicate cluster of repressed homosexualities.

Elnathan John, who, in his “Elnathan’s dark corner” blog refused to “give a definition beyond whom [he has or has not had] penetrative sex with” (n.p.), shows, throughout his narrative, compassion for women and young men forced to have same-sex sex in cockroach-infested lavatories. He also endearingly features the kohl-eyed *‘yan daudu*, male “gender outlaws” who are part of an ancestral institution generally accepted in Islamized Northern Nigeria and gleefully argue that “Allah made us” (Gaudio 2009). Elnathan John further asked: “I have wondered if sexuality is fixed or if it is a continuum—a scale with well-oiled wheels. Are people *always* either this or that- gay or straight or bisexual? How well do labels work? Do they work?” (emphasis in original). In his 2013 blog, John comes close to Foucault’s emphasis on the importance of “the assertion of non-identity,” as in my epigraph, and therefore of the need to embrace a sexual continuum.

It remains that Islam and homosexualities are seen by many as deeply incompatible and this alleged mismatch drives individuals like Diriye Osman to leave their homeland and to inhabit borders. Another border-example concerns Nina Bouraoui, who incarnates the striated history between the Maghreb and France. Born from an Algerian father and a French mother, Bouraoui writes in *Garçon Manqué* (2000), translated as *Tomboy* (2007): “Every morning, I check my identity [...] French? Algerian? Girl? Boy?” (PP, my translation).<sup>8</sup> This identitarian problem is complicated by her being a woman who desires other women. In *Poupée Bella* (2004), she writes: “I am in the time of my homosexuality” (23, my translation).<sup>9</sup> Her resistance to the fixed categories – French / Algerian and girl / boy – allows Bouraoui to partake of a fluidity, that migration to

<sup>8</sup> “Tous les matins je vérifie mon identité. [...] Française ? Algérienne ? Fille ? Garçon ? “

<sup>9</sup> “Je suis dans le temps de mon homosexualité.”

France is, however, going to contain. She, possibly unwittingly, retaliates by never using the word “lesbian” (*lesbienne*). In one of his short stories, “J’aime les filles” (2013), Moroccan Hicham Tahir features two female lovers, who both confirm that “neither boys nor girls were [their] cup of tea” (Tahir 54, my translation)<sup>10</sup> and therefore locates same-sex desire outside of the homosexual / heterosexual divide, in a multigendered perspective.

### **Slippery Contenders**

The Arabic coinage *al-mithliyyah* لمثلية is a recent invention patterned on the combination of the Greek original word for “sameness” and the Latin word for “sex” (as in “homosexuality”), whereas *ghayriyah* غيرية renders differentness (also altruism) or heterosexuality. These new words come to replace the coinage *al-shudhuudh al-jinsi* الشذوذ الجنسي or literally “the deviance / deviation of sex,” itself possibly a translation from the European, end-of-nineteenth-century medical conception of “sexual inversion.”

In *Desiring Arabs* (2007), Massad has targeted the white male European or American gay scholars’ “missionary” explanations of what they mean by “homosexuality” in Arab and Muslim history. Massad has also taken a few stabs at the “Gay International’s” obsession with romantic coupling and its discursive transformation of practitioners of same-sex contact into homosexual or gay subjects (Massad 172, 184). One of the earliest novelistic expressions of male same-sex desire in twentieth-century Arabic literature is to be found in Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz’s *Zuqāq al-Midaq* (1947, *Midaq Alley*), which features Kirshah, a café owner and married man, who has a preference for boys. Such a preference is tolerated as would be a mistress, until he goes public and his wife causes a social scandal. Mahfouz therefore uses the term *shudhuudh* to refer to Kirshah’s sexual practice but also to “all nonnormative sex, desires, excess, and general publish conduct” as well as “all socially unpleasant behaviour” (Massad 283). By the time Mahfouz publishes *Al-Sukkariyyah* (1957, *Sugar Street*) a decade later, he presents male homosexuality as an illness which reflects, according to Massad, the possible entrenchment of “the medical model of homosexuality [...] in the colonial North Atlantic world” before the

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<sup>10</sup> “Ni les garçons ni les filles n’étaient ma tasse de thé.”

“purveyors of Western gayness” colonized Arab homosexualities and “sodomy” became an apt metaphor for Westoxification (Massad 287, 369, 385). Massad prefers to talk about Levantine “same-sex contact” and aims to “re-orient” desire against the grain of western liberation struggles which championed identity politics in the face of oppression. Howard Chiang, for his part, refers to male same-sex relations in China as “contact-moments” (Chiang 3–19).

Likewise, a phrase like “a male lesbian,” relexified from *‘yan kifi* in Hausa (a language in the Islamized northern parts of western African countries) to refer to a passive homosexual male (the already mentioned *‘yan daudu*), who has an affair with another passive partner, reveals a certain level of translational uneasiness and possibly the incommensurability of African same-sex relations. In Kampala, Uganda, where Sections 140 and 141 of the Penal Code condemn same-sex relations, some Ugandan women identify themselves as “tommy-boys,” that is, biological women who see themselves as men, often pass as men, and need to be the dominant partner during sex, rather than “lesbians.” In South Africa, the word “gay” is also susceptible to a category crisis, as a South African “masculine man” playing the dominant role in a relationship with another man, for instance, is called “a straight man” and is not perceived as “gay” because he acts as penetrator and retains a form of heterosexual identity. *Amachicken* involves foreplay only whereas the English word “lesbian” was, at least in the mid-1990s, equated with genital sex. The word “lesbian” clashes with indigenous (e.g. Zulu) designations and their corollary practices. For instance, same-sex sex between female “gang bosses” and women inmates in women’s jail is called *snaganaga* but does not qualify as “lesbian” sex (Nkabinde 134).

In her autobiography, *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma* (2008), Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde explains that she is a *sangoma* or traditional healer within the larger system of Zulu gender-differentiated spiritual possession cults involving “male women,” that is, women “possessed” by a male ancestor. “Lesbian” is a word that she looked up in an English dictionary at the age of thirteen and that does not quite render the relationship she, as a male woman, has with her “ancestral wife.” Both biowomen, Nkabinde as a “male woman” and her “ancestral wife,” are not united in a common identity based on a shared sexual orientation, as in the sexual orientation clause in the 1996 South African Constitution (9/3), but rather are distinguished from each other according to gender difference, complicated by spirituality (Zabus

“Writing”). Zulu “ancestral wives” can only function in their relation to “male women,” the way “dees” (from the last syllable of the English word “lady”) function solely in their relation to “toms” (from “tomboys”) in Thailand (Sinnott). Even though Nkabinde, unlike the Thai *tom*, translates her gender identity into “tomboy,” “lesbian” and “butch” in the space of her autobiography and, later, as “transgender,” the Zulu label tagged onto her ancestral wife, like the Thai term *dee*, falls off the grid of a global, translational vocabulary so that postcolonial local naming practices clash with western-influenced parlance.

Translated into Algonquin, Nkabinde would be a Two-Spirit (*niizh manitoog*) in Canada, following the reclaiming of First Peoples’ pre-colonial taxonomies in the 1990s; in western transgender parlance, she could be labelled pre-FTM (female-to-male) and, finally, beyond her narrative, a trans man. A decade after his autobiography, he underwent a mastectomy, chose a new name – Zaen (also spelled Zean) Nkabinde. He was on a waiting list for bottom surgery or phalloplasty in Soweto when I visited him in May 2016,<sup>11</sup> but died two years later of unknown causes.

Parker and Aggleton have cautioned that although African communities are aware of same-sex relationships, “they do not understand the concept of homosexuality” (22). In that regard, South African *sangoma* Mkasi Lindiwe’s own rendition of western gender identities in terms of Zulu possession cults is fascinating:

- i Lesbian – A female sangoma who is possessed by a female spirit;
- ii Bisexual – A female sangoma who is possessed by a female and a male spirit;
- iii Transgender – A female sangoma who is possessed by a male (authoritative) spirit, or vice-versa;
- iv Hermaphrodite – A sangoma with both sexual organs.

Confusion reigns when the participants themselves claim “to be lesbian one day, the next day [...] bisexual; the following day [...] transgender” (Lindiwe 56), thereby confirming that sexual orientation can occur on a continuum and is fluid for some people, sometimes even over one day. In legal terms, such fluidity may not go down well. Tiwonge Chimbalanga

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<sup>11</sup> I interviewed Zaen Nkabinde on 27 May 2016 at 9148/61 Extension 12, Protea Glen, Soweto, Johannesburg.



Kachepea and Steven Monjeza Soko were arrested in Malawi on charges including “gross indecency” and were sentenced to 14 years’ hard labor, until they received presidential pardon in the wake of then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon’s visit to the country in 2009. While the courts defined the couple as “gay,” Tiwonge, one half of the couple, identified herself as “a woman.” Does that mean that Tiwonge is transgender?

## V. Transidentity Cards

Some three decades ago, transgender became an umbrella term which, though not limited to transsexuality, covered heterosexual transvestitism, gay drag (drag-queen, drag-king), butch-femme lesbianism, and such non-European identities as the Native American *berdache* (now renamed Two-Spirit) or the Indian *hijras*. Transgender studies then entered an arduous dialogue with the ever-increasing spectrum now known as LGBPTQI2A+, to which “2” or Two-Spirit, “A” for “Asexual,” and + for “Others” have lately been added. No unequivocal answer to the question of identification – “Am I gay?” “Am I Mtf?” “Am I butch?” “Am I Ftm?” “Is s / he TS?” “Is s / he homosexual?” “Am I intersex?” – has so far been provided possibly on account of lexical amalgamations and of the many grey zones of undecidability on the African continent but also in countries such as Iran (Najmabadi). Among these new sexual citizenships, those allowed to travel and cross the borders of the nation-state contribute to further transpassing and, possibly, to trans-spatiality.

Nigerian-born, US-based Chris Abani’s *The Virgin of Flames* (2008) hints as a trans-spatial location. Black, “a biracial kid” (Abani 106) born in Pasadena from an Igbo father and Salvadoran mother, calls himself a “shape-shifter”; he takes on “several identities, [...] different ethnic and national affiliations as though they were seasonal changes in wardrobe and discarding them just as easily. For a while, Black had been Navajo, the seed race: children of the sky people, descendants of visitors from a distant planet. That was when he built the spaceship” (37). It is in his spaceship which he built on top of his Los Angeles apartment building that he takes refuge after a painful incident, involving Sweet Girl, a trans prostitute, whom he befriended during her titillating lap dances in a bar.

In the privacy of his place, however, Black becomes uncomfortable. After touching her scrotal sack, he tries to reassure himself: “Technically Sweet Girl was a woman, so this didn’t count as a gay experience” (Abani

282). As Sweet Girl appears more mannish to Black, who is now dressed up as a woman in a borrowed wedding dress and blond wig, he fights with her and she throws turpentine at him. As his dress catches on fire and he steps out onto the roof of his spaceship, the searchlight of a helicopter catches him, revealing to the crowd of devout Christians below the “Virgin of Flames.” Death is the inexorable outcome for Black, as if to signal through the flames that identitarian shape-shifting is still part of a current dystopia.

In Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956), the 1947 Partition is seen from the point of view of the inhabitants of a small village, Mano Majra, perched on the newly created border between India and Pakistan. Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs used to live in harmony until their faiths were used as lethal identifiers. However, one group escapes easy categorization. When quizzed by the Deputy Commissioner as to whether “there are other Muslims in Chundunnugger,” Muslim singer Haseena Begum falters. “You can call them Muslim, Hindu or Sikh or anything, male or female. A party of hijras [hermaphrodites] are still there” (Singh 103). *Hijras*, sketchily defined as ancestral “eunuchs” harking back to the Mughal empire (1526–1858) and whose current, varied identities run the whole westernized gamut between intersex and transgender, have always inhabited borders.

The Indian Supreme Court ruled in April 2014 to recognize *hijras* and transgender individuals as a “third gender.” Pakistan issued its first gender-neutral passport to a transgender activist Farzana Jaan in 2017. Earlier, in 2013, Nepal’s government started issuing citizenship certificates with the category “third gender” for people who do not wish to be identified as male or female.” In 2013, Australian passports started displaying three categories of sex: M for male, F for female, and X for indeterminate, unspecified or intersex. Similarly, a New Zealand passport may now be issued in an applicant’s preferred sex / gender, without the need to amend these details on his / her birth or citizenship record. In 2014 in Kenya, MTF (male-to-female) Audrey Mbugua won a court case to have the “M” on her identity card changed to “F.” Despite advances in Euro-American legislation, the most progressive reforms regarding gender variance emanate from non-Euro-American societies where new legislation is construed as a postcolonial response to laws and thought systems inherited from colonialism that imposed sexual dimorphism.

For some nation / states, the M / F binary is already a thing of the past; chances are that it will eventually disappear from I.D. cards, like

the race or ethnicity or the language or the religion of an individual,<sup>12</sup> and be ousted by “preferred identities” and the “right to be forgotten.”<sup>13</sup> The I.D. card itself may be replaced by a chip and the QR (“Quick response”) code, with its unlimited scan life, will presumably continue to be machine-readable. Both non-human animals and non-animal humans may be ID’d by a mega-state, in which authority will have shifted “from individual humans to networked algorithms” (Harari 402). Arguably, I’s will be shrunk down to a binary system, inherent in all two-dimensional matrix barcodes, and the notion of “post-identity,” which already exists to refer to European integration (McMahon 2013), may thrive within the EU orbit. As Shoshana Zuboff has decreed in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), “[l]et there be a digital future, but let it be a human future first” (522), when the straitjacketing identity politics of yore will bend to post-human experientiality and diversity. In that regard, the postcolony’s cultural production, especially its literatures, acted as a discourse of anticipation.

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<sup>12</sup> “Din” (religion), for instance, continues to be featured on Turkish passports.

<sup>13</sup> According to Article 17 of the General Data Protection Regulation of 2016 (<https://gdpr-info.eu/art-17-gdpr/>), it is now possible to permanently delete a Facebook page and to have personal data removed from Internet searches, just as it should be a trans person’s right to have their “deadname” (the name given at birth in accordance with their birth sex) forgotten, if they so wish.

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# Kunene and the Swan: Two Approaches to Biography, History and Shakespeare in South African Theatre

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## I. Recognising Shakespeare: A Conversation

In May 2019, I was one of the convenors of the eleventh triennial congress of the Shakespeare Society of Southern Africa: a gathering of theatre makers, teachers and scholars that extended over a week in the apposite setting of two of Cape Town's major theatrical spaces, the Baxter and the Fugard. We were delighted to host John Kani and Buhle Ngaba as the participants in an event designed to create a segue between a two-day workshop for theatre makers ("Making Shakespeare") and an academic conference ("Shakespeare and Social Justice: Scholarship and Performance in an Unequal World"). As organisers, we benefited from serendipitous timing – Kani was appearing on the main stage of the Fugard Theatre every night opposite Antony Sher in *Kunene and the King*, his third sole-authored play after *Nothing But The Truth* (2002) and *Missing* (2014).<sup>1</sup> Ngaba generously agreed to give a one-off performance of her solo show *Swan Song* in the Fugard's smaller Sigrid Rausing Studio. Both plays have Shakespearean origins and inflections, both present variations on the notion of "Making Shakespeare," and both could be seen in their own way to respond to matters of social justice. A discussion between the two playwright-performers about Shakespeare in South Africa thus enriched the congress programme, giving delegates the opportunity to watch them alternately "in" and "out" of character.

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<sup>1</sup> Kani was co-author, with Winston Ntshona and Athol Fugard, of various iconic apartheid-era plays, such as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973).

Billed as “A Conversation between John Kani and Buhle Ngaba,” the dialogue was not scripted; nevertheless, it followed a format one might anticipate given a relationship of respect and seniority. Kani and Ngaba had performed together in *Missing*, but this was not a conversation between equals – Ngaba cast herself as an interviewer whose role was limited to asking prompting questions of *uTata* John,<sup>2</sup> while Kani played the veteran, the affable raconteur sharing anecdotes from a lifetime on the stage. Ngaba’s first question, however, took Kani and his audience back to performances pre-dating his stage debut by some years: “When was your first interaction *that you remember* with Shakespeare, and what *do you think* your opinions were *at the time?*” (Kani and Ngaba n.p.). The wording of this opening question is instructive – though doubtless not intended in this way by Ngaba, the phrases I have italicised allow me to emphasise the slippery quality of memory: the difference between what we once experienced and what we now remember, or what we choose to remember; how we turn memory into story, which is to say, how we remember differently in different contexts, or how we interpret memories differently for different audiences.

Kani’s response recalled, in the first instance, how he was required to perform Shakespearean sonnets to impress the (white) inspector of his (black) school in the township of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth. He alluded to the fraught history of Shakespeare and “Englishness” in South Africa – using the 1820 British Settlers, missionary education and colonial government schooling as shorthand.<sup>3</sup> The content of Shakespeare’s work was irrelevant and inaccessible to young Kani and his schoolmates, but “Shakespeare” remained important, for it / he was either an impediment to or a means of progress: not just moving from one grade to the next, but also making one’s way socially. In township debating societies in the Eastern Cape at the time, “You could never be recognised as learned if, when delivering a speech, you did not quote one line from the Bard. Otherwise you were considered not very educated. Every speaker quoted Shakespeare. Every speaker” (Kani and Ngaba).

Kani did add that there was a “slight aversion” on the part of black South Africans towards Shakespeare because “the language which was used

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<sup>2</sup> *Tata* (father) is a term of respect used in South Africa when addressing or referring to an elder.

<sup>3</sup> Among numerous scholars who have explored these links, see Johnson, Distiller, Wright and Willan (“Whose Shakespeare?” and “Implanting”).

in all Shakespeare's plays is quite similar to the Bible. And you know that the Bible ... broke our people ... there was an association of Shakespeare and the Bible" (Kani and Ngaba). Nonetheless, he listed among the plays he read at the time *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, *Twelfth Night*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Coriolanus*: "Just having read all of those plays was fantastic, because we saw another world." Kani was here rehearsing the (perhaps irresolvable) dilemma of Shakespeare both as symbol and tool of British imperialism, and as universal figure who gives those familiar with his plays access to "the globe." At various points in the interview, he circled back to such paradoxical formulations. On the one hand, "Shakespeare was brought in as part of educating the natives ... so we were stuck with him"; on the other hand, the fact that it was an enforced universality causing "the relevance of Shakespeare generally in everybody's lives" didn't detract from the pleasure of feeling that relevance.

This was all presented as background to the seminal year of 1959, when Kani would have been 15 or 16. As Kani narrated it to Ngaba: "My teacher came, very excited, and said we're going to do Shakespeare in isiXhosa" (Kani and Ngaba). The translator was B.B. (Bennett Beste) Mdledle – or, as Kani prefers to call him, W.B. Mdledle – and the play was *Julius Caesar*. Kani, explaining how his relationship with Shakespeare was necessarily framed by British settler colonialism, had already noted to Ngaba and the audience at the Fugard that the Empire's impositions on, for example, traditional forms of government among the amaXhosa peoples could be represented by a failure of translation between the languages of English and isiXhosa: "Queen Victoria decided there couldn't be kings and queens in the colony, so all kings and queens were demoted to chiefs – a word that doesn't translate in [my] African language. I don't know what a 'chief' is" (Kani and Ngaba). Turning to the encounter with Mdledle, however, and expanding from this into a general claim about Shakespeare translated into isiXhosa, he affirmed that "the structure of isiXhosa in written form is almost quite similar to the English ... where the operative word is, where the verb is ... so Xhosa translates very well from English." This view is not necessarily shared by other experts on Shakespeare in isiXhosa who have weighed in on Mdledle's translation. Peter Mtuze, emphasising not grammatical but cultural and lexical considerations in interlingual translation, has argued that Mdledle's accomplishment lies in overcoming the *difficulty* of English-isiXhosa translation: his "exceptional command of the Xhosa language [...] compensates for the occasional loss caused by the vast differences between the English and Xhosa

cultural milieu” (Mtuze 65). In those instances where Mdledle sought equivalence through literal translation, Mtuze suggests, the isiXhosa text becomes almost “meaningless” – Mdledle chose *not* to “Africanise” *Julius Caesar*, and direct isiXhosa renderings of idiomatic English expressions in particular “could not make sense to the target language reader” (66–68).

Still, for Kani, while acts of (mis)translation can reinforce the linguistic, cultural, political and socio-economic aspects of imperialism – “kings” become “chiefs,” which is an untranslatable word – Shakespeare in translation is exempt from these dynamics. Moreover, in Kani’s view, *Julius Caesar* so readily lends itself to translation in the skilled hands of a writer like Mdledle that the isiXhosa execution is superior: “Later in my life I bumped into the English version of *Julius Caesar* – the ‘English version’ – and I was a bit let down by Shakespeare. He didn’t catch the power, the potency, the poetry, the passion of Mdledle” (Kani and Ngaba). This is a variation on a line Kani has delivered with glee for some years. It stakes a bold claim. One could theorise it in terms of the Derridean *supplément*: Mdledle’s text, as “supplement,” is not derivative but holds (at least) equal status with the putative “original” Shakespearean text, and in fact demonstrates certain shortcomings or hitherto-unseen flaws in that original (Derrida 144–5). One could use it, in a South African context, to spur advocacy and activism regarding African languages – why shouldn’t we affirm that Mdledle’s isiXhosa is superior to Shakespeare’s English?

Kani does not always tell the story in the same way. I first heard it when interviewing him in 2009, as he and Sher prepared for their respective roles as Caliban and Prospero in a Baxter Theatre / Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) co-production of *The Tempest* directed by Janice Honeyman (as it happens, this was the collaboration during which the seeds of *Kunene and the King* were first sown). In that telling, young Kani had no knowledge when reading the Mdledle text that he was reading a translation of a Shakespeare play. In the conversation with Ngaba, the younger version of himself narrated by Kani was clearly aware of the prior act of translation – aware that he was reading Shakespeare in translation. These shifts in narration are not insignificant, and they represent only two among numerous versions in circulation. The more often the story is told, inevitably, the more variation there is in the telling; sometimes this has the effect of securing its authenticity, but there is also the risk that it carries a hint of the apocryphal. The encounter with Mdledle is important for my purposes here because it is one of the key drivers of the Shakespearean presence in *Kunene and the King*. Kani’s

memory of thrilling at Mdledle's isiXhosa translation is reproduced as a recollection shared by male nurse "Sister" Lunga Kunene, the character he plays in *Kunene and the King*.

Inevitably, the episode was recycled in marketing material and in promotional interviews with Kani, as well as in a short essay he wrote for the official programmes (in which, tellingly, he also admits "[m]emory is my worst enemy these days"): "My first real introduction to Shakespeare was in 1959, when my teacher, Mr Budaza, walked into our classroom, looking very proud, and said: 'Today we are going to study one of Shakespeare's most important plays, *Julius Caesar*, translated into the Xhosa language by W.B. Mdledle'" (Kani "Shakespeare Lives" 3 and "Author's Note" 2). The programme note, in turn, borrows substantially from an essay Kani penned about *Othello* and apartheid – hinging on his performance of the title role in the seminal Market Theatre production directed by Janet Suzman in 1987 – for the British Council's "Living Shakespeare" series (published in 2016, the essay also includes various anecdotes from Kani's career that were shared three years later in the conversation with Ngaba). In that text, presumably following editorial intervention, Mdledle's initials are correctly given as B.B. But the programmes for *Kunene and the King* revert to W.B., and these are the initials Kani has used when interviewed.

As a consequence of all this, an internet search under "Mdledle" and "Shakespeare" or "isiXhosa" and "Julius Caesar" yields results referring to W.B. Mdledle, the almost-mythical figure in Kani's narrative, rather than the historical person B.B. Mdledle. The limited (hyper)textual record of B.B. Mdledle, his life and his wide-ranging work, is increasingly buried in the digital archive as "W.B. Mdledle," translator of *Julius Caesar* as read and loved by John Kani, becomes more prominent. The implications of other inconsistencies in Kani's account of Mdledle – and of Shakespeare in apartheid South Africa more broadly – will emerge in the discussion that follows.

Spurred by Kani's retelling of the Mdledle story during their Fugard conversation, Ngaba shared with the audience a few snippets from her own experience of *Julius Caesar*. Unlike Kani's Bantu Education-era schooling,<sup>4</sup> her post-apartheid education had led her to think of

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<sup>4</sup> Formally introduced in the Bantu Education Act of 1953, this policy was one of the apartheid government's most devastating blows to black South Africans. Based on the premise that black ("Bantu") people would be limited to providing low-paid manual labour after they left school – if indeed they completed secondary schooling, for there

Shakespeare's plays only in English – until she read Sol Plaatje's Setswana translation, *Dintshontsho tsa bo-Juliuse Kesara*, and more particularly read her late grandmother's copy of that text (published in 1937, five years after Plaatje's death). When Ngaba's grandmother died, she bequeathed an "archive" that included *Juliuse Kesara* (Kani and Ngaba). Archive here is a carefully chosen word; for Ngaba, her grandmother's possessions were not merely sentimentally valuable, but a means of accessing history. An archival object is something specific and concrete. Ngaba was referring not just to a memory of her own past, but to a point of access into the lives of her forebears: "My grandparents had picked up Shakespeare even before Bantu Education." The generational markers here are significant – her grandparents form a bridge between Plaatje and Kani's generation, but the copy of *Juliuse Kesara* also connects Ngaba to a practice of appropriating, "Africanising" or "indigenising" Shakespeare that in fact preceded Plaatje, stretching back into the nineteenth century (see Willan "Implanting" and "Whose Shakespeare?").

The implication of Kani and Ngaba's personal experiences of Shakespeare translated into South African languages is that the acts of studying, reading and performing those translations are not primarily significant because they facilitate an understanding of Shakespeare. Rather, they are important because they affirm African languages in despite of centuries of linguistic imperialism and an ongoing diminution. Shakespeare as a symbol of Englishness morphs into Shakespeare as a means of conscientising black South Africans about their own linguistic repertoire – a force, I have suggested, for African language activism and advocacy. As Ngaba observed, upon reading Plaatje's translation she began to overcome a learned inferiority regarding Setswana and English: "I felt like I hadn't recognised before that African languages also have a history; they've also been around forever!" (Kani and Ngaba).

Given Plaatje's significance as a translator of Shakespeare, it is intriguing that he is granted only a fleeting mention in *Kunene and the King*, and doesn't come up more often in Kani's public pronouncements on or writing about Shakespeare in South Africa. In the play, after he

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was little incentive to do so – the policy began with ostensible aims of "separate but equal" education that sub-segregated black children into "tribal" groups (a dubious ethnic division made primarily on linguistic grounds), but it was soon evident that what was intended was ensuring generations of black schoolchildren would not achieve proper literacy or gain any worthwhile form of education.



has recited lines from Mdllele's isiXhosa *uJulius Caesar*, Lunga Kunene presents a mini-lecture: "It's not the only one translated in the African languages. There was, into Setswana, *Measure for Measure* by Sol Plaatje [...] first Secretary-General of the ANC. And into Swahili, *Merchant of Venice* by Julius Nyerere" (Kani *Kunene and the King* 18:30).<sup>5</sup> The choice of translations included in this brief discourse is curious, not least because Nyerere also translated *Julius Caesar* (although here one should add that he was probably given his "Christian" name after a Catholic saint or pope, and not after the ancient Roman). In the case of Plaatje, some more rigorous correction is required: *Measure for Measure* cannot be counted among the six translations undertaken by Plaatje (his translations, "in whole or in part," of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Much Ado About Nothing* were, sadly, lost; Willan "A South African's Homage" 17). Why does Kunene-Kani not mention *The Comedy of Errors* and *Julius Caesar*, the translations that survived and were published?

Of all the South African versions of *Julius Caesar*, it is Plaatje's text that has continued to live (albeit sporadically and refashioned) on stage and has been the more sustained object of scholarly study.<sup>6</sup> Kani's personal interest, of course, is in Mdllele and isiXhosa, not Plaatje and Setswana – although in his *Othello* essay he does rue the loss of Plaatje's translation of that play. The difficulty is that to invoke Plaatje is also to invoke a complex knot of issues, requiring an acknowledgement that the history of translating Shakespeare in South Africa is not simply about the promotion of African languages. Although Plaatje undertook his translations in the service of Setswana – they formed part of his work as a philologist and linguist aiming to preserve what he saw as the disappearing cultural and idiomatic richness of his mother tongue – he was also an imperial apologist, and his Shakespearean endeavours are bound up in this awkward embrace of the British empire. Focusing only on Plaatje's status as co-founder of the South African Native National Congress (later

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<sup>5</sup> Quotations from *Kunene and the King* have been transcribed from live performance and a video recording (not publicly available at the time of writing; temporary access to the recording, provided by the Fugard Theatre to ensure accurate citation, is gratefully acknowledged). Timestamps have been rounded to the nearest 30 seconds.

<sup>6</sup> See Seddon, Schalkwyk and Lapula, Ndana, Orkin (*Local*) and Orkin ("I am" 43-59).

the ANC) better fits the narrative of liberationist Bardophiles, but it is reductive.

The Venn diagram in which Kani's Mdllele-isiXhosa-Shakespeare triangle overlaps with Ngaba's Plaatje-Setswana-Shakespeare triangle inevitably makes Shakespeare the most prominent figure. The burden of their Fugard Theatre conversation was ostensibly that Shakespeare is not deserving of a pedestal and should be seen as just one among many writers: "Shakespeare is as important as S.E.K. Mqhayi, as A.C. Jordan, as Zakes Mda, as Athol Fugard," said Kani, so "we love him as a great writer, but not in awe, as *the* writer. There are other writers who wrote better plays than him. But we just like his because they cut deep into the soul" (Kani and Ngaba). Without doubt, however, in *Kunene and the King* it is Shakespeare who looms largest. Nor is Shakespeare's presence in this play of the kind that Kani described to Ngaba with reference to his other work: "In my writing, I don't think about Shakespeare ... but suddenly his plays try to speak into my ear, [saying] 'That could work in there,' just as a reference or as a parallel to the given scene or situation." In *Kunene*, Shakespeare – and specifically *King Lear* – is everywhere; not whispering into the playwright's ear, but shouting, providing a meta-theatrical premise, a character profile, a repertoire of themes and even a shadow plot.

Kani admitted to Ngaba that, having turned down the part of Lear at the age of 65 and then again at 70, he decided at 75 he was ready to take it on. Yet in writing *Kunene and the King*, he did not cast himself in the Lear-like role. That went to veteran Shakespearean Sher, who had played Lear in an RSC production that ran in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2016 and then in New York in 2018. Sher's character, Jack Morris, is a white South African actor who has stage four liver cancer but hopes to live long enough to star in a production of *King Lear* at the Artscape Theatre in Cape Town.<sup>7</sup> He is horrified to learn that a black male nursing "sister" (Kunene) has been allocated as his carer. The alcoholic Morris is full of personal bitterness and racist bigotry. Kunene is all dignity and grace, unless provoked by Morris into fits of anger. He wins his patient over – at the play's end, the dying Morris admits to his own short-sightedness and recognises Kunene's individuality and humanity. One is tempted to

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<sup>7</sup> For Schalkwyk, the play's "realism, in the technical, literary sense," lies in Sher "playing himself – a superannuated, white South African Shakespeare actor obsessing about his new role as King Lear in Shakespeare's 'greatest' play" ("*Kunene*" n.p.).

identify in this an echo of Sher and Kani's depiction of the Prospero-Caliban relationship in their 2009 "African" *Tempest*, which accentuated Prospero's closing contrition and Caliban's granting of forgiveness (see Young and Bosman). If we limit the Shakespearean paradigm to *King Lear*, and Sher's Morris is the Lear figure, then Kani's Kunene has no direct analogue; he could be part Kent, part Fool, part Gloucester, part Cordelia, or none of these. Rather, Sister Kunene's external point of reference is not Shakespearean but autobiographical. Kunene is, in many ways, Kani.<sup>8</sup>

In the sections that follow, I want to explore further the effects of Shakespeare-inflected autobiography and "national history" in *Kunene and the King* before turning my attention to Ngaba's one-woman show, *Swan Song* – which also contains both Shakespearean and autobiographical elements, but which transmutes these into a very different theatrical product.

## II. Kunene

I did not enjoy watching *Kunene and the King*. Churlish though it may sound, I did not even enjoy watching other audience members enjoying the show – which they certainly did, in large numbers. This rather curmudgeonly response, which I could not deny, gave me pause; it continued to puzzle me for some time. After all, both the play *Kunene and the King* and the publicity generated by Kani's Shakespearean recollections would seem to do exactly the kind of work I have been trying to do for years, popularising some of the ideas and debates I have attempted to promulgate when it comes to the historical and present-day phenomena of Shakespeare in South Africa.

Kunene-Kani's speeches foreground Shakespeare's imbrication in the vexed history of education in South Africa, from the colonial period to Bantu Education and its legacy. They also offer a potted history of Shakespeare in translation into South African languages, and a vindication of these translations both as necessary for meaning-making in our country's

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<sup>8</sup> An alternative autobiographical reading of the play – one beyond the scope of this article – is suggested by the sad revelation in the programme for the play's West End run at the Ambassadors Theatre (which commenced in February 2020) that Kani's brother, the Reverend Welile Kani, died of liver cancer in December 2019.

polyglot context and as theatrically powerful. After Lunga has impressed Jack with his English-isiXhosa Shakespeare translation, courtesy of Mdledle,<sup>9</sup> Jack reciprocates by sharing his Shakespearean acting method – which entails a pre-rehearsal translation from “Shakespeare English” into “English English” (Kani *Kunene and the King* 56:00). The play thus also demonstrates that any act of interpreting Shakespeare requires a form of intralingual translation, which may in fact be considered interlingual translation (according to this view, Early Modern English, “Shakespeare English,” is not just a dialect of English but a different language altogether; see Delabastita). Shakespeare is *always* encountered in translation, even by so-called English monolinguals (Frassinelli), whose experience of Shakespeare is in any case impoverished by their limited language repertoire (Schalkwyk “Shakespeare’s Untranslatability”). Performance is another act of translation, one in which the actor is the interpreter – as Jack says, “If I understand what I’m saying, then the audience will too” (Kani *Kunene and the King* 56:00). These are all points I make to my students, to readers of my academic essays and general interest articles, to teachers and theatre makers and members of the public whenever I have a platform to do so. I should be grateful to see them demonstrated in the play.

Furthermore, with Kunene as mouthpiece, Kani seeks intercultural and transhistorical connections between Shakespeare (or pre- and early modern England more generally) and South Africa’s artistic and political traditions. One example is the suggestion that Lear’s fool is like an *imbongi*, or praise-singer, the poet who speaks truth to power and is given licence to criticise. Again, I have tried this comparison with students and readers and audiences (for scholarly precedent, see Opland); why would I not be glad to see Kani make the connection on stage? Lunga and Jack’s dialogue also considers the advantages and limitations of employing Shakespeare’s plays as national political allegories. Are Lear and his daughters like Nelson Mandela and the presidents who followed him? Evidently not – the whimsical notion disappears after a fleeting exchange between the two men. But the seed has been planted. What else, or who else, can Lear stand for? The apartheid government that

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<sup>9</sup> David Schalkwyk astutely sees, in Lunga and Jack trading the lines of Antony’s funeral oration from *Julius Caesar* in isiXhosa and English, “a contest of the two languages that echoes the rhetorical struggle between Brutus and Antony” in which, “as in Shakespeare, Antony [Kunene] wins” (“*Kunene*” n.p.).

tried to “divide its kingdom”? Privileged white South Africans like Jack who have “ta'en too little care” of the oppressed black majority? Scholars have drawn more explicit parallels between *King Lear* and South Africa's history of dispossession and contested land ownership (Orkin; Visser). But Jack dismisses productions that try to be too “relevant” by mocking such readings:

JACK: ... old white man gives away power, and his inheritors are not wicked sisters but heroic black people. And later when he cries out in despair to them, “I gave you all!”, and they cry back, “And in good time you gave it!”, the audience claps and cheers, “Amandla! It was ours anyway. Amandla!”

(*Kunene and the King* 43:00)

Instead, Jack is happy enough when a putatively ahistorical, apolitical Shakespearean universality can be affirmed. “This is Shakespeare making his magic,” he declares. “It works everywhere in the world” (*Kunene and the King* 48:30). Once more, these are among the perspectives that I regularly set against each other in the hope of helping students, teachers, theatre makers and members of the public to navigate between contrived allegory and tedious universality as they consider the permutations of Shakespeare in South Africa.

I have had to face the possibility that my discomfort with *Kunene and the King* lies precisely in its staging of my own teacherly and scholarly interests (“my” material) and that I am simply jealous. Or perhaps it is more a case of pedantry; perhaps my resistance stems from annoyance with minor inaccuracies in the presentation of the material. I have already mentioned the slippage between B.B. Mdllele and W.B. Mdllele, and the imprecision regarding Plaatje. One might also opine that Mdllele's translation is slightly misquoted in the play,<sup>10</sup> to which a fair riposte would be that it is more “believable,” in dramatic terms, that although Lunga Kunene thinks he remembers it word for word he has to extemporise here and there. But there are other quirks in the play's borrowings from South Africa's Shakespearean historiography.

<sup>10</sup> Midway through the bilingual delivery of Antony's speech, Lunga's lines diverge from Mdllele's text. Mdllele's rendering, “*Inkohlakalo abathi abantu bayenze bayishiya ngasemva;/ Ubulungisa amaxesha amaninzi bungcwatywa kunye namathambo abo...*” (in Mdllele 49) becomes Kani-Kunene's “*Inkohlakalo abantu abayenzayo ... isala ngasemva / Kodwa ubulungisa bona bungcwatywa namathambo awo...*” (Kani *Kunene and the King* 18:00).

Consider Kunene explaining to Morris why it was Mdllele's text in particular that found its way into his classroom all those years ago:

*Julius Caesar* in isiXhosa was the only one of all Shakespeare's plays allowed to be studied in black schools those days. Because our teacher told us that the conspirators were like terrorists trying to overthrow the state, and they got their just desserts. I mean, under Bantu Education, one Shakespeare was enough for a "Native" child.

(*Kunene and the King* 19:00)

Here we have a notable divergence between Kunene's recollection and that of John Kani, writing in the programme notes for the play (and in his British Council essay). In the latter texts, the apartheid government's motivation is the same: "The purpose of allowing this play to be taught in our native language was to show that if we dared to rise against the establishment (the government) we would all suffer the pain and failure of Brutus, and of all the conspirators who were ultimately defeated by the army of the state" (Kani "Shakespeare Lives" 3). The teacher's role as purveyor of this ideological indoctrination was, however, suspended in the case of young Kani – whose teacher, Mr Budaza, "taught us differently":

He told us that Caesar was ambitious and did not care about the rule of the majority; he was a dictator and would fall, just like the apartheid government of the Afrikaners would. However, he warned us that, during the examinations, we must follow the syllabus as prescribed by the Department of Bantu Education. ("Shakespeare Lives" 3)

The discrepancy is a gratifying one insofar as, between the play and the author's essay on the play, we have a suitably ambiguous portrayal of the figure of the black teacher under Bantu Education – a figure who in some cases would have been seen as complicit in the systemic oppression associated with Bantu Education, but who in other cases enabled covert resistance against that system.

Nevertheless, what Kunene says about the book ("*Julius Caesar* in isiXhosa was the only one of all Shakespeare's plays allowed to be studied in black schools in those days") is patently an exaggeration. Undoubtedly, Bantu Education sought to destroy what educational infrastructure (both physical and academic) had been developed for black South Africans in the colonial period and in the first half of the twentieth century – specifically, the schools established by missionaries and church institutions. In the case of the latter in particular, a strong anglocentric

tradition had ensured Shakespeare's prominence; this was almost exclusively an English presence. But one of the odd consequences, in the early years of the apartheid government and the Bantu Education policy, was that out of the emphasis on separation of black pupils along "tribal" or ethno-linguistic lines – combined with an anti-English Afrikaner nationalism – developed the notion that Shakespeare's plays might be presented to learners not in English but in African languages. This gave further impetus to what was already a modest boom in the translation of Shakespeare's plays: in the 1950s and early 1960s, in addition to Mdledle's three isiXhosa translations, over a dozen translations were published in isiZulu, Sesotho, Setswana and Xitsonga. The phenomenon did not last. Bantu Education's monomaniacal focus on preparing black South Africans to be nothing more than "hewers of wood and drawers of water," in the words of the infamous biblical misappropriation by Minister of Education and subsequent Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, meant that Shakespeare was squeezed out. But Shakespeare – in English, rather than in translation – would remain a significant point of reference, whether because quoting him sounded impressive in schoolboy debates or because "our parents kept the plays and sonnets of Shakespeare at home" (Kani *Apartheid and Othello* 8). Hence Kani's own listing of all the plays he read as an adolescent (*The Merchant of Venice, Measure for Measure, Twelfth Night, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Coriolanus*), in a combination of curricular and extra-curricular reading.

Dramatic economy, admittedly, does not allow for such elaborate exposition. As it is, at least one reviewer has noted, "Kani's writing tends towards the expositional, especially on the subject of politics" (Williams n.p.). The play can ill afford to belabour the unintended consequences of Bantu Education if it seeks primarily to convey the iniquity of the apartheid system. Indeed, all of the inaccuracies and the over-simplifying bent I have sketched thus far could be justified by what is, in the end, a didactic aim. Kani wants his audiences to learn something about South African history in the hope that it will give them insight into the race dynamics that frame the encounter between Lunga Kunene and Jack Morris, and give them an illustration of the possibility of overcoming these. I will discuss who might comprise his intended classroom / auditorium of learners below; for now, let's say that Kani, like Mr Budaza, is fulfilling a teacherly function. Yet, if this is indeed the case, it may be that my frustration as a teacher and scholar watching *Kunene and the King* stemmed from the play not being didactic *enough* – that is, although

it gives voice to contrasting viewpoints in Jack and Lunga's dialogue, theatre's built-in multivocality is not enough to redeem the conversation from some misleading generalisations. My inclination as an academic is to "teach" my audiences (university students or otherwise) about the dangers of narratives that essentialise for the sake of dramatic effect rather than complicate for the sake of intellectual honesty and rigour.

I am reminded of two comments made by Kani's chief collaborators on the Baxter-RSC "African" *Tempest*, Sher and Honeyman, when I asked them about the risk of reinscribing essentialist binaries (such as "rational" Europe meeting "irrational" Africa in the colonial encounter). "Academic politics can be anti-creative," warned Honeyman; Sher agreed, "It's all very well for scholars to comment on these issues, but we've got to make the plays work" (Thurman "The Making" 83). On this score, I would be inclined to defer to the theatre makers – were it not that part of a scholar's job, after all, is to caution against claims that might enable creative work but remain (to a lesser or greater degree) dubious. The same applies to Kani's assertion some years ago that "*Julius Caesar* is, simply, Shakespeare's African play": a remark that authorised Greg Doran's contentious "African" *Julius Caesar* for the RSC in 2012 (see Thurman "After Titus"). This connection is pertinent to the present discussion because Stratford audiences were cued to recall it by the programme for *Kunene and the King*; there, accompanying Kani's essay, is an image from Doran's production of Antony standing over Caesar's body. We are thus presented with a closed circle: Kani's moral and political authority as an "African" spurs the RSC's *Julius Caesar*, and the RSC is later able to confer its own stamp of approval to Kani's narrative about black South Africans and *Julius Caesar*.

The same essay also, inevitably, includes a brief concluding section on the Robben Island "Bible" (the copy of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* circulated in secret among anti-apartheid activists who were political prisoners on Robben Island). This book, too, is the cause of various stories of uncertain origin and veracity. One take, reproduced by Kani, is that the text was "smuggled" into the prison "by removing the front cover ... and replacing it with the cover of the *Hindu Prayer Book*"; that it became "the most exciting book" on the island; and that "many" prisoners "read the *Complete Works* under the nose of [their] captors" (Kani "Shakespeare Lives" 8). Well, yes and no. The book was initially allowed on Robben Island but its owner, Sonny Venkatrathnam, covered it in images of Hindu deities on greeting cards when prison authorities tried to remove



incendiary texts. The text does bear the signature of various prisoners, famous and otherwise, but a number of them admitted they had no recollection of signing it and one very reliable signatory-witness, Ahmed Kathrada, subsequently insisted that the book was signed to display camaraderie with Venkatrathnam but had no special significance to the prisoners (Gordon 209). The complicated story of Shakespeare in South Africa, here epitomised by the Robben Island Bible – the subject of substantial scholarship, including two books (Desai; Schalkwyk *Hamlet's Dreams*) – is given a neat, upbeat and universalist conclusion: Shakespeare has helped South Africans to define their humanity and preserve their dignity against the odds.

Does an accumulation of fictionalised facts – facts incorporated into fiction, but also facts blurring with fiction – amount to a grave misrepresentation? There again, is it not Kani's writerly prerogative to borrow aspects of his personal experience and snippets from his compatriots' collective history in shaping a dramatic character such as Kunene, without having to carry the burden of absolute fidelity? This calls to mind that memorable line from Julian Barnes' novel *Flaubert's Parrot*: the "writer of the imagination" must be given the liberty to "alter a fact for the sake of a cadence" (Barnes 165). Still, moving beyond aesthetics ("cadence" as metonym for considerations of form), other questions may be posed. For whom does Kani shape the characters of Lunga Kunene and Jack Morris? To whom is he telling this story about Shakespeare and South Africa, and a black man and a white man?

If *Kunene and the King* appears to grapple with the complexities and contradictions of South African Shakespeares, but ultimately evinces a surface-level rather than a deep engagement with the phenomenon, the same may arguably also be said of its treatment of the country's political history – and of the two characters who represent it.<sup>11</sup> This results in some inconsistent characterisation. Lunga, for instance, needs to be "ignorant" of Shakespeare for the sake of (heavy-handed) humour in some of his exchanges with Jack. Here, Jack is defensive because he can't pronounce an isiXhosa "x":

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<sup>11</sup> Schalkwyk ("*Kunene*"), in a more generous reading of the play than mine, also considers "surface" and "depth" – and finds *Kunene and the King* to work on two levels. I will return to Schalkwyk's analysis at the end of this section.

- JACK Alright. I can't do the bloody click, right? Can you do the iambic pentameter?
- LUNGA I am ... what?
- JACK It's a metrical foot.
- LUNGA Foot?
- JACK Five beats of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one.
- LUNGA I'm not stressed.
- JACK *Dadum dadum dadum dadum dadum...*
- LUNGA Maybe you are a bit stressed.

(*Kunene and the King* 6:00)

Indeed, Lunga's only point of reference for Shakespeare seems, at times, to be Mdedle's *Julius Caesar*. He is clearly, however, a Shakespeare enthusiast. He is delighted that Jack bequeaths to him a bust of the Bard acquired in Stratford-upon-Avon. He doesn't need the "difficult" English of *King Lear* explained. He memorises lines easily. Like Kani, he shifts effortlessly between Shakespeare in isiXhosa and Shakespeare in early modern English. Yet it also falls to him to ask naïve questions about *Lear* to allow some cross-cultural exchange between the two men to take place. As David Schalkwyk ("*Kunene*") observes, this follows the seriocomic anthropological style of Laura Bohannon's "Shakespeare in the Bush":

- LUNGA But what I don't understand in this whole matter – did he not have an heir?
- JACK You mean a son?
- LUNGA Yes.
- JACK The three daughters were his heirs.
- LUNGA Well, that is not acceptable to us. Why did he not take another wife until he got a son from her?
- JACK Because he didn't.
- LUNGA Why not? Look at our former president, Jacob Zuma. He has seven wives! So he's got many sons and daughters. Wasn't there an English king that kept chopping off the heads of his wives as soon as they gave birth to a girl child, until one of them gave him a son?
- JACK Ja, Henry the Eighth. Anyway, in *this* story King Lear *doesn't* take another wife, and he only has three daughters.

- LUNGA In the African culture, then we look if any of his brothers has a son, then he would be king.
- JACK Well, this isn't an African story, it's an English story, and King Lear only has three daughters.
- LUNGA Alright, I got it! Why does he want to divide his kingdom while he was still alive? Oh! What about his wife? She could tell everyone about his will.
- JACK Listen, my brother – Sister – in this play Shakespeare doesn't give him a wife and he *only has three daughters!*
- LUNGA In my culture he would not be allowed to do this.
- JACK He's the king, he can do anything he wants.
- LUNGA Then what would be the role of his ancestors? It would be like he does not trust his own ancestors to guide his relatives to do the right thing after his death.
- JACK What?
- LUNGA It's not right what he did. If I was there I would not have advised him to do that. Bad things are going to happen to this king. He might anger the ancestors.
- JACK There are no ancestors! This is not an African story. The English have no ancestors!
- LUNGA Everybody has ancestors.

(*Kunene and the King* 34:00)

Lunga's complaint was voiced again by Kani in his conversation with Ngaba when he shared an anecdote about staging *King Lear* in China, where audiences supposedly have no sympathy with a Lear who gives his kingdom to his daughters: "What the hell was he thinking? ... divide the estate among girls? ... how did he expect them to look after him?" (Kani and Ngaba). Equating one patriarchal context with another, Kani segued to South Africa: "That would have been the same situation in my country." He reiterated the importance of respecting the ancestors by leaving it to them to guide those who are still alive about how to divide an estate after a death. Despite identifying yet another difference between Lear's England and South Africa, Kani still affirmed similarities: "You can take any Shakespeare play ... it sits so well in the African culture. Because there are parallels [between] our kingdoms and in the histories of our countries" (Kani and Ngaba).

At the risk of repeating an obvious point, this brings us again to a paradoxical nub: Shakespeare and his world (which is not actually Lear's world, although that inconvenient detail is glossed over) are simultaneously "recognisable" and "unrecognisable" in South Africa. When Shakespeare is unrecognisable, as we have seen, Kani's logic is that his work is nonetheless important – to post-apartheid generations of school learners, as it was for Kani and his cohort – because the country, still reeling from the effects of its apartheid-era isolation, needs "more ideas, not less" (Kani and Ngaba). This seems fair enough: Shakespeare is one window among many that opens up a wider world. There is a hidden implication in all this, however, and that is (South) Africa's fundamental difference to the modern northern and western reaches of that world. When Shakespeare is recognisable, in other words, it is because he, too, is different to the modern West or Global North: his England, early modern at best, and continuous with an England of the late medieval period, has certain "pre-modern" traits in common with twenty- or twenty-first century Africa – eternal, timeless, unchanging, "backward" Africa.

This logic has been displayed by those who, with the best intentions, saw something "Elizabethan" about South African township life; it can be discerned, as Jonathan Holmes notes, in (British South African) *Drum* magazine editor Anthony Sampson playing the African flâneur in the 1950s, in (British South African) actor and director Janet Suzman conceptualising her Market Theatre *Othello* in 1987, and in (British South African) duo Sher and Doran writing about their *Titus Andronicus* at the Market in 1995. The same logic is evident in well-meaning but nonetheless essentialising claims that a "black" or "African" world view is more in line with the cosmology of Shakespeare and his contemporaries: "they are altogether more aware of the numinous, the unearthly, the sacred" (Butler 223) and, to quote Sher regarding the "African" *Tempest* once more, "[w]hile Jacobean would have had a very real relationship with magic, secular Westerners do not" – ergo the play's supernatural elements work better in a (South) African setting (in Thurman "The Making" 82).

Thus, Kani and Sher discussing Shakespeare with respect to African and European or western "culture" sound very similar to Lunga and Jack resorting to generalisations about "your people" and "my people" when they discuss race. The characters and the play supposedly overcome racial and cultural divisions, but these are reinscribed by a Shakespeare-inflected essentialising.

Lunga's character, I have suggested, is accidentally inconsistent; Jack's character seems to be inconsistent by design. He veers from irascible to vulnerable, from begrudgingly decent in his interaction with Lunga – and suitably cynical about Verwoerdian apartheid apologetics – to caricaturish racism. We are told that he is 65 years old, but he can be positively doddering (“Did you use that Google thing?” he asks Lunga when he thinks he is being robbed) and his attitudes towards black people at the outset are those of an even older generation: his former domestic worker's surname, he professes, “starts with an ‘M,’ like they all do,” and he assumes Lunga will sleep “out the back” in the servant's quarters and will drink tea from “a green enamel mug” rather than a regular cup (*Kunene and the King* 3:00, 7:00, 21:30, 23:00). Sometimes his physical state – the sudden onset of acute pain, the embarrassment of soiling himself – induces a humility that brings him closer to Lunga. Sometimes shame or anger spurs him to want to put Lunga in his place through humiliation or subordination. This may be an astute portrait of a dying man. Yet his behaviour *in extremis* is hardly typical of the “white English liberal” who would typically be associated with Shakespearean enthusiasm in South Africa. Perhaps Kani is trying to expose how, beneath a veil of respectability and “saying the right thing” publically, white South Africans still cling to their bigotry. In other words, Jack's racism needs to be crass and ugly to shock white people watching the play into an acknowledgement of their complicity. Jack may be crude, but he is honest:

JACK Ja well, look, I'm not gonna lie. When I was growing up, life was good for us – and we wanted to ride it to the end ... But then suddenly, without any consultation with us, we're told things must change. Our so-called leader, F.W. [De Klerk], goes into negotiations with a former terrorist straight from Robben Island, and what happens? F.W. walks out with nothing and Mandela walks out as president of the fucking country.

LUNGA And what did you want from those negotiations?

JACK I don't know, I told you I'm not political. But some kind of government where we whites are still in charge of our country.

LUNGA Are you crazy? And you think we would be happy with that?

JACK You had no choice. We had the army. We had the police. We had the economy. What did Mandela have to offer?

LUNGA Your lives. Your dignity. Your humanity.

JACK Fuck that. F.W. sold us out. Finish and klaar.

(*Kunene and the King* 50:30)

Jack's unapologetic bitterness and historical myopia, his lack of self-awareness – his inability, it will emerge, to see himself in Lear or Lear in himself – thus allows Kani to drive home a point about white culpability:

JACK ... I have nothing to be forgiven for. I never harmed any of you people.

LUNGA Oh yes, you did. All those children who died of hunger in the townships and the rural areas of this country while your government did not provide proper health care to black people, you harmed them. All those people who died in your jails just because they wanted freedom, you harmed them. You said nothing!

(*Kunene and the King* 53:00)

The denialism exhibited by Jack in this exchange is present among some white South Africans who were old enough to “say something” and “said nothing” under apartheid; likewise, the denial of a more general white privilege might be heard from members of these generations. But it is a denialism on the wane, and it has less and less purchase in public discourse – it is roundly criticised, widely derided and indeed increasingly seen as risible. Does Kani-Kunene see himself haranguing and enlightening members of his audience who might sympathise with Jack's position? It is more likely, for the predominantly white Capetonian audiences at the Fugard Theatre, that Jack would function as a sort of bogeyman – the “wrong” kind of white South African – from whom they would seek to distance themselves. Perhaps there is a psychological scapegoating occurring here. But as there is no subtlety or nuance in Jack's racism, there is little inducement for white South African audience members to reflect on their own subtle or nuanced racism.

In an interview with BBC's Clive Anderson promoting *Kunene and the King's* run at the Ambassadors Theatre in London, Kani gave a brief account of the play's germination. He wrote to Sher asking for some input on the script, and Sher replied, “When are we rehearsing? I'm in! And Greg [Doran] is excited about it” (Kani and Anderson

n.p.).<sup>12</sup> Kani resisted the suggestion that the play should be staged in England under the RSC banner: “I write my plays for my own people in my own country. I do not understand why [*Kunene*] would open in England, it’s a different audience” (Kani and Anderson). And yet that is exactly what occurred. The play premiered at the RSC’s Swan Theatre in Stratford before moving to Cape Town and the Fugard. Although Anderson observed that Kani has brought many of his plays to the United Kingdom – *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* ran at the Ambassadors, as it happens – in all other cases these had already been performed for South African audiences. David Schalkwyk makes this point, even as he sees a line of continuity between the apartheid-era protest plays and what appears to be the “realism” of *Kunene*: “It is an old play, despite having been written and workshopped in 2018 [...] It is also not, in the strictest sense, a South African play” but rather “a curiously globalised product: devised in South Africa, produced in England, exported to South Africa. And from there back to [England]” (“*Kunene*” n.p.).

Kani imagines himself to be writing for his “own people,” a phrase which he usually employs to mean black South Africans, but it is hard to believe that this was really the case with *Kunene*. The Stratford premiere is no minor detail; as Schalkwyk rightly asserts, if we want to understand the spectacle of Jack’s racism, no less than Lunga’s explanations about black life under apartheid, we have to realise that Kani’s primary audience for *Kunene and the King* was in fact a British one. To a British viewer, Jack does not seem like such a caricature. And British audience members – unlike either white or black South African audience members – would need the minor history lessons Lunga provides about, say, the student protests in Soweto in 1976 or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the 1990s. They would also benefit from the timeline of important events in South Africa in the twentieth century provided in the programmes for the runs at the Swan and the Ambassadors (but not, of course, the Fugard).

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<sup>12</sup> There is, perhaps unsurprisingly, variation in the story of the play’s “gestation”: Schalkwyk reports that at a post-performance Q&A session in April 2019, the two actors described how “Kani approached Sher” not for general advice about *King Lear* but, specifically, “to do a two-hander about contemporary South Africa” (“*Kunene*” n.p.).

The play's didacticism is, therefore, best enjoyed by someone who is disconnected from and ignorant of the country's past and present – who would not find, say, the introduction of Big Issues like crime or poverty or AIDS or “black on black xenophobia” (Kani *Kunene and the King* 73:00) to be clumsy, although British reviewers did comment that the dialogue tends to “lurch from theme to theme” (Williams n.p.). Beyond all this, however, a worse prospect must be faced: that white South African audience members at the Fugard, enamoured of anything that comes from Stratford (the deference of a colonial cringe compounded by the cultural weight of Shakespeare), schooled in the significance of John Kani as anti-apartheid theatre icon, and primed to admire the Shakespearean depth and complexity in any character performed by Antony Sher, bought into the redemption of Jack Morris and delighted at the final scene in which he gives an account of his trip to Lunga's house in Soweto.

What Jack describes is redolent with cliché: Soweto is an exotic, glamorously dangerous place (“no meter taxi would take me to Soweto after five”) full of residents who either fit the type of the “angry black” (saying “*Bulala lo mthakathi!* Kill this [white] wizard!”) or form part of the noble, longsuffering working class (black “mamas” who “have supper to cook”; Kani *Kunene and the King* 74:00–78:00). These are the poor with whom Jack-Lear sees out a highveld storm in his hovel (a minibus taxi). But instead of the pathos of Lear's self-admonishing monologue, we have Jack's warm and fuzzy white feelings following his discovery of black generosity. In the culminating confrontation, Lunga eloquently slams the hypocrisy of white criticism of the failings of the post-apartheid state and a willful forgetting on the part of some white South Africans of the horrors of apartheid. And yet the conflict between Lunga and Jack is so readily resolved – an exchange of forgiveness, followed by dancing (almost like a Shakespearean comedy?) – that the power of this accusation, this reminder of history, is lost. Jack is absolved.

What Holly Williams has identified as the play's “predictable ... shape and story arc,” in which Jack as Lear follows “the journey of a pompous, entitled man learning how to see the value in people through the humbling experiences of sickness and age” (n.p.), ultimately gives too much attention to a now redundant – and suitably impotent – reactionary whiteness. The sentimental moment in which a dying Jack tells Lunga, “I see you,” is too easy a resolution (“old-fashioned” is Williams' term; n.p.). Lunga's assertion, following this moment, that “A white man dead in my house – in Soweto” means he will be “in deep shit” (Kani *Kunene and the*



*King* 97:00) is a reminder of skewed power relations in post-apartheid South Africa, but to me this came across in performance as anti-climactic, or part of a hasty denouement. After all the didacticism, what might be the play's most powerful "message" was lost as a throwaway final thought.

Schalkwyk, arguing that "there is more to *Kunene* than meets the eye," analyses this moment as the culmination of the tension in the play between its "realist" mode and its "allegorical" dimensions: precisely because it doesn't end with Jack's "I see you," the play

evades a purely humanist, psychological resolution by refocusing attention on the material space of the tragic event ... [Jack's] death places a new burden on Kunene, who must now bear the responsibility for the corpse of a white man in his Orlando kitchen. The economic, racial and geographic divisions of apartheid become despairingly palpable again.

("Kunene" n.p.)

Stressing this shift, Schalkwyk finds reason to revisit the play's expository tendency: "While I initially thought that there was no need to retell events with which all South Africans would be familiar, I now think that it is crucial that this play does re-tell those stories, not just for a British audience, but for a South African one as well." According to this reading, Kani – through Kunene – expresses the post-apartheid pairing of "black anger and white obliviousness" (Molefe *passim*). Morris, like Lear, seeks to crawl unburdened towards death; when Jack speaks this line from Shakespeare's play, Lunga "picks it up and repeats it," for he identifies in it a white desire "to cast off, to be unburdened of, responsibility (but not power)" ("Kunene" n.p.). Schalkwyk is persuasive in contending that "the whole impetus of *Kunene and the King* is to burden Morris and all he represents with the weight of responsibility – political, economic, moral – as a condition for a final release" (n.p.).

Sadly, it is likely that the great majority of audience members take with them not this insight but a trite summary, a nugget given to them at the outset in the play's marketing material and paratexts: Shakespeare helped two men from opposing South African racial camps to overcome their differences. Recognising their respective versions of Shakespeare led them to recognise their shared humanity. "Universal" Shakespeare is triumphant.

### III. The Swan

Like *Kunene and the King*, Buhle Ngaba's *Swan Song* has its origins in Shakespearean histories and institutions. In 2016, Ngaba was in Stratford-upon-Avon working with the RSC as a recipient of the Brett Goldin Bursary (established a decade previously by, among others, Sher and Suzman following the murder of Goldin, a young actor who was due to appear in a Baxter-RSC production of *Hamlet*). Her grandmother had died not long before this, and the discovery of Plaatje's *Juliuse Kesara* was fresh in her mind – but somehow, although she knew that South Africa had its own Shakespearean traditions, in Stratford Ngaba “had the growing suspicion that I didn't belong there. I also didn't know how I would begin to see myself ‘fitting’ into all of it; the town, the people, and the stories” (Ngaba “Guest Post” n.p.). It was only when she took to the stage of the Swan Theatre to perform a monologue from *Romeo and Juliet* in front of the company that she “suddenly understood that there was no need for me to continue looking to ‘fit’ into anything because it was all already within me.” And so, inspired by the swans of Avon, *Swan Lake* and the “ancient belief that swans burst into song with their dying breath,” Ngaba began working on a play of her own. She was cognisant, while doing so, that it was Goldin's death that had given her the RSC opportunity, and that she would be the last recipient of the bursary, which was in its tenth and final year – this *Swan Song*, too, would be about “finality and closure.” The life of the play was, however, just beginning; composed and first performed in Stratford, with South Africa always in mind, it would subsequently “return” to the country and develop further in performance in various theatrical spaces and, in the Covid-19 era, as a film and audio drama.

*Swan Song* is not a play “about” Ngaba herself, although, as she notes, it “finds its origins in something [I] have known to be true, even if that is just in the form of a memory, a glimpse of something as a child, a song once heard” (Ngaba “Correspondence” n.p.). The autobiographical elements in *Swan Song* do not result in a self-portrait; the show “depicts my experience of being a young black woman in South Africa” but, by immersing herself in the character she created for it, and letting go of her “personal attachment,” she sought to share aspects of a collective experience (“we exist”) without implying a raced or gendered homogeneity (“we are complex persons with hearts that hurt and bones that break ... we laugh and cry and get into our heads about things ... we also deserve

to be children, to be teenagers before we are forced to become women who carry a nation” (Ngaba “Correspondence”). The protagonist finds herself in an apartment “in what could be present-day Johannesburg” (Ngaba “Guest Post”), reliving memories of girlhood and adolescence, of falling in lust and love, and of coming to terms with an anatomical quirk – she was born with a winged scapula. At the end of the play, in a dreamlike state, she readies herself to cut open the skin on her shoulders with a can opener, preparing to spread her proverbial wings.

It is thus tempting to see *Swan Song* as a dramatic “portrait of the artist,” a story of how the artist comes to the point of autonomous, creative self-expression. There are two difficulties with such a reading. Firstly, the moment of “finding one’s wings” at the end of the play occurs in a desperate, delusory state – and entails (possibly fatal) self-harm rather than actually taking flight. Secondly, when I put this interpretation to Ngaba she emphasised not the metatheatrical possibilities within the world of the play but rather her own process of creating the work, collaborating with a designer and director at the RSC and receiving ongoing feedback from members of the company. Ngaba was “literally coming to a point of creative self-expression” in and through this process, but that should not be conflated with the experience of the character she moulded (“Correspondence”).

The same applies to the undertone of sorrow in *Swan Song*. When she first conceived it, Ngaba was mourning the loss of her grandmother, and the play “started with my response to the immense grief I was carrying” for a “family matriarch” (“Correspondence”). In 2020, *Swan Song* was developed into a filmic iteration when Covid-19 forced South Africa’s National Arts Festival to produce a virtual programme; Ngaba’s mother had passed away at the end of 2019, and her performance in the filmed version evinces this compounding of heartache. The protagonist in *Swan Song* is also grieving, but her lament is primarily over the self – the younger self, the forgotten self, the disavowed and lost and reclaimed self. As she becomes reconciled to her physical imperfection (the winged scapula), this embrace of an embodied identity merges with a celebration of a wider set of identity markers. *Swan Song* is thus “a celebration of black female / femme youth” but also of those who have gone before. Embedded in this is Ngaba’s desire to pay tribute to her elders and forebears:

I come from a family with an incredible sense of identity ... we *know* where we come from. We are peasants and farmers and teachers and

nurses and domestic workers and, later, soldiers, mayors, actors, advocates, accountants – a people and family who are proud of where we come from. With only my immediate brother and sister left in our direct bloodline, it has never been more important for me to celebrate all we are.

(“Correspondence”)

Ngaba’s “people” here are family past and present – she does not use the term in the same way as Kani, for whom “my people” by turns refers to the amaXhosa, black South Africans or even South Africans more generally. This difference in scope, or scale, speaks to other ways in which their plays (and their performances in those plays) may be compared. Kani’s Lunga Kunene seeks to teach both Jack Morris and the audience about South African history, painting in broad brushstrokes; Ngaba’s character in *Swan Song* makes members of the audience her confidantes, sharing with them some of the small moments that constitute a life, and following an artistic method that is closer to pointillism. The contrast has also been manifest in the spaces their plays have occupied. While *Kunene* has filled large auditoria, the *Swan* has been performed inside a modified shipping container. And, finally, one cannot help but feel that *Swan Song* offers a counterpoint to the “fatal flaw,” the “inexcusable hubris,” of *Kunene and the King* – a “silence” discerned by Schalkwyk between all the verbiage, because “women have no voice in Kani’s play: they are relegated to shadowy absences, as absent wife and girlfriend, essentially abandoned by their respective men” (“*Kunene*” n.p.). Insofar as *Swan Song* represents a wider group (“young black women in South Africa”), it does so not by portraying or speaking on behalf of that group but merely by daring to occupy a stage: “Not many of us get the opportunity or platform to share our experiences,” as Ngaba has remarked, so the sheer existence of her solo show conveys “an aspect of this voice” – the voice missing from *Kunene* (“Correspondence”).

What happened, then, to the Shakespeare in *Swan Song*? Juliet is still in there, no doubt – a young woman who falls head-over-heels in love, who thrills at the discovery of sexual pleasure, who learns that love is always mixed bitterness and bereavement. Indeed, *Romeo and Juliet* also provides a warped template for her parents’ lust (not love) story: in this telling, her father enters as Romeo but disappears after a brief cameo. Other Shakespearean tragic heroines are also distilled into Ngaba’s troubled protagonist, most notably Ophelia, whose mistreatment at the hands of the men she loves leads to madness and her own bawdy “swan

song” before death. When the young protagonist is trying to fit in at university, fighting against her fear that she does not belong because of her poverty, her race and her rural background, Shakespeare becomes a means of access – a form of social capital and a marker of upward mobility. She boldly declares, “Shakespeare? ... I got this!” (Ngaba *Swan Song* 12:30), before discovering that she does not: Oliver, her own love interest, is introduced when he corrects her error in delivering the final line of Sonnet 147.<sup>13</sup> Yet the most potent Shakespearean influence on the play – its driving engine, you could say – is not a character or plotline lifted from Shakespeare, not an analogy or allegory, and not even discernible if you don’t know the backstory. It is a copy of Sol Plaatje’s *Juliuse Kesara* passed from grandmother to granddaughter, symbolising not the vexed sociopolitical history of Shakespeare-in-translation in South Africa (although that signification hovers in the air) but something much more intimate: a family legacy.

For Kani, writing *Kunene and the King*, Shakespeare’s problematic colonial history and inheritance is counterbalanced by his universality and his resonance in a South African context. The emphasis falls on the latter, and Shakespeare is redeemed, uplifted, affirmed. As he asked rhetorically in the conversation with Ngaba at the Fugard: “You see how easily Shakespeare sits in the culture of any person or nation? ... He talks to you and to your situation beyond the boundaries of geography, time, culture and language ... There isn’t a single Shakespeare play where you can’t find its relevance to your life and to what your country is about” (Kani and Ngaba). The play thus reinscribes the “soft power” of Shakespeare, the RSC and English cultural capital (Schalkwyk “*Kunene*” n.p.).

For Ngaba, making *Swan Song*, the positive force of Shakespeare’s work was initially placed in the foreground – the play was forged in and through (and, initially, for) the RSC community. Nevertheless, “Shakespeare” here was merely a springboard, with Stratford providing a moment of epiphany (speaking Juliet’s lines on the stage of the Swan) and then a sustaining metaphor (the swans of Avon). Shakespeare and Stratford soon began to recede, inevitably, but their disappearance was not overdetermined by an antagonistic struggle between the “good” and

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<sup>13</sup> Oliver is also Prince Siegfried from *Swan Lake*. This ballet, rather than any Shakespearean work, is the more sustained object of “canonical” allusion in *Swan Song*; like Shakespeare, however, it is ultimately peripheral or incidental to the South African content and context of the piece.

“bad” that comes with Shakespeare in South Africa. Indeed, among theatre makers of Ngaba’s generation, the problem of Shakespeare goes without saying; one need not therefore undertake the grand project of reconciling the contradictions in Shakespeare’s legacy. One can simply nudge the figure of Shakespeare away from the spotlight, upstage him, or usher him off the stage entirely – making of him a kind of absent presence, a means of enriching (but not crucial) allusion, a pace-setter or sparring partner... and nothing more.

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## **Boom and Bust: The Global Novel of Ireland (2007) and India (2008)**

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This article examines the phenomenon of the global novel and its celebration as consecrated through the high prestige award of the Man Booker prize, and so constitutive of an elite global literary culture. It offers a contrastive comparison between two Booker prize-winning novels from the consecutive years of 2007 and 2008. An East-West polarization coincidentally appears in the winners: the Irish novel, *The Gathering* (2007) by Anne Enright and the Indian novel, *The White Tiger* (2008) by Aravind Adiga. Both are publications from decolonized nations and can be linked to familiar stereotypes of national economic expansion, the new or “shining” India and the Irish Celtic Tiger, at a moment when the economic boom of neoliberal globalization had peaked and before the spectacular collapse of the Irish economy in particular, in 2008. They share prizewinning assets of fictional innovativeness, social relevance and high consumer appeal at a time when networks of global capital had consolidated and transformed the neoliberal economies of their societies. Together they speak for an era that witnesses the radical decline of the West and a corresponding rise of economies in the East.

As novels from postcolonial nations informed by the new world order of global capitalism, their preoccupation with the marginal, underrepresented figure usually associated with postcolonial paradigms of injustice and inequality distances them from euphoric celebrations of economic prosperity, or the new forms of self-empowerment as appears in American novels like De Lillo’s *Cosmopolis* or *Underworld*. Enright’s novel returns to the Ireland of the 1960s, and is about family dysfunction, death and mourning, while Adiga’s ironic portrait of the new shining India, presents the extremes of poverty and wealth in the economic boom

as mobilizing a rapacious, self-serving opportunism. Despite the hint in his title of a rising economy with connotations of “unstoppable economic growth” (Mendes 277), Adiga’s win was controversial in India where his novel was read as an “unglamorous portrait of the nation’s economic miracle” (Jeffries n.p.), and seen more as “a guide to Dark India” (Ghoshal n.p.). Enright’s *The Gathering*, by contrast, approaches the Celtic Tiger, looking “awry” (Schwall 594) in Zizek’s terms, and is part of an expanding literature in Ireland on trauma, memory and mourning, suggesting that economic growth was encouraging a return to explore what Joyce called the nightmare of Irish history. Despite the optimism following the Good Friday Agreement and the unprecedented prosperity of the boom years, the collective experiences of pain and suffering due to historical injustice and cultural loss still needed to gain symbolic representation before these political and economic successes could be celebrated (Gibbons 95, 99).

The novels are contrasting fictional types, both in terms of gender, and generically, thematically and aesthetically, and they paradoxically subvert East-West cultural stereotypes: one about a psychological crisis due to child abuse, the other a savage satire on the New India. *The White Tiger* denotes the cult of individualism, entrepreneurialism, and family exclusion that is more usually associated with break-through works in western fiction like *Robinson Crusoe*, while *The Gathering*, referring to a collectivity, the coming together of family, and reinforcement of blood ties, is more reminiscent of earlier Indian novels like those by Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things*. As their titles imply, they share a preoccupation with the family unit, represented as a microcosm of the figure of the national body / family. The crisis of legitimation in the family’s role and function that they present can be read as metonymic of the nation, through the prism of a national allegory in *The Gathering*, and by an elaborate fabulist metaphorical conceit in *The White Tiger*. Both approach this through first-person narrators, in modes of fictional psychobiography (Enright) and pseudobiography (Adiga), speaking from outside or in conflict with social systems of representation in which oppression of gender, religion and class / caste has been perpetuated across generations. Their narrative trajectories develop from abject positions of subjugation and subordination towards greater autonomy and self-agency facilitated by the more empowering self-imaginings available in the new consumer culture; and their protagonists overcome their fraught legacies to acquire

greater autonomy and self-agency, whether this culminates in alienated self-promotion (Adiga) or renewed embrace of self and others (Enright).

These contrasts and *The White Tiger's* place in a pantheon of its own making in its break from previous Indian writing in English, as critics and reviewers have noted, can also be traced through a prototype of world literature, familiar in the Booker prize-winning system<sup>1</sup>: this features a trauma and recovery story with magico-realist elements involving abuse and family dysfunction that arrives at resolution by the invocation of spiritual or holistic verities (Menand 139). Enright's novel best fits this paradigm through a "holistic" cure rather than the mystical or exotic. Adiga's novel, however, adopts the structure of trauma and recovery, abuse and family dysfunction, breaking with this paradigm just as it does with other conventions of fiction, adapting the beast fable and narrative voice to an innovative construction of entrepreneurial selfhood, and presenting for global consumption elements of India's economic rise as self-styled unholy and "unholistic" verities. In this too the novels undermine simplistic East / West dichotomies, in that Enright's focus on the inner life and holistic cure is reminiscent of eastern writing whereas Adiga's break from family and literary tradition is more usually associated with western-style capitalism. *The White Tiger* resonates with other self-help, entrepreneurial novels such as Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* (2005) and Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) that represent a "development of cosmopolitan reflexivity" and deliberately subvert western readers' expectations of South Asian fiction being about postcolonial victimhood and injustice (Tickell 155).

In acknowledging the differentiated and unequal spread of the global economy, as identified by Neil Lazarus, this article aims to construct a dialogue between these dissimilar novels to suggest the synchronicity of underlying preoccupations in eastern and western cultural production when poised on the crest of the economic wave, and differences in their fictional treatment. Its orientation comes from Fredric Jameson's argument, that one impact of combined unevenness in the global economy is that of "a mode of production still locked in conflict with traces of the older mode" (Lazarus 40, citing Jameson "Magic Realism" 311) – tensions that can be traced in the novels' postcolonial and global frameworks. In providing a literary comparison / contrast it aims to examine the

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<sup>1</sup> On the critical reception, see Hunter 1286-89.

impact of modernity's inheritance by identifying the authors' revisionist approach to national images and symbols that have centred the family unit in the national imaginary in terms of "the concrete situations from which such texts spring and to which they constitute distinct responses" (Lazarus 40, citing Jameson "Third-World Literature" 86–87 n5).

The East-West differences of the global economic reforms, finance capital and commodity markets inform the novels' contrasting orientations to the burgeoning culture of consumerism and commodification in the 1990s and 2000s. In India local economies opened up to global market forces through deindustrialization and land speculation, dispossessing marginalized communities and widening the division between traditional, agrarian modes of production and modern, IT-based ones (Mirza xxi). The beneficiaries of official economic liberalization in 1991 were the rapidly expanding urban middle classes. *The White Tiger's* division between Darkness and Light is a schematic response to restructured "neoliberal economic policies which adversely affected the economic interest of poor and marginal sections of the population" (Sahoo 2) that were denied upward mobility, displaced through urban migration and subject to precarious working conditions. The Irish economic transformation, by contrast, saw Ireland as a successor state whose postcolonial dream was betrayed by the failure to deliver modernization, because the implementation of the neocolonial bourgeois project brought a utopian world, but only limited change in entrenched cultural and social realities. Unlike the burgeoning IT industry of Bangalore celebrated in *The White Tiger*, in which global economic forces led to overheated expansion in the construction sector, poorly regulated finance markets and heightened consumerism, Ireland's sense of global empowerment was more ambiguous; metropolitan ascendancy and celebration was also backward looking, amplifying the national heritage rather than purely springing from a new industry, and Enright's *The Gathering* points to a transitional stage of Irish nationalism still marked by postcolonial victimhood.

These different types of economic emergence and their eastern and western cultural frameworks can be traced further in the contrasting identities, orientations and voices of the novel's narrators, and their problematizing of fiction's relationship to reality. Adiga's narrator, Balram Halwai, masquerading as his murdered employer, Ashok Sharma, embodies the new spirit of consumerism, fast capital growth, and cheap credit. The novel opens with the announcement of his arrival in Bangalore, new centre of the IT world as "The White Tiger / A Thinking Man / And

an entrepreneur” (Adiga 1), and a vision of progress commonly associated with the “savage” phase of western capitalism and expansion. Enright’s narrator, traumatized at the news of her brother Liam’s suicide, which she traces to sexual abuse that she may have witnessed as a child, is positioned as though at the limit of symbolic power; she can only speak about it but lacks the right words or certainty of its existence: “I feel it roaring inside me – this thing that may not have taken place” (Enright 1).<sup>2</sup> Her name, Veronica, invokes the woman who caught the *vera icon*, the true image of Christ, a meaning that is reflected in her urge to tell the “true history” (Ewins) of her brother, and the hint of resurrection in her forgiveness at the end; the novel’s Christian symbolism, extending to details such as Veronica’s coming from a family of 12 children, conveys a past-oriented world-view anchored in the belief and ritual of an earlier era, values that in *The White Tiger* are dismissed as backward and irrelevant (Nandi 165).

The narrators embody a differentiated relationship between power, voice and identity. Balram / Ashok projects the post-millennial ascendancy of the entrepreneur, claiming “I am tomorrow” (Adiga 6), and equating his story to that of the city: “If anyone knows the truth about Bangalore it’s me” (4). Enright’s narrator, by contrast, compromised by her suppressed memory and traumatized about what happened in her grandmother’s house when she was eight or nine, struggles with the problem of representation and speech: “I do not know the truth or I do not know how to tell the truth. All I have are stories” (Enright 2). Veronica’s trajectory from outside history is to override the fictions she tells herself, to remember, and face the truth, but Balram’s insistence on a singular truth argues that in impersonating his murdered employer, he has also appropriated the project of history as his own. In these contrastive representations the novels again complicate and blur any easy distinction between East and West: Adiga’s narrator has the thrusting determination and confident self-invention to launch the entrepreneur’s narrative of “new” India with a recognition of global history, whereas Enright’s backward-looking narrator, steeped in neurosis and melancholia, reflects the problematic of (post)colonial Ireland, one that blurs the lines between eastern spiritualism and western capitalism, of a nation that has not yet come to terms with its burden of history.

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<sup>2</sup> Meaney, citing Lyotard, comments that this is close to his idea of the postmodern, i.e. that “which cannot be represented is presented in representation” (Meaney 146).

## The “New India” and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*

Written from the point of view of Balram Halwai, a despised and ridiculed subaltern, who becomes the chauffeur for the son of a wealthy corrupt landowner, *The White Tiger* tells of Balram’s ascendancy due to cleverness, cunning and amorality. The sociohistorical concept of the subaltern caste based on stereotypes of illiteracy, willing servitude and lack of privacy is overturned in the complex reconfiguring of selfhood and projection of a naked ambition that underlines his decision to kill his employer, Ashok Sharma, steal his money, assume his name and enter the global economy of Bangalore, “the world’s centre of technology and outsourcing” (Adiga 3).

Balram’s changing attitude towards his own family and scepticism about the concept of the Indian family as a fulcrum of national identity, are inextricable from his ambition to overcome his subaltern status and reinvent himself as an entrepreneur. The novel, a form of bildungsroman, consists of a retrospective narration spoken in the appropriated voice of his murdered employer, Ashok, looking back on his younger self, and it reconstructs his impoverished upbringing in Laxmanargh, a village in Bihar near the Ganges, and employment as domestic servant first in the landlord’s house in Dhanbad and then as sole servant and chauffeur to the landlord’s son Ashok and his wife Pinky Madam in Gurgaon, a satellite commuter town in Delhi. These social and geographical transitions are reinforced by the namings and renamings of the child known anonymously as Munna (meaning boy) – for the subaltern identity is only instrumental in the fiction (Nandi 154) – and then as Balram and Ashok: these comprise the composite narrative voice.<sup>3</sup> The novel’s enunciative framework consists of an address to the Chinese Premier, Jiabao Wen, who is planning to visit Bangalore and meet Indian

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<sup>3</sup> On the narrator’s inauthenticity, and the problems of silencing and objectifying the subaltern in representing poverty, familiar in much Indian literature in English, see the debate in *Connotations* (Korte, Nandi, Lau and Mendes). Nandi argues that the narrator, invested in an elite discourse attributable to Adiga’s US and Oxford education, writes against middle class stereotypes of the subaltern, without necessarily giving voice to the subaltern (156, 158); Mendes argues that “class ventriloquism” (27) is introduced through strategies of characterization; Detmers that “the subaltern self’s emancipation [...] [gives] a new voice” to the indigene (540), refashioned as a new precarious subject; Lochner that neoliberal discourses are contested in identifying the narrator as subaltern who writes himself into being (35).



entrepreneurs, adapted from the epistolary novel in the form of seven email letters over seven chapters – a semi-confessional monologue. From the outset then the narrative voice is positioned through the protagonist's discursive representation in the Indian class / caste system, in ways that represent his subjugation, then anger and violence at the imprisoning inequalities of global growth. In the novel's present moment as fake narrator, and urbane entrepreneur, Ashok, he poses as worldly authority on India's place in the wider world, introducing into the email conversation with Jiabao Wen topics such as East-West relations, Chinese-Indian economic power, and global politics.

Ashok's alias Balram's retrospective narration produces an "unrelentingly negative" (Tickell 157) portrait of his family attributable to his harsh upbringing. His abject alienation and disaffection in response to social inequality and political corruption and his embrace of consumerist ideology are conflated with the loss of both parents early on, in a savage satire of Indian / Hindu mythology concerning death and burial and the Indian medical system. Witnessing his mother's funeral pyre in the Ganges is recalled as the child Munna, in a mixture of disgust at the circumstances and empathy for his deceased mother, an affective moment rhetorically signaled by the proximity of the speaking voice of Ashok / Balram to that of the experiencing subject (Nandi 165); this is contrasted with his father's expiry from TB on the hospital floor in an exposé of national neglect of the health of the indigent classes. The child's abandonment to the clutches of his mercenary grandmother Kusum reinforces this grim portrait of family duties whereby children are exploited for their labour and marriageability, and "domestic employment [is] construed as a qualified form of kinship" (Tickell 160); Balram's servant status incurs financial remittances, return visits, and responsibility for his dependent nephew. These multiple family obligations due to extreme poverty, ill health and death, can be correlated to Adiga's claim that his novel aims to "highlight the brutal injustices of society": such as limited health care in underdeveloped states like Bihar, poor Indians' fear of tuberculosis, and the fact that "family ties get broken or at least stretched when cities like Bangalore draw people from the villages" (Jeffries n.p.). Again the East-West fictional stereotype is subverted, for Adiga's hero is comparable to the prototypical western capitalist colonizer-fortune seeker who begins in abject poverty with no prospects and abandons family ties to follow his destiny in the wider world, a trope found in western genres such as the

“Robinsade,” Victorian novels like *Great Expectations* and the Australian convict novel.

These socio-realist contexts and the novel’s innovative realism in depicting the newly impoverished state of India’s global economic growth, for which it has been praised (see Anjaria; Lochner), however, require some reconciliation with the tropes of dynamic self-invention that mark Balram’s reconfiguration of the family unit: this appears in the techniques of transformative parody, caricature and performance of his subjugated and triumphalist identities in the metamorphosis from abject servant, evident in appellations such as Country-Mouse or “village idiot” (Adiga 130) to the killer, imaged by the White Tiger. This comparison of the representation of the family in *The White Tiger* with Enright’s depiction of family dysfunction in *The Gathering*, which can be read as a national allegory, turns to Adiga’s representational strategies that suggest a framing of the family unit as metonymic, rather than allegorical, of the life of the nation.<sup>4</sup> Balram’s decision to turn against his own class, emulate his masters, and sacrifice his family to his ambition, one moral pivot on which the novel turns, is implemented through the narrative device of the political beast fable. In this “discursive paradigm of subaltern emancipation” (Detmers 542) from poverty by overturning the master-slave relationship, Adiga’s satire expands into a full blown caricature of the subaltern as a symbol of dumb passivity, and so dispensable in the entrepreneurial new order, just like his employer.

Balram’s early parental loss and the unremitting cruelty of his grandmother sets up his conflict with a family hierarchical system represented as an inextricable part of and indeed a justification for national class / caste oppression. The novel’s satire on the global economy and its privileging of a monetary system argues that the Indian nation state and the family are alike in being governed by economic principles; in Balram’s solipsistic logic the incentive of individual financial gain, devoid of human consideration, makes them interchangeable. The ruling metaphor

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<sup>4</sup> Detmers reads *The White Tiger* as a “state-of-India” novel, referring to socio-political concerns such as “hegemony, class emancipation, revolt and revolution, crime and guilt” (536, 540); but while Balram claims his “business self-help genre as the public text of New India” (Tickell 163) and offers a model of emancipation for the poor (Adiga 318), there is no “redeeming collective agency on the part of the poor” (Tickell 157), or revolution, and his reimagining of India is reduced to the lens of the entrepreneurialism he promotes, through which the poor who are excluded from the economic miracle, are viewed.

that carries the emotional and symbolic weight of this vision and marks the flowering of Balram's ambition is the Rooster Coop, a centralized social system of subaltern entrapment – a coop of tightly packed hens and roosters awaiting slaughter. Framed by the novel's manichean binary of Darkness and Light that figures the rich-poor divide, this human killing process images Balram's destiny in terms of the eponymous White Tiger image. Initially conferred upon Munna / Balram by a school inspector for being "intelligent" and "honest" (Adiga 35), and animated by shifting signifiers, the White Tiger moniker connotes uniqueness and rarity as it appears "only once in a generation" (Adiga 177). In Indian mythology the tiger is associated with Durga, the goddess of wrath (Nandi 162), but western values of aggressive individuality also appear, marking Balram's aspirations to become a cosmopolitan entrepreneur.

Balram's dystopic vision of "The Great Indian Rooster Coop" depicts those who live in Darkness as passively enduring enforced servitude and enslavement to a killing machine: "They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they are next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop" (Adiga 173). The grounds of the entrapment metaphor, Balram's master blow at Indian nationalism, is the family: "the *Indian family* is the reason we are – tied to the coop" (176). The sacrifice of family becomes part of his act of self-emancipation, so aligning him with the "grinning young butcher" (173), bloody-handed and conscience-free, because the man who wishes to break out of the coop "is prepared to see his family destroyed – hunted, beaten, and burnt alive by the masters." In acclaiming the White Tiger as the "freak, a pervert of nature" who in "the story of the social entrepreneur" can do this deed (176–77), Balram resignifies his self-image as a cold-blooded, villainous assassin.

The consequences of murdering Ashok Sharma – the likely death of Balram's entire family as reprisal – are never verified, for Balram is unable to read a report of the slaughter of a family of 17 in a village north of the Ganges. They never reach the status of connected narrative as attested by the fractured temporality in his conversations with Premier Jiabao Wen (Anjaria 117–18) and hints of an impending doom – but can be inferred by his self labelling as "a virtual mass murderer" (Adiga 45), and his refusal to "watch Hindi films – on principle" (Adiga 8, 313). The Christian moral framework of *The Gathering* and Veronica's initial inability to tell her story, or any story, is both counterpoint to and echo of Balram's attitude to his performance of entrepreneurship, for Veronica's

turning point comes in recognizing that invention is in fact avoidance – her traumatized state requires the telling of the right story in order to heal and recover her life. Such distinctions are suppressed in Balram’s version: the account of how his family met their fate is one that cannot be told, although as his narrative unravels he becomes uncertain: “I cannot be certain the story, as I will tell it, is the right story to tell” (Adiga 113). Instead in a confirmatory celebration of his new “bestiality,” Balram commodifies the White Tiger image as the name of his taxi company in Bangalore, “The White Tigers.” In this final resignification into a symbol of financial success, the label speaks for his performance in a new representative structure that allows him to distance himself symbolically but not emotionally from the consequences of his ambition.

In this representation of Balram’s symbolic excision of the family from the national imaginary in a way that audaciously challenges moral propriety and social orthodoxy Adiga also creates readerly undecidability. His satire of a social system that invisibilizes the subaltern, juxtaposed to Balram’s transformation into a killer who condemns that very victimized subaltern class in order to escape it, can be approached through a reading based on the model of the postcolonial picaresque novel proposed by Jens Elze. Stemming from *Don Quixote* and other eighteenth century types, the postcolonial genre’s narrative paradigm is a first person episodic life story overlaid by a panoramic view of the society through which the protagonist travels, opening up the question of whether events can be attributed to a personal pathology – “the truth of facts” as experienced by the protagonist or “the truth of social pressures and conventions” which he aims to expose – in ways that create readerly “precarious undecidability” (Elze 151–52). *The White Tiger* conforms to this genre with its enunciative framework that resembles a confessional or testimonial that “addresses an authority to state a case or a criminal offence” (Elze 148); in other words the address to the Chinese premier Jiabo Wen, is by proxy positioning the reader to judge whether Balram’s “morally despicable action” is “a legitimate consequence of the vulgar conventions of reality” (Elze 152) or not. The reader is implicitly invited to evaluate the pervasive injustice and violence of the global economic system in its indifference to human suffering against Balram’s act of double betrayal in his willingness to sacrifice his family following his crime of murder.

Juxtaposing the potency of the White Tiger image in Balram’s subjectivity are sights of collective dispossession, futility and poverty that fuel his disgust and anger. The same Light and Darkness disparities of

the urban-rural worlds are reproduced within the city space of Delhi, as the global division of labour and class / caste constructs the third world within the first world, making the city “a synecdoche for a nation divided by capital” (Detmers 538), for “Delhi is the capital of not one but *two* countries – two Indias. The Light and the Darkness both flow into Delhi” (Adiga 251). At one extreme are the air-conditioned cars, imaged as eggs, which glide around, bearing their wealthy owners hermetically insulated. At the other, as Balram sees from the car window, are “[t]hose poor bastards [who] had come from the Darkness to Delhi to find some light – but they were still in the darkness” (Adiga 138). A narrative temporal and spatial thickening provides a chronotope of the car-as-egg as Balram has an epiphany while driving his master’s Honda City:

We were like two separate cities inside and outside the dark egg. I knew I was in the right city, But my father, if he were alive, would be sitting on that pavement, cooking some rice gruel for dinner, and getting ready to lie down and sleep under a streetlamp and I couldn’t stop thinking of that, and recognizing his features in some beggar out there, So I was in some way out of the car too, even while I was driving it.

(Adiga 138)

By linking his vantage point from inside the egg-car to his father (now deceased), evoking an uncanny sense of being in both worlds and time zones simultaneously, Balram perceives the one degree of separation the car affords him from the Darkness from which he has come; while reinscribing himself into the system from which he wishes to escape.

Parallels between Enright’s and Adiga’s novels appear in these images of mechanization that stress the characters’ transitional positioning between dual temporalities and spatialities, and situate them outside domestic domains. In driving his employer Ashoka and his wife Pinky Madam, Balram’s doubled perception fosters his transgressive ambition to overcome the division between these spheres and escape the Darkness. In *The Gathering* Veronica’s car, a Saab 9.3, is both a mode of transport and a protective shell; an extension of herself as she drives around during the night, after hearing of her brother’s death, becoming estranged from her own family, it is a “tin coffin” in which to enact her despair in an alternative kind of intimacy, in which the organic and inorganic intertwine as “the embodied female self is enmeshed in the machine” (Bracken 186): “I am hanging onto the steering wheel, with my mouth wide open. We stay locked together like this for a while, me and the

car” (Enright 29). The car also seemingly acquires a life of its own, taking her away from home and out of present time into memory, as she drives to the asylum in Portrane she had earlier visited with her grandmother where her uncle was a patient, and to the airport where she flies to Gatwick, symbolizing her temporary escape from Ireland. In these ways it facilitates her transition from disembodied alienation and dislocation to a more local and situated state. As protection and source of the reidentifying / resignifying process that allows her to recover from the tyranny of the past and “generate the production of something more positive and productive” (Bracken 194), the Saab is comparable to the Honda imaged as an egg, inspiring Balram’s vision of being both inside and out of time and space / place as the exceptional subject. In both novels the car is *the* symbol of mobility producing “subjective experiences of space and time as nomadic movement and journeying” (194), needed for differentiations and redefinitions of self in ways not possible through existing social and domestic frameworks.

Adiga’s satiric attack on the current mythification of India as the shining nation of global order extends to the nation’s sacred value systems. The systematic undermining of the mythic structure of Indian nationalistic rhetoric first emanates from his mother’s death, Balram’s witnessing of her funeral pyre in the Ganges, and subsequent deconstruction of the national mystique of the Mother Ganga, protector of the Nation as “the river of emancipation” (15). The “real god of Benares” is not purifying water but the mud “into which everything died and decomposed and was reborn from, and died again. [...] Nothing would get me liberated here” (17). Likewise the ironic celebration of Indian family as the “repository of love and sacrifice, pride and glory of the nation” (Adiga 176) is overturned in Balram’s portrait of the self-serving, manipulative tactics of his granny, Kusum, likened to the “fierce and black skinned” goddess Kali (Adiga 135), appearing in magnetic stickers on the Honda City’s dashboard (132) – the car he drives, and by extension a desacralized myth of the motherland, which, according to Nandi, is “corrupt backward, cruel and verging on the bestial” (159). The myth of Independence is not about the birth of the nation, but when “jungle law replaced zoo law” and those with “Big Bellies” rose up against the “Small Bellies,” in an anti-myth that reinforces Balram’s jungle philosophy of “eat or get eaten up” (Adiga 63–64). The novel’s renunciation of national myths involves a deliberate displacement of the national imaginary and reconfiguring it into the global imaginary dominated by the consumer society and his

entrepreneurial cult of ruthless individualism and mercenary self-interest. Whether this erasure of all that is valued in the national mythology can be justified by Balram's powers of invention and promotion of a new global order, is a significant aspect of reader undecidability.

## **Ireland and Anne Enright's *The Gathering***

In *The Gathering* the new freedoms and opportunities of globalization – as in electronic communication, financial expansion, consumerism – are just one context for the novel's domestic tragedy. The family crisis is set in motion by the suicide of Liam, the heroine's younger brother, and this opens her eyes to the sex abuse he suffered as a child. Veronica's trauma on hearing of her brother's death and considering its causes, catalyses her search into her family's past, to a time when Catholicism still ruled in Irish society: she returns to the 1960s when she was growing up, and beyond that to the 1920s and 30s, the era of her grandparents and mother. In the background are the 1990s "revelations of child abuse in orphanages, and by the Catholic clergy, scandals within the Catholic Church, high level corruption in business and political circles" (Gibbons 99); general amnesia about the abuse of minors and other vulnerable groups pointing to clerical dysfunction and cover ups as well as child abuse in domestic spaces. These revelations, and other features of the Celtic Tiger that internationalized Ireland's world view – increased immigration, the extension of finance capital, commodity markets, and the burgeoning local economy – are alluded to obliquely. Paradoxically, however, they contribute to the heroine's forward momentum, by offering new possibilities for self-imagining.

The novel is about the unreliability of memory, representation and history – in the sense of not knowing and being unfamiliar with events, yet the need to recover the facts. The symptoms of trauma – the experience of inner stress, muteness, of inability to speak about or even confirm the abuse she witnessed – set out the trajectory of the novel: to recover knowledge of what she witnessed from her unreliable memories; that is, of abuse of her brother in her grandmother's house in 1968 where the children stayed for a year, by the owner, Nugent Lambert, who came every Friday to collect the rent. Although not sexually abused herself Veronica displays all the symptoms of the traumatized hysterical subject and can only recover her memory by trying to reconstruct the lives of her grandparents, the source of the family tragedy. From these perspectives,

the novel stands in polar opposition to *The White Tiger*. Her comment, “I don’t even know what name to put on it” (Enright 1), for example, contrasts to the plural naming strategies to label the new reality set in place by Adiga’s anti-hero to represent his transition from Darkness into Light.

Enright’s work, like that of other Irish novelists like Mary Morrissey, Desmond Hogan and Colm Toibin, has been described as postnationalist because it poses a challenge to the restrictive images of gender and sex associated with traditional nationalism (Gibbons 90; Ryan 166). She is seen as rewriting a new position and identity for Irish women, as many assumptions and stereotypes of Irish nationalism were being questioned at a time when the depressed economy transformed into relative prosperity; this intervention into national mythologies and the congruence of her novel’s thematics with national concerns, enables it to be read as a national allegory of Ireland representing the vicissitudes of economic globalization. This is captured in an uneasy “high maintenance” (Enright 36) atmosphere, just before the crash, filled with moments of comprehension and foreboding. The present is revealed as a fragile and precarious state.

Veronica’s process of working through her traumatized reaction to her brother’s suicide involves a reconstruction of her entire life; for exploring sexual trauma inevitably summons up the archaic trauma of the subject’s being which in Lacanian terms is “the ‘truth’ of the unconscious” (Gardam 100). She questions her identity, now seen as a lack, a fabrication, in contrast to Balram’s acquisition and performance of a new persona: “I realised that until now I had been living my life in inverted commas” in a lifetime of “false intensities” (Enright 181, 120). At the time she had witnessed without understanding the abuse; then “the world around us changed,” and the public reaction in the media helped her to register it: “I would never have made that shift on my own – if I hadn’t been listening to the radio and reading the paper, and hearing what went on in schools and churches and people’s homes” (173).

Matthew Ryan, in his reading of the novel, sees that Enright’s narrator, as a subject in crisis, represents the cultural social phenomenon that conditions the way people symbolically construct meaning as affected by the social conditions of globalization; he sees the problem of reconfiguring the self in *The Gathering* as represented by the tension between the two forces of the Celtic Tiger: the global drive that disembodies and alienates, and the local desire to embody and situate (166–68). Such a tension can



be seen as reflective of Veronica's attempts to fix meaning for although tempted in telling Liam's story by "the romantic place" of history, before he was born, history keeps "sliding around in my head" (Enright 13). The moment she arbitrarily fixed on – when Lamb Nugent first saw her grandmother, Ada Merriman, in 1925 in a hotel foyer – turns out to be false. It also explains how she finds that "my mind is subject to jolts and lapses" (Enright 39). The transition to a more centred state is symbolically referenced in the novel's conclusion, where she speaks from outside the national space in the anonymity of Gatwick airport, as though she is now earthed: "I feel like I have spent the last five months up in the air" (Enright 261).

Although the novel's setting is redolent of the Ireland of the Celtic Tiger era, the new gods of neoliberal globalization, consumerism and rapid wealth that mobilize the entrepreneurial ambition of Balam / Ashok in *The White Tiger* have little appeal for Veronica Hegarty: as a middle-class 39-year-old mother-of-two married to a man from the world of corporate finance who "moves money around, electronically" (18), her inner crisis is only magnified by the habits of consumerism, which make her "suddenly aware of the poor, starving and marginal, and hence the impossible situation of Liam" (Enright 190). Shopping and spending become painful reminders of her family and especially of her mother who is not consumer-minded enough to enjoy the cashmere scarf she buys her. Yet at the novel's end, consumerism plays a part in her rediscovered life, imparting agency and freedom. Objects, possessions, and consumables become materially valued, as they are now emptied of connotations of trauma and symptomatic of her recovery. They rename her as an affluent subject as she calculates she can trade in the Saab, dreams of buying her grandmother's house and selling it on at twice the price (Enright 238), and buys her daughters flipflops at Accessorize at Gatwick airport. Such ambivalence about the consumer society illustrates the mixed responses to the boom years in early twenty-first century Ireland, often represented as a collapsed Slave-Master paradigm: a "narrative of dystopian malcontent," a "brutalizing and alienating system" forcing abandonment of traditional values, alternating with an "irenical utopianism" in which the citizen becomes the self-empowered consumer with entitlements, desires and agency (Cronin 81–82).

The crisis of family legitimacy that marks both novels' intervention into the sphere of cultural representation and reconfiguring in order to shape a more globally inflected national imaginary appears in their

similar representations of precarious, struggling and impoverished family life: the paradigms emerging from Irish Catholicism set against those of Hindu ritual and caste. In both novels children are unrecognized or ignored, invisible due to overcrowding and because “children were of little account” (Enright 256). Veronica’s trauma retrospectively diminishes the parent-child relationship due to feelings of nothingness and perception of her mother as being absent after her father’s death, and of not looking after her brother when he needed her; Balram’s indistinctness in *The White Tiger* is symbolized by his name, Munna: he is an orphan in a world where monetary concerns matter more than children and the “water buffalo,” a vital source of income, is revered as household “dictator” (Adiga 20). In *The Gathering* family dysfunction can be traced to Veronica’s grandmother’s impecuniousness, and in the present excessive physical proximity, claustrophobic intimacy due to indiscriminate breeding and crowding with large families and children doubling in the same beds, feelings that become too intense, or even illicit sex, for in the 1920s “people were mixed up together in the most disgusting ways” (Enright 35). The feelings of love are too often contaminated because of these confusing relations and Veronica is unable to separate love from hate in thinking about those she is closest to: her husband and mother. In her uncertainty of memory, however, misjudgments about family cohesiveness and ties allow for reconciliation by contrast to Balram’s calculations about his family’s likely obliteration, leaving him with no possibility for reversal, memory or remorse.

For post-Celtic Tiger readers of *The Gathering*, the behaviours of sexual excess and too many children, lack of regulation with no birth control, domestic mismanagement and cover-up in the domestic realm suggestively parallel the excesses that occur later in the macro-realm, the economic crash in Ireland in which indiscriminate treatment similarly renders people faceless: that is, the revelations of different kinds of abuse exposed in the novel, due to unchecked behaviour, are analogous to the boom-time’s consumer overspending, excessive consumption, unregulated borrowing, production of excess surplus to requirements or measure of need, that brought unprecedented Irish prosperity to an end. In this sense the novel can be read as a national allegory of the rise and then the implosion of the Irish financial / economic system, according to Jameson’s use of the term, that “the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society” (“Third World Literature” 69). The link

between dysfunctional families and the dysfunctional nation can further be traced to a history of malpractice. Veronica's grandparents became locked into a financial system of rental debt and payment in which child abuse occurred in their relationship of dependency, as Nugent Lambert's financial control over them affected children and grand-children, while those who should have known better allowed it to happen. Parallels in the global financial crisis appear in the underdeveloped public financial management and anti-corruption systems in Ireland prior to the 2008 crash and the banking scandals that followed.

## **National and Global Imaginaries**

In their revaluing of the role of the precarious family unit in pre-crash society, imaged as a financial system to which its members are beholden, both novels register the impact of consumerism and the global economy on the national imaginary; these involve transgression or relocation of national boundaries in terms of global diasporas, and a reframing of national myths and stereotypes of nationhood. Adiga's bestial metaphors show displacement and distortion of the Indian family's place in relation to the anti-hero's murder for personal gain, and subsequent obliterating of the family from the symbolic imaginary; his murderous intent extends to his nephew, the only family member left, in order to guard his secret. Enright's reassessment is effected through a national allegory that correlates the narrative of Catholicism pluralism, breeding and mismanagement to the mishandling and excesses of the Celtic Tiger boom that ended in 2008. By contrast Balram's fixation on the shrine of Bangalore and worship of the false god of mammon is local and global, a monocular realignment by contrast to the principle of unity in multiplicity dominating the nation's spiritual and secular mythologies. Included in the recalibration of national and global imaginaries is the presence of the outsider, the familiar stranger, reflecting the greater mobility in the global economy of diasporic subjects and transnational travellers. In *The White Tiger*, Ashok, Balram's master, is an NRI (non-resident Indian) neoliberal returnee, floundering in the corrupt circles of Delhi, dominated by his family and out of control as seen in his wife Pinky Madam's abrupt departure to the USA. Ashok's disorientation and misunderstanding of the metropolis includes Balram himself whom he sentimentally mistakes for a simple country fool and to whom he shows empathy, making Balram's ruthless murder all the more inhumane. As

Nandi notes, the narrative can be read as a diasporic one, comparable to Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* (1962), and it reflects Adiga's own position as a returnee (159). In *The Gathering* the Irish diaspora appears in the family reunion for Liam's wake with returnees from scattered destinations – North America, London, Europe, South America – and the valorizing of an expanded and dispersed family network boosted by renewed connectivity to rural Ireland – one brother will stay on to buy a farm – and a new inclusivity as Liam's previously unknown illegitimate son joins the gathering. Enright's expansion of the family entity reflects Veronica's healing, and with the hint of her own pregnancy, her move from grief to restoration and reconciliation.

In both novels reconfiguration of the family unit involves reassessing national stereotypes of belonging, constructed from a fusion of ideas of motherhood, maternity and the stereotype of national sovereignty imaged as the mother of the nation: both the earth figures of Mother India and of Ireland, whether the nationalist romantic ideal of the virgin soil of the green isles, or Yeats's Mother Ireland, or more recently suffering Mother Ireland. The implied undermining or erasure of these symbolic roles in order to acknowledge a global ascendancy is traceable to diminished mothering roles in the text and the protagonists' suffering at the preconscious level of the loss of the mother, through death in Balram's case or vagueness as with Veronica's mother: "so absent-minded she was absent altogether" (Enright 213). Overwhelmed by bearing too many children, lost in the weight of domestic duty and providing minimal care, sustenance and parenting, she is associated with Veronica's feelings of nothingness: "If only she could become visible. [...] But she remains hazy, unhittable" (Enright 5).

Further entrenching the portraits of family confusion and destruction, and cause of present day unhappiness are the protagonists' grandmothers, who are locked into earlier patriarchal and colonial power structures, imparting a negative legacy of collusion, tyranny or apathy. Both act dysfunctionally in loco parentis providing neither protection nor love. Veronica's grandmother Ada is the source of the family's trauma – remembered by Veronica as if in a snapshot watching and doing nothing, as if she knew about the family abuse, but took no steps to prevent it. Balram demonizes his granny Kusum as a witch, an exploitative despot, autocratic and self-serving in her deference to political and social powers and naked in her greed; she is a grotesque anti-maternal image in her obsession with the finances

of arranged marriages, remittances, and emotional blackmail; but her likeness to Balram indicates that though he has emptied out and re-purposed abusive family structures, the powerful female figures are not completely cut off, as anxieties about his past deeds discernible in present-day interruptions in his discourse indicate. In both novels, these tainted maternal genealogies militate against the traditional female mythological figures associated with national cohesiveness replacing them with images of greater individual mobility and spatiality, self-determination and transnational frames of identity and belonging.

## **Conclusion**

The displacement of crucial images of nationhood associated with the pre-neoliberal economy and postcolonial nation in these novels reflects their particular moment in time. Lacking a political agenda for the individual emancipation that constitutes one aspect of consumerism, both novels sacrifice unbroken traditions of national mythologies of earth mother goddesses to images of mobility and travel, neoliberal assets of material gain and new forms of agency and self-empowerment. In this reconfiguring of their national imaginaries alongside global ones the differences in their global economies are seminal: India, like other Asian countries, was ahead with the rapid growth of technologies focused in IT industries, while Ireland's global expansion was intermittent and uneven and its nationalism remained closer to the postcolonial paradigm. Enright reinvents the national imaginary by expanding the role of the female, redefining and diversifying the family unit, which allows her to suggest an Ireland more sure of its roots and future, whereas Adiga creates reader undecidability, reinscribes masculinity in control in an innovative narrative structure, but in a symbolic erasure of the family and national myths of nurture and fertility presents a singular image of neoliberal capitalism: a loss of traditional bearings and moral compass in the realignment of the national towards a transnational global imaginary.

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# Joseph de Guignes et John Barrow face à la Chine impériale, ou les illusions des *hommes du lointain* (1793–1812)

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## Diplomatie occidentale vs système tributaire

Pendant longtemps, les ambassades en Orient ont seulement été envoyées par des pouvoirs affaiblis sollicitant la protection d'un puissant voisin ou des privilèges commerciaux, ou encore apportant des cadeaux à un souverain dans le cadre d'une relation tributaire. Les ambassadeurs ne recevaient alors jamais les honneurs qu'on leur accorde dans les états occidentaux, où ils sont considérés comme représentant la personne de leurs souverains. C'est bien ce que dit le diplomate français, Simon de La Loubère (1642–1729), envoyé extraordinaire de Louis XIV auprès du roi du Siam : « Un Ambassadeur par tout l'Orient n'est autre qu'un messenger de Roy : il ne représente point son Maistre. On l'honore peu à comparaison des respects, qu'on porte à la lettre de créance, dont il est porteur » (La Loubère 327–28).<sup>1</sup> Une opinion que partageait Napoléon Bonaparte, pour qui les ambassadeurs ne pouvaient être considérés comme égaux à leurs souverains. Selon lui, cette manière de les considérer résultait d'un préjugé hérité de la période féodale, lorsqu'un grand vassal rendant ses hommages était considéré comme un ambassadeur recevant les mêmes hommages que son maître (O'Meara 112).

Cette différence de point de vue a toujours été, dans l'histoire des relations internationales entre l'Orient et l'Occident, une source de malentendus en ce qui concerne les obligations à respecter et les honneurs qu'on s'attendait à recevoir. Ce fut le cas également en ce qui concerne les

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<sup>1</sup> Sur les ambassades françaises dans ce pays, voir Dirk Van der Cruyse.

missions envoyées à la cour de Chine par les pays européens – Portugal, Provinces-Unies, Russie, Angleterre – nombreuses depuis l'Antiquité jusqu'à la fin de la période impériale. Pendant toute cette période, en effet, les nations occidentales engagées dans le processus d'expansion ouvert par les grandes découvertes des XV<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles cherchèrent à obtenir de l'Empire du Milieu, par le truchement de missions mi-diplomatiques, mi-commerciales, des avantages qui leur furent d'ailleurs la plupart du temps refusés.<sup>2</sup> De part et d'autre, l'incompréhension était totale : les Européens comprenaient difficilement les subtilités de l'organisation bureaucratique encadrant les relations de la Chine impériale avec les nations étrangères ; et les Chinois n'avaient pas toujours une perception claire des origines géographiques de leurs hôtes. C'est ainsi, par exemple, que l'*Histoire officielle des Ming*, le *Mingshi* (明史) – compilée sous le règne de l'empereur Shunzhi 順治帝 (r. 1643–1661), mais achevée tardivement sous les Qing en 1739 – confond un des participants de l'ambassade malaise venue à Pékin pour faire valoir les droits du sultan déchu de Malacca (prise par les Portugais en 1511) avec l'ambassadeur portugais lui-même, Tomé Pires (1468–1524), arrivé en Chine en 1520.<sup>3</sup> En outre, les Portugais étaient qualifiés par les autorités chinoises de *folangji* (佛郎機) ou *falanji* (de l'arabe *ifrangî* ou encore *farangi*), un terme désignant à l'origine les Francs, mais qui avait fini par devenir, aux yeux des fonctionnaires impériaux chargés de l'administration des ports, le nom d'un canon ;<sup>4</sup> ce qui en dit long sur les méthodes d'approche des envoyés lisboètes (Gruzinski 189) !

C'est que la conception de l'ordre mondial selon la Cour impériale ainsi que la vision des relations internationales qui en découle, ne reposaient pas, comme en Occident, sur un système d'équilibre des forces, mais sur une représentation globale du « monde sous le ciel » (天下 *tianxia*), dont le centre n'est autre que la Chine elle-même, le « pays du Milieu » (中国 *zhongguo*), seul et unique détenteur de la culture et de la civilisation. De là un système complexe de relations avec les peuples

<sup>2</sup> Liste de ces ambassades dans Guillaume Pauthier ; à compléter par Louis Pfister. Pour l'histoire des ambassades européennes vers la Chine impériale : Woodville Rockhill, *Diplomatic Audiences*; Hevia, *Cherishing*; Kevak.

<sup>3</sup> Voir : Paul Pelliot (2–5) ; Girard et Viegas (62) ; Fujitani (87–102).

<sup>4</sup> Il semble que les Chinois aient été intéressés par les armes portugaises, qui représentaient un grand progrès par rapport aux leurs (autrefois importées par l'Occident), entre autres un canon léger nommé *berche* – *barço* (Girard et Viegas 50–51).

limitrophes, supposés demandeurs et bénéficiaires de la « civilisation en soi », dans le cadre d'une organisation ritualisée des échanges, impossible à concevoir en fonction des catégories mentales occidentales, parce qu'étroitement dépendante d'un certain nombre de concepts religieux (le « mandat du ciel » confié à l'Empereur) ou éthico-philosophiques confucéens (la hiérarchie, la subordination).

Ainsi, sous les Qing en particulier (1644–1912), les relations avec les autres nations ne dépendent pas d'un « ministère des affaires étrangères », mais sont gérées par un *Bureau des rites* (禮部 *lipu*). Il s'agit en fait d'un système de réciprocité, qu'on peut voir comme une transposition du lien féodal né de la très ancienne confrontation de la Chine avec les peuples nomades de la steppe, au nord ; aborigènes au sud, qui, poussés par une sorte de loi de gravitation, aspirent à jouir des bienfaits de la civilisation (Hok-lam Chan 411–18). Certains documents chinois sont, sur ce point, révélateurs : une ordonnance de l'époque Ming, datant de 1530, parle de la *vertu impériale* qui « chérit les hommes du lointain » ; un cliché entraînant pour réponse l'humble soumission des étrangers (Fairbank *Trade and Diplomacy* 27). En d'autres termes, la Chine était incapable de concevoir la relation avec les autres états autrement qu'à travers le prisme « civilisation-barbarie » : elle n'a donc jamais traité d'égal à égal avec les pays étrangers, dont les souverains ne pouvaient être que des vassaux ou des ennemis. Les notions de réciprocité, de mutualité, ont toujours été absentes de la vision impériale chinoise qui se pensait elle-même comme parfaite et auto-suffisante.

C'est ce qu'on appelle conventionnellement le *système tributaire*,<sup>5</sup> dont l'armature rituelle organise les relations avec les pays étrangers sur un mode codifié, au terme duquel une série de royaumes tributaires proches ou contigus (la Corée, l'Annam), ou plus lointains (le Siam, la Birmanie, le Laos, le Bhoutan) accomplissent à date fixée (l'Annam une fois tous les deux ans ; la Birmanie et le Laos une fois tous les dix ans) le voyage de Pékin en vue d'apporter le tribut, et repartent ensuite dans leur pays munis de présents, dont la valeur excède souvent celle des cadeaux apportés. En effet, la procédure consiste en un échange de biens symboliques, en principe indifférent à la signification proprement commerciale de l'échange, qui n'est destiné qu'à matérialiser la prééminence impériale,

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<sup>5</sup> Sur l'organisation du système tributaire, voir : Fairbank et Ta-tuan Ch'en ; Fairbank et S. T. T'eng.

ce qu'exprime admirablement la formule condescendante contenue dans le poème de l'empereur Qianlong (乾隆r. 1735–1796) accompagnant la lettre au roi d'Angleterre remise à l'ambassadeur George Macartney (1737–1806) en 1793 :

Bien que leurs tributs soient ordinaires, mon cœur les accepte,  
L'étrangeté et l'ingéniosité si vantée de leurs inventions,  
Je ne les apprécie pas.  
Bien que ce qu'ils aient apporté soit sans conséquence,  
Dans ma bonté envers les hommes de l'extérieur,  
J'ai généreusement donné en retour.<sup>6</sup>

## Système tributaire vs système de Canton

On se trouve donc en présence d'une antinomie apparemment absolue, qui oppose deux mondes, deux espaces, deux régimes culturels incompatibles. D'une part se développe un impérialisme lusitanien agressif, soutenu par des visées à la fois commerciales et idéologiques (la conversion des « infidèles » reste un objectif avoué), qui a semblé, dans ses débuts, désireux de reproduire en Asie les méthodes violentes adoptées auparavant aux Amériques. D'autre part, se donne à voir une structure fermée, isolationniste, sino-centrée, hostile au commerce lointain et aux lois du marché, en concordance avec les valeurs morales confucéennes de l'élite mandarinale connectée à l'appareil d'État centralisé et bureaucratique. On ne saurait ignorer que, dans la Chine ancienne, l'empereur était supposé assumer l'héritage du « laboureur divin » Shennong (神农), à qui l'on prête l'invention de la houe, de l'araire et du champ, ainsi que de la culture des cinq aliments de base. Investi de la mission sacrée de relier la terre au ciel, le souverain chinois était chargé de lui adresser suppliques et prières, de lui faire des offrandes en vue d'obtenir sa sollicitude ; et, dans la religion traditionnelle où son culte avait pris son essor sous les Song, il était aussi le patron des cultivateurs. C'est le cœur même de la tradition chinoise, qui affirme avec force la primauté de l'agriculture sur toutes les autres activités humaines : William Theodore de Bary mentionne par exemple un mémoire de 178 av. J. C. relatif à l'encouragement de l'agriculture, figurant déjà dans le *Han shu* (汉书),

<sup>6</sup> Cité par R. Servoise (551). Version anglaise dans Hevia, *Cherishing* (188).

le *Livre des Han antérieurs* (24A : 9b–13a) (de Bary 230–32). Le texte commence par dire que si le peuple n'a pas souffert de la famine sous le règne de rois sages (par exemple les inondations sous les règnes de Yao et Yu ; la sécheresse sous le grand empereur Tang), c'est parce que l'on avait pris soin de mettre en réserve des provisions. Il signale que la pauvreté vient du fait que la production agricole n'est pas suffisante, alors que des ressources n'ont pas été assez exploitées. Or, celui qui ne travaille pas la terre n'est pas attaché à elle, et donc est susceptible d'abandonner son village, pour vivre comme les bêtes. Les gens qui ont faim ou qui ont froid n'auront pas confiance dans leur souverain. Donc, un souverain éclairé devra encourager son peuple à pratiquer l'agriculture et la sériciculture, veiller à prévoir des réserves en cas d'inondation ou de sécheresse. Les bijoux, l'or, l'argent, ne préservent pas de la faim et du froid, mais leur possession encourage à quitter les villages et constitue en plus un attrait pour les voleurs. Au contraire, les graines et les fibres sont le produit des terroirs, ils sont nés des saisons, ils n'ont pas été obtenus facilement en un jour ; ils n'attisent pas la cupidité, et c'est pourquoi ces productions doivent être préférées à toutes les autres.

Pourtant, de la tradition chinoise à la nouvelle donne de la « première mondialisation », en cours depuis l'entrée en jeu des puissances européennes dans les mers du Sud, la distance s'était progressivement creusée. En effet, si la Chine ancienne n'a jamais vraiment accédé aux demandes formulées par les ambassades occidentales qu'elle considérait comme intégrées dans le système tributaire, elle n'en a pas moins accepté des compromis de circonstance correspondant à ses intérêts, principalement dans le cadre de ce que l'historiographie coloniale a appelé le « système de Canton », seul lieu habilité à entretenir des relations commerciales avec les puissances européennes. En dépit de son splendide isolement, le « monde chinois » n'a en réalité jamais été totalement imperméable au monde extérieur, avec qui il nouait, sur la périphérie, des relations sporadiques se déroulant « à la marge », dans des zones intermédiaires – ports francs, zones côtières – où se déroulaient toutes sortes d'activités, parfois clandestines (piraterie, contrebande) ; où officiaient également des agents impériaux peu surveillés par le pouvoir central, donc corruptibles ; et des marchands dits *hanistes*, intéressés au commerce avec les étrangers.<sup>7</sup> Quant aux missionnaires étrangers, ils ont certes été admis à la cour de

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<sup>7</sup> Pour une description détaillée du système de Canton, voir l'incontournable thèse de Louis Dermigny.

Pékin – et ont été exempts des formalités tributaires en raison de leur statut d’ecclésiastiques – mais ils n’ont jamais été que tolérés, tandis qu’ils étaient constamment susceptibles de se voir refoulés vers leur base de départ, à Macao.

## Macartney et le *puppet show* impérial

L’ambassade Macartney,<sup>8</sup> la première mission britannique organisée en 1793 par Sir Henry Dundas (1742–1811), secrétaire d’État au Home Office en 1791, conseiller de William Pitt et président du Bureau de l’East India Company, avait pour but d’obtenir un certain nombre de privilèges susceptibles d’équilibrer la balance commerciale britannique, mais elle ne fut pas un succès, malgré l’ampleur des moyens déployés : trois navires, un personnel pléthorique, une grande abondance de présents, notamment des instruments scientifiques et des objets manufacturés représentatifs de l’*industrial enlightenment* britannique (Mokyr 9–15). Les envoyés durent se contenter, dans certains cas, de logements sommaires, qu’ils jugèrent incompatibles avec leur dignité d’émissaires royaux. Ils durent subir l’humiliation de voir leur cortège précédé d’une bannière portant en caractères chinois la mention : « Ambassadeurs du pays d’Angleterre apportant le tribut à l’Empereur » ; ils se sentirent espionnés en permanence par les mandarins les accompagnant sur le long trajet les conduisant à Pékin par le Grand Canal. L’audience impériale elle-même, qui ne se tint pas dans la capitale, mais à Jehol dans la résidence d’été de l’empereur, leur fit l’effet d’une cérémonie pompeuse, d’un formalisme figé et sans incidence sur le contenu de leur entretien, les échanges de cadeaux remplaçant en fait la concertation. Dans la relation de l’événement que nous a laissée l’ambassadeur, apparaît une formule éloquente : *a puppet show* (Macartney 131). Un incident marqua fortement les esprits : lors de l’audience impériale Macartney refusa d’accomplir une des formalités rituelles prévues – la plus importante – c’est-à-dire le *kou tou* (叩头), la triple prostration rituelle, front contre terre, devant l’empereur.<sup>9</sup> Enfin,

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<sup>8</sup> Sur l’organisation et le déroulement de l’ambassade, voir Cranmer-Byng ; Hevia, « A Multitude of Lords » ; Peyrefitte, « Introduction » ; Aubrey Singer ; Hevia, *Cherishing* ; Pritchard, *The Crucial Years*.

<sup>9</sup> Sur les péripéties qui ont accompagné l’exécution de ce rite par les tributaires occidentaux, voir Rockhill, « Diplomatic Missions » ; Pritchard, « The Kowtow » ; Cameron.

comble d'humiliation, les envoyés britanniques durent se soumettre au décret impérial les enjoignant de quitter Pékin en catastrophe, sans même avoir eu le temps de rassembler toutes leurs affaires, ce qui fit dire à l'un des chroniqueurs de l'ambassade, Aeneas Anderson : « In short, we entered Peking like paupers; we remained in it like prisoners; and we quitted it like vagrants » (Anderson 181).<sup>10</sup>

Finalement, l'échec des pourparlers fut à l'origine d'un renversement majeur dans la perception d'une certaine image de la Chine. Image largement fantasmatisée, transmise par les missionnaires dans les *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, répandues dans toute Europe entre 1702 et 1776. Dans le dialogue de l'Europe avec l'Asie, la démarche de leurs auteurs, les jésuites résidant à Pékin auprès de la cour impériale, était surtout intellectuelle, mais aussi stratégique : il s'agissait de proposer un tableau exaltant la splendeur, l'excellence politique et la bonne organisation économique de l'ancien empire chinois, afin de justifier la présence des pères dans une contrée aussi éloignée ... et, surtout, de légitimer leurs demandes de financement (Shenwen Li) ! Transférées en Europe, ces données socio-culturelles avaient été paradoxalement exploitées par les philosophes français des Lumières dans un sens correspondant à leurs aspirations réformistes. Mais les déboires encourus par Macartney produisirent en Angleterre un tout autre effet : la Chine des « philosophes », la Chine vertueuse présentée par Voltaire comme un modèle de société laïque fondée sur des principes moraux, sur la méritocratie (via le système des examens impériaux) et non sur les privilèges,<sup>11</sup> la Chine adorée des physiocrates en raison de l'excellence supposée de son système agraire (Marx, « La Chine des physiocrates »), la « Chine de l'enchantement » enfin, inspiratrice de tout un imaginaire de la rêverie dans les arts (Alayrac-Fielding *Rêver la Chine*), est désormais vilipendée, identifiée avec un empire stagnant et rétrograde – l'*Empire immobile* dont parlait Alain Peyrefitte (Peyrefitte *L'Empire*).<sup>12</sup> L'Angleterre, en particulier, se mit à abhorrer une nation jugée despotique et arriérée, réfractaire au progrès, incapable de s'ouvrir aux échanges, peuplée de gens « [...] vain, licentious,

<sup>10</sup> Anderson était le valet de chambre de Macartney ; sa relation fut publiée sans l'accord de l'ambassadeur et présentait de graves lacunes, son auteur n'ayant pas eu accès aux pièces officielles de la mission.

<sup>11</sup> Voir : Basil Guy ; Roland Mortier ; Shun-Ching Song ; Hua Meng.

<sup>12</sup> Sur ce changement de perspective décisif pour l'avenir des relations Europe-Chine, voir Étiemble.

uncivilized, and rude, when compared with the inhabitants of Europe », si l'on en croit le jugement d'un certain Samuel Holmes, un sergent-major qui participait à l'expédition anglaise, auteur d'une relation qui connut un franc succès populaire (Holmes *The Journal* 187).<sup>13</sup>

Reste que les raisons de l'échec n'étaient pas très clairement comprises. Si l'on estimait possible de traiter avec « le peuple peut-être le plus singulier au monde » (*a people, perhaps the most singular upon the Globe*) (Morse 232), mais dont on admettait qu'il jouissait de la civilisation et cultivait les arts de façon ininterrompue depuis de nombreux siècles, on suspectait la duplicité des mandarins et des fonctionnaires de Canton. Avant même le départ de l'ambassade anglaise, Dundas n'avait-il pas mis en garde l'ambassadeur au sujet des intrigues menées par les marchands hanistes : « It is supposed that former endeavours made by the English, or other European Companies, to represent their grievances at the Court of Peking, and obtain defined privileges for their Trade, have failed from the intrigues of the Mandarines and Merchants of Canton...? » (234). Se trouvaient donc déjà présentes, à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les germes néfastes d'un *topos* qui allait imprégner la représentation stéréotypée de la Chine après la guerre des Boxers : celui d'une nation sophistiquée, mais dont l'« inquiétante étrangeté » dissimulait un fond de sournoiserie et d'hypocrisie. Ici, Confucius, le « Socrate chinois » opérant la synthèse du philosophe et du législateur ; et là, dans le film du réalisateur Lloyd Corrigan, d'après le roman de Sax Rohmer, le *Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* (1929), meneur de jeu d'un théâtre de la cruauté. En arrière-plan, l'horizon métaphorique du « péril jaune »,<sup>14</sup> dont les attestations sont nombreuses, du *Jardin des supplices* (1899) de Gustave Mirbeau aux photographies insoutenables illustrant le reportage de Louis Carpeaux, *Pékin qui s'en va* (1913).<sup>15</sup>

Et puis, il y avait l'épineuse question du cérémonial : la question de savoir si Lord Macartney accomplit ou non la triple prosternation devant l'empereur a longtemps été un objet de controverse : alors que la relation anglaise officielle de l'ambassade rédigée par son secrétaire Sir George Leonard Staunton (1737–1801) confirmait que l'envoyé de George III n'avait pas accompli les formalités demandées, mais s'était contenté

<sup>13</sup> Sur le désenchantement anglais, voir Alayrac-Fielding, *La Chine dans l'imaginaire anglais* (III<sup>e</sup> partie, « La sinophobie anglaise et ses avatars », 353–598).

<sup>14</sup> Voir Decornoy ; Moura.

<sup>15</sup> Voir Dominguez Leiva et Détrie (éds) ; Henriot et Wen-hsin Yeh (85).



de ployer un genou comme il l'aurait fait devant son propre souverain (Staunton 38),<sup>16</sup> d'autres commentateurs de l'événement, s'appuyant parfois sur des sources chinoises difficiles à interpréter, assurèrent que l'ambassadeur anglais s'était plié au rituel. En réalité, l'importance démesurée accordée à cette séquence de l'audience impériale révèle toute l'étendue des questions protocolaires mettant en jeu l'orgueil national britannique, profondément choqué par le traitement réservé à un aristocrate de haut vol, familier du roi d'Angleterre.<sup>17</sup>

## Dans le sillage hollandais

C'est en tout cas ce que laisse apparaître le récit du majordome de l'ambassadeur, John Barrow (1764–1868), qui fera plus tard une belle carrière comme deuxième secrétaire de l'Amirauté. Barrow était un des fondateurs de la Royal Society ; il favorisera les expéditions en Arctique (il a donné son nom à un des passages du nord-ouest), ce qui lui a valu l'érection d'un monument imposant, au sommet de Hoad Hill, à Ulverston, dans le nord-ouest de l'Angleterre. Ses *Travels in China, containing descriptions, observations, and comparisons, made and collected in the course of a short residence at the imperial palace of Yuen-Min-Yuen, and on a subsequent journey through the country from Peking to Canton* sont un pavé indigeste, qui sacrifie à la mode d'un certain encyclopédisme exotisant, très présent dans la tradition littéraire du *voyage à la Chine*, mais aussi un monument de mauvaise foi, d'incompréhension culturelle, et de sinophobie.

L'ouvrage n'en connut pas moins un grand succès, et fut traduit en français et en allemand. En fait, il est révélateur d'une ligne de fracture qui parcourt toute l'histoire moderne de la relation Chine-Europe depuis la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, dont le tracé semble encore en partie lisible aujourd'hui, et qui a mis en concurrence, dans le monde globalisé parcouru par leurs grandes expéditions maritimes, la France et l'Angleterre, deux partenaires diplomatiques appelés à devenir bientôt des compétiteurs inconciliables.

<sup>16</sup> « (...) ascending the few steps that led to the throne, and bending on one knee ».

<sup>17</sup> Sur cette polémique, où intervinrent des sinologues de renom comme Abel-Rémusat et W. W. Rockhill, voir Pritchard « *The Kowtow* ».

En effet, l'ouvrage de Barrow fut bientôt pris à partie par un sinologue averti, Chrétien-Louis Joseph de Guignes (1759–1845). Ce dernier était le fils de l'orientaliste Joseph de Guignes (1721–1800), lui aussi membre de la Royal Society au titre étranger, auteur d'un stupéfiant *Mémoire dans lequel on prouve que les Chinois sont une colonie égyptienne* (1760) qui avait fait déjà au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle couler beaucoup d'encre. Chrétien-Louis avait appris le chinois grâce à son père, qui l'avait fait attacher en 1783 au consulat français de Canton, où il restera le seul chargé d'affaires français en poste après la suppression de la représentation française dans ce port, peu fréquenté par les navires français.<sup>18</sup> Plus tard, en 1813, sur commande de Napoléon I<sup>er</sup>, il composa un célèbre *Dictionnaire chinois, français et latin* – un superbe monument typographique qui a marqué une étape décisive dans l'histoire de la sinologie française, et qui fait de lui un des premiers érudits sinologues non-missionnaires (Cordier « Les études chinoises »). Mais, surtout, lui aussi eut l'occasion de se frotter aux us et coutumes de la cour de Pékin, à l'occasion de sa participation au titre d'interprète à ce qui allait s'avérer comme la dernière ambassade européenne du système tributaire (de Guignes *Voyages à Péking*).

Il s'agit de la mission hollandaise, organisée à partir de Batavia par la *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), en 1794–1795,<sup>19</sup> qui se situe donc entre la mission de Macartney en 1793 et celle, inaboutie, de Lord William Pitt Amherst (1773–1857) en 1816 :<sup>20</sup> cette fois, l'ambassadeur – qui s'était une fois de plus énergiquement refusé au *kou tou* – ne fut même pas reçu en audience par le successeur de Qianlong, Jiaqing (嘉庆r. 1796–1820).

L'ambassade hollandaise, qui venait officiellement présenter ses respects à Pékin à l'occasion des soixante années de règne de l'empereur Qianlong, était dirigée par un des administrateurs généraux à Batavia, Isaac Titsingh (1745–1812), secondé par le subrécargue Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest (1739–1801). Le premier, « citoyen du monde », parfait exemple d'esprit éclairé, marqué par les idéaux philosophiques du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, capable de prendre ses distances par rapport à une conception étriquée de la supériorité occidentale, fut également un acteur essentiel de la médiation culturelle entre l'Europe

<sup>18</sup> Henri Cordier, « Le Consulat de France »; Knud Lundbæk.

<sup>19</sup> Sur cette ambassade, voir Jan Julius Lodewijk Duyvendak ; J. Marx, « L'ambassade Titsingh ».

<sup>20</sup> Relation dans Ellis.

et le Japon.<sup>21</sup> L'expédition chinoise terminée, Titsingh fut ensuite choisi comme responsable des activités de la VOC au Bengale, à Chinsura (près de Calcutta), où il eut l'occasion de fréquenter William Jones, le fondateur de l'*Asiatic Society*, qui l'appelait « le mandarin de Chinsura », ce qui en dit long sur sa personnalité (Boxer 3–27). Il allait ensuite, aux alentours de 1800, rejoindre Paris, la Mecque de la sinologie commençante, où il rencontra la plupart des érudits français préoccupés par l'analyse de la langue chinoise : Louis-Mathieu Langlès, conservateur des manuscrits orientaux de la Bibliothèque impériale ; Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, déjà cité, et Antoine-Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, fondateur de la *Société asiatique* (Zurndorfer). Titsingh ne quitta plus la France ; il est enterré à Paris, au cimetière du Père-Lachaise.

Van Braam Hougkeest, l'auteur du récit d'ambassade qui fut publié en français avant la version néerlandaise,<sup>22</sup> partagea ses activités entre la Chine, les Provinces-Unies et les États-Unis d'Amérique. Il fit donc partie du groupe des derniers Occidentaux à pouvoir admirer les splendeurs du *Yuanming yuan* (圆明园) – l'ancien palais d'été, édifié à Pékin, avec la collaboration des missionnaires français, dans un style hybride mélangeant chinoiserie baroque et tradition orientale – avant sa destruction par les troupes franco-britanniques lors de la seconde guerre de l'opium, en 1860. Or, le récit de Van Braam présente la particularité de n'avoir été commenté, critiqué ou jugé que par des commentateurs – anglais pour la plupart – qui se sont révélés incapables de considérer l'aventure chinoise de Titsingh autrement qu'en relation et par comparaison avec l'ambassade Macartney, ce qui implique automatiquement une prise de position inspirée des présupposés diplomatiques occidentaux sur la « balance des pouvoirs » et « l'équilibre des forces ». Cette vision persistait à penser l'Asie dans les termes d'une politique de puissance, et avait pour conséquence de confiner le récit de Van Braam dans un cadre univoque, européocentriste, privilégiant une logique d'ancrage identitaire et de confrontation entre « l'ici » et « l'ailleurs » ; entre le normatif et l'exotique, voire l'inintelligible, pour déboucher, à la limite, sur la négation pure et simple de « l'Autre » en tant qu'autre.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Lequin, *Isaac Titsingh (1745–1812)* ; et, du même, *Isaac Titsingh in China (1794–1796)*.

<sup>22</sup> L'ouvrage est dédié à George Washington, sa version néerlandaise parut en 1804.

## Imiter les « Chinois de l'Europe » ?

Comme l'a montré un article récent, dont l'objectif est d'inventorier les stéréotypes « nationaux » mis en œuvre par la presse périodique française pendant la période révolutionnaire et impériale, après la rupture de la paix d'Amiens (1802) qui consacrait la prédominance sur les mers de la « Nouvelle Carthage », la situation politique était évidemment favorable au développement d'une certaine anglophobie, sensible dans une série de textes de propagande anti-britanniques, et notamment dans les journaux français qui rendent compte des récits de voyages publiés outre-Manche (Haugen 32). Il n'est, au surplus, pas sans pertinence de souligner l'intérêt de Napoléon pour la Chine, même si sa politique ne devait déboucher sur rien de concret. L'empereur, en effet – qui ne faisait, sur ce point, que perpétuer une tradition inaugurée dès le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle par les jésuites de la mission de Chine – jugeait que l'ambassade Macartney avait montré l'inadaptation du modèle mercantile au ritualisme dogmatique de la cour impériale ; il estimait que l'implacable fermeture de l'Empire du Milieu ne pouvait être brisée que sur base d'une transaction fondée sur le respect des valeurs culturelles, et, c'est d'ailleurs dans cet esprit qu'en 1811 il avait demandé au marquis Félix Renouard de Sainte-Croix (1767–1840) de diriger une ambassade auprès de la cour de Pékin ; un projet qui tourna court.

C'est donc dans ce contexte qu'il convient d'inscrire la confrontation instaurée entre deux interprètes du monde chinois, que sépare une différence de vision fondamentale. En effet, outré par les sarcasmes de Barrow, de Guignes lut à l'Institut de France en 1804 – quelques mois avant le couronnement de l'empereur des Français – des *Observations sur le voyage de M. Barrow à la Chine*, qui furent publiées en français à Londres. Certes, le déroulement de la polémique révèle un décentrement qui rappelle la vision napoléonienne d'un Orient débarrassé du carcan de l'East India Company. Mais la rivalité politique, et surtout commerciale, entre la France et l'Angleterre ne suffit pas à expliquer un antagonisme qu'on ne peut réduire à des péripéties conjoncturelles. Est avant tout concerné un débat idéologique inscrit dans l'héritage des Lumières qui, d'ailleurs, semble avoir également inspiré les responsables de l'entreprise batave, même si, évidemment, les arrière-pensées commerciales ne font, dans le cas hollandais, pas de doute : un méchant cliché courait décrivant les employés de la VOC comme « les Chinois de l'Europe ! » (Blussé et van Luyn 12).

Les principales critiques de de Guignes à l'égard des *Travels in China*, qu'il semble avoir lus dans l'original anglais de 1804 plutôt que dans sa traduction française, concernent la manière méprisante dont Barrow considérait l'ambassade hollandaise, coupable à ses yeux de servilité à l'égard des usages chinois – une servilité propre à donner une bien piètre idée de la civilisation européenne – complaisamment mise en parallèle avec la surévaluation de la nation anglaise, cette « île heureuse » dans laquelle « une piété éclairée dans le peuple, est le plus ferme soutien d'une juste autorité » (De Guignes *Observations* 38);<sup>23</sup> une tendance aussi à dénigrer l'action des missionnaires qui, pourtant, avaient révélé Confucius et les classiques chinois aux Européens ; et enfin une incapacité foncière à aborder la réalité chinoise dans sa dimension véritable, c'est-à-dire culturaliste et anthropologique.

Instruite des déboires essayés par Macartney, l'ambassade hollandaise avait décidé de se soumettre à toutes les obligations rituelles qui lui furent imposées ; mais, constatait Barrow, cette attitude conciliante ne lui épargna pas les humiliations. Déjà à Canton, les Hollandais furent obligés de se prosterner ... devant une pièce de soie portant le nom de l'empereur, tandis que leur délégation n'était pas jugée suffisamment représentative pour mériter la visite du vice-roi (Barrow *Travels* 9–10). De fait, dans la phase de préparation de l'expédition, la lettre adressée au vice-roi présentant les émissaires bataves était signée par les commissaires généraux de Batavia, ce qui fut à l'origine de rumeurs affirmant que « l'ambassadeur n'était pas envoyé par le chef de la nation hollandaise, que ce chef n'était pas un roi, que l'ambassadeur n'était pas un grand mandarin ». <sup>24</sup> Barrow se gaussait : ce n'étaient donc pas des représentants d'un état souverain, mais « [...] a company of merchants! » (15).

À Pékin, les humiliations reprirent, en particulier à l'occasion d'un épisode haut en couleur : une des audiences se tenait très tôt le matin, dans un froid glacial. Au cours de la présentation à l'empereur, et alors que Van Braam exécutait sans sourciller le rite de la prosternation, son chapeau tomba à terre. L'empereur rit et demanda à l'ambassadeur s'il

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<sup>23</sup> « (...) that happy island [...] where an enlightened piety in the people is the firmest support of lawful authority » (Barrow *Travels* 419). Il s'agit en réalité d'une citation venue du *Droit des gens ou principes de la loi naturelle appliqués à la conduite et aux affaires des nations et des souverains* du jurisconsulte Emmerich de Vattel (1714–1767) (Vattel 122).

<sup>24</sup> Cité par Duyvendak, 32.

connaissait le chinois. Il répondit *poton* (« bu dong », « je ne comprends pas », 不懂) ; ce qui lui aurait permis de se tailler une belle réputation ! Et le chroniqueur hollandais de conclure : « J'ai achevé ensuite mon salut d'honneur, et lorsque je me suis levé pour me retirer, l'empereur ayant toujours ses regards tournés vers moi, n'a pas manqué de me montrer un air affable. J'ai reçu ainsi une marque de la plus haute prédilection, et telle qu'on prétend même que nul Européen n'en a jamais obtenu de semblable » (Van Braam Hougkeest 179). La scène était hautement pittoresque, mais ne contribuait pas à rehausser la dignité du diplomate ; d'où l'ironie de Barrow : « At Pekin they were required to humiliate themselves at least thirty different times, at each of which they were obliged, on their knees, to knock their heads nine times against the ground, which Mr. Van Braam, in his journal very coolly call, performing the salute of honour, *faire le salut d'honneur* [...] no man will certainly envy this gentleman's happy turn of mind, in receiving so much satisfaction in being laughed at » (Barrow *Travels* 11). Barrow concluait que l'insolence du gouvernement chinois était constitutive, qu'elle s'exerçait dans des formes immuables, aussi rigides que les lois des Mèdes et des Perses (21), et que, dans ce contexte, il était sûr que l'inflexible assurance des Anglais dut faire sur les Chinois une bien meilleure impression que la mollesse hollandaise... Pour lui, la fermeté britannique était justifiée : « On the contrary, it may, perhaps, be rather laid down as a certain consequence, that a tone of submission, and a tame and passive obedience to the degrading demands of this haughty court, serve only to feed its pride, and add to the absurd notions of its own importance » (24).

Une des doléances hollandaises concernait le logement des plénipotentiaires : Van Braam, en effet, déplorait qu'à leur arrivée dans la capitale, ils furent installés dans une écurie (Van Braam Hougkeest 134). Mais, en réalité, il n'y avait pas malice : il avait été convenu que le groupe serait à Pékin avant le Nouvel An chinois, ce qui imposa un train d'enfer, dans des conditions hivernales difficiles. Le périple ressembla à une marche forcée ; dans la plupart des cas, les ambassadeurs se présentaient au gîte d'étape – généralement misérable – avant les porteurs, privés de leurs bagages. Rien n'était prêt lors de l'arrivée à Pékin après la fermeture des portes, ce qui obligea à les loger dans les faubourgs, où s'installaient d'ordinaire les charretiers.

En lisant Barrow, de Guignes se persuadait que l'auteur des *Travels* ne ménageait pas ses efforts pour rabaisser l'ambassade hollandaise. Il notait que, de leur propre aveu, les Anglais ne furent pas beaucoup mieux logés,

alors que les Chinois eux-mêmes – y compris de hauts fonctionnaires – s’accommodaient de ce genre d’hébergement, ce qui pousse de Guignes à s’exclamer : « [...] que dire à des hommes qui nous traitaient comme eux-mêmes ! » (De Guignes *Observations* 7). Barrow, d’ailleurs, avouait : « The apartments were somewhat larger, but miserably dirty both within and without, and wholly unfurnished; but as our attendant took care to tell us they belonged to one of the *ministers of state*, and that he lodged in them when the Emperor was at Yuen-min-yuen, we were precluded from further complaint » (Barrow *Travels* 108). Bref, de Guignes jugeait que Barrow se servait des épreuves subies par les Hollandais pour fonder un préjugé en faveur de la puissante Angleterre, maître des mers, que craignaient apparemment les Chinois, instruits de leur pénétration en Inde. De cette espèce de « great game » précurseur de la politique qui sera menée plus tard par le Raj, la presse française était consciente : la *Décade philosophique* par exemple dénonçait en mai 1798 les intentions cachées de la Grande-Bretagne et mettait en exergue la constatation que les Chinois ne s’étaient pas laissés abuser par une nation arrogante, occupée à manigancer des usurpations de souveraineté « en Hindoustan » (Haugen 32). Le journal n’était pas trop mal informé : les Anglais cherchaient à nouer des relations commerciales avec le Tibet depuis l’arrivée dans ce pays de l’aventurier écossais George Bogle (1746–1781), qui agissait comme émissaire de l’East India Company.<sup>25</sup> Or, cette dernière était soupçonnée par les Chinois de collusion avec les Gurkhas népalais, responsables de l’invasion du Tibet en 1791, à laquelle Qianlong avait dû mettre fin en envoyant dans l’Himalaya une armée de quinze mille hommes<sup>26</sup> : des documents chinois, comme le *Da Qing lichao shilu* (大清歷朝實 Relations véritables des Qing), en relation avec l’ambassade Macartney, mentionnent les relations des Gurkhas avec les « barbares étrangers » (Lo Shu Fu 324). Barrow, au surplus, s’enorgueillissait de cet impérialisme avant la lettre, qui annonce la diplomatie de la canonnière adoptée plus tard, au moment des guerres de l’opium : « The very different treatment which the English embassy received at the court of Peking is easily explained. The Chinese are well informed of the superiority of the English over all other nations by sea; of the great extent of their commerce; of their vast possessions in India which they have long regarded with a jealous eye; and of the character and independent spirit of the nation. They perceived, in

<sup>25</sup> Sur la poussée anglaise vers les contreforts himalayens, voir Petech.

<sup>26</sup> Rockhill « The Dalai Lamas » (57) ; Deshayes (185).

the manly and open conduct of Lord Macartney, the representative of a sovereign in no way inferior to the emperor of China... » (Barrow *Travels* 17). Aurait-on pu en dire autant du Stathouder, qui avait envoyé à la cour de Pékin des marchands de Batavia ?

La vérité, pensait de Guignes, c'est que rien, dans les coutumes des Chinois – ni même dans leur culture matérielle – ne trouvait grâce aux yeux d'un homme imbu de préjugés anglocentristes : ni leur réputation d'ingéniosité, que contredit leur faiblesse dans la construction de leurs jonques et dans leur art de la navigation<sup>27</sup> ; ni leurs insuffisances en matière scientifique – Barrow prétendait qu'un des religieux-astronomes accrédités à la cour de Pékin, le père Alexandre de Gouvea, un franciscain, proposé par la reine du Portugal comme évêque de Pékin, avouait user de supercherie pour berner les Chinois dans leurs calculs astronomiques (112) – ; ni leur religion, « [...] as obscure and inexplicable as that of almost any other of the oriental nations » (423) ; ni leur gouvernement, caractérisé par l'oppression, l'injustice et la bastonnade, pratiques communes d'une « [...] nation, where every petty officer is a tyrant, and every man a slave » (419).

Vision réductrice selon notre sinologue français ; Barrow jugeait les Chinois d'après les usages de son pays, « défaut originaire des voyageurs » (De Guignes *Observations* 48) ; il déplorait que leur gouvernement fût d'essence despotique, alors qu'en réalité sa forme n'était que la résultante de l'étendue de son territoire et de l'importance de sa population. Et de Guignes de conclure : « Je n'admire pas les Chinois, mais je suis impartial, et nous ne devons pas les juger d'après nos idées. Ils se sont proposés un but et l'ont atteint depuis longtemps, c'est en cela qu'il faut les louer ; qu'importe que, d'après M. Barrow, ils ne soient pas aussi libres qu'en Angleterre : ils existent sans cette liberté, et l'introduire à la Chine ce serait y mettre le trouble et le désordre » (50).

Le débat rappelle les considérations sur la Chine exposées par Montesquieu dans le huitième livre de *L'Esprit des lois* (chap. 21), qui constatait la nature despotique de son gouvernement et déclarait celui-ci régi « par la crainte ». Mais, comme le montre de Guignes, il faut relativiser le constat : ce que faisait voir *L'Esprit des lois*, c'est qu'il existe une singularité chinoise, qui contredit les classifications occidentales.

<sup>27</sup> Sans que soient évoquées, à aucun moment, les expéditions maritimes de l'amiral eunuque Zheng He, 郑和 sous les Ming, au début du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Voir Levathes.



Tantôt, l'empereur est un tyran, et tantôt il est un souverain modèle ; contradiction qui avait beaucoup troublé Étiemble (Étiemble 50–72) et l'éminent sinologue qu'est Jacques Gernet – pour des raisons différentes. Le second estimait en effet que l'incapacité de Montesquieu à penser la Chine selon des critères autres que ceux qui lui sont propres pouvait s'expliquer (Gernet 31–44) : il semble que la confusion entre le pouvoir temporel et le pouvoir spirituel, entre les lois et les *manières* (entendons les « rites »), qui forme le sujet du livre XIX du traité de Montesquieu, ait été très difficile à accepter pour un penseur préoccupé par la question de la religion civile. Comment, en effet, interpréter un système qui donne l'impression de faire prévaloir le rite sur la croyance, surtout en France, où la philosophie des Lumières se mobilisait contre la superstition ?

Mais, sur un point au moins, de Guignes et Barrow s'accordent : tous deux abordaient une réflexion sur le rôle de l'agriculture dans un état qui avait fait du fondamentalisme agraire son *credo*. Mais si le diagnostic est identique, les conclusions diffèrent.

Très curieusement, on pourra mettre ici en concordance une observation (Barrow *Travels* 397) de Barrow sur l'excellence de l'agriculture dans le *management* de l'économie politique (« In order to prevent as much as possible a scarcity of grain, and in conformity to their opinion, that the true source of national wealth and prosperity consists in agriculture; the Chinese government has in all ages bestowed the first honours on every improvements in this branch of industry ») avec une citation d'un empereur chinois lui-même, Yongzheng (雍正帝 r. 1722–1735), qui figure dans un édit impérial de 1724 : « Depuis plusieurs décennies que notre dynastie dispense les bénéfices de sa sollicitude, la population ne cesse de se multiplier, alors même que la quantité de terres [cultivables] reste limitée : si les paysans de l'empire ne consacrent pas sous notre conduite toutes leurs forces aux labours et aux sarclages pour réussir à obtenir des récoltes doubles, quand bien même ils voudraient jouir de l'abondance et de la paix dans leurs demeures, on peut être sûr qu'ils n'y arriveront pas ».<sup>28</sup>

L'issue, pour Barrow, consistait dans l'ouverture des marchés, dans un état hostile aux échanges commerciaux, pour qui les marchands n'étaient que des « vagabonds ».<sup>29</sup> Dans ces conditions, comment s'étonner des

<sup>28</sup> Cité par Will (867).

<sup>29</sup> « The man who, in China, engages in foreign trade is considered as little better than a vagabond » (Barrow *Travels* 399).

réflexes de rejet de la bureaucratie impériale en présence des Occidentaux lancés loin de chez eux, venus frapper à leur porte après avoir accompli un si long périple ? (De Guignes *Observations* 52). C'est probablement en considération de cette situation que, très subtilement, dans le poème accompagnant la lettre qu'il adressait au roi d'Angleterre, Qianlong faisait allusion aux *longues distances* parcourues par ces audacieux nomades...

Or, justement, de Guignes repérait dans le discours de Barrow une contradiction fondamentale (24) : ce dernier semblait reconnaître le rôle joué par ce type d'activités dans la vie des Chinois, mais il évoquait aussi une terre en grande partie inculte, des famines (Barrow *Travels* 567), et une population « immense », dont le nombre était si important qu'il défiait toute crédibilité (564). En effet, sous les Qing, l'appareil idéologique d'État se trouvait en complète distorsion par rapport à la situation économique réelle du pays : l'absence de moyens techniques, les pesanteurs bureaucratiques, et surtout la sujétion des esprits, prisonniers de configurations mentales sclérosées héritées du passé, n'avaient jamais permis un véritable décollage de la production agricole. Le programme gouvernemental en la matière a toujours été plus « paysan » qu'agraire, et s'est généralement cantonné dans les schémas traditionnels d'une économie de subsistance peu soucieuse des lois du marché, ce que, d'ailleurs, Barrow avait aperçu, puisque sa description des « travaux et des jours » en Chine concerne moins le labourage que le jardinage (564–67) !

Sur cette question – centrale si l'on songe aux projets mercantilistes d'une Angleterre anxieuse de conforter sa suprématie dans la gestion du *country trade* en mer de Chine, et de faire triompher dans cette partie du monde les lois du libéralisme économique – il semble que la réflexion de de Guignes sur la Chine soit restée très dépendante de l'école physiocratique, matrice de l'économie politique française, comme le suggère la place occupée dans les *Observations sur le Voyage de M. Barrow* par les calculs statistiques et les supputations relatives aux ressources quantifiées du pays par rapport à sa population (De Guignes *Observations* 41–48). On y trouve comme l'écho du « gouvernement de la nature » c'est-à-dire de ce système global d'économie politique que le fondateur de l'école, François Quesnay (1694–1774),<sup>30</sup> avait identifié dans *Le Despotisme de la Chine* (1767), comme une forme de « despotisme légal », assez proche de l'idéal du despotisme éclairé de l'époque des Lumières. L'idée de base,

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<sup>30</sup> Sur sa vie et son œuvre, voir Hecht et Pinot.

qui s'avère aux antipodes de la théorie rousseauiste du « contrat social », était que l'ordre social s'insère dans un ordre physique universel ; que ce sont des causes physiques qui décident de la nature du gouvernement ; et que les lois civiles ne sont finalement que les règles de la répartition des subsistances. L'action gouvernementale ne peut donc être efficace que si elle s'adapte à un ordre naturel et immanent. En d'autres termes, la bonne gouvernance de l'empire chinois résultait du fait que celui-ci avait toujours maintenu la forme primitive de son gouvernement depuis sa fondation par des laboureurs, en des temps lointains où le souvenir des lois du Créateur ne s'était pas perdu : depuis Fuxi (伏羲),<sup>31</sup> disait le naturaliste et philosophe Pierre Poivre, « [...] le premier des trois Auguste et le fondateur de la nation, tous les empereurs se sont fait gloire d'être les premiers laboureurs de leur empire » (Poivre 122).

## La France en position missionnaire

Mais là où de Guignes et Barrow s'opposent le plus frontalement, c'est sur la question missionnaire. Pour l'auteur des *Observations*, l'expédition Macartney avait eu le grand tort de ne pas tenir compte des recommandations des missionnaires en place – des catholiques romains ! – qu'ils soupçonnaient de menées souterraines, mais qu'il leur était impossible de contourner. Ainsi, Barrow accusait l'un d'entre eux, le père d'Almeida (1728–1805), de nationalité portugaise, d'avoir voulu nuire à Macartney en avertissant l'empereur que les Anglais se préparaient à envahir Macao.<sup>32</sup> Mais le résultat fut différent que celui escompté : l'empereur diligenta une enquête auprès du vice-roi de Canton afin de vérifier si, réellement, les Anglais constituaient une menace : la réponse du vice-roi amena Jiaqing à faire comparaître devant lui Almeida, qui fut forcé de demander pardon à genoux pour ses crimes, et contraint de ne plus jamais s'occuper des affaires d'état de la Chine.<sup>33</sup>

Pourtant, observe de Guignes, Macartney aurait eu tout avantage à écouter les bons conseils des missionnaires en poste à Pékin, ce qui leur

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<sup>31</sup> Il s'agit d'un personnage mythique, héros civilisateur et inventeur des caractères chinois, supposé avoir vécu dans les temps néolithiques.

<sup>32</sup> Sur ce personnage, arrivé à Pékin en 1759, nommé président du tribunal des mathématiques en 1783, le dernier jésuite à occuper ce poste, voir Pfister.

<sup>33</sup> Sur l'affaire Almeida, voir Maryks and Wright (256).

aurait évité bien des déboires. On le voyait dans la lettre de l'un d'entre eux, le père Jean-Joseph de Grammont (1736–1812),<sup>34</sup> qui attribuait le fiasco anglais aux piètres performances d'un interprète, à l'inexpérience de l'ambassadeur,<sup>35</sup> au fait qu'on avait négligé d'apporter aucun présent pour les fils de l'empereur et les ministres d'État ; et, de manière générale, qu'on n'avait rien prévu pour *graisser la patte*.

Bref, Grammont suggérait que les Anglais s'étaient dispensés de toute véritable prise en considération des réalités de la vieille Chine. Mais c'est que le parti-pris anti-missionnaire de Barrow ne tolérait pas beaucoup de concessions : dans un endroit des *Travels*, il note par exemple que les pères jésuites encensaient les vertus morales d'un pays qui prisait par-dessus tout la piété filiale ... sans dire un mot de sa détestable habitude d'exposer les enfants (Barrow *Travels* 31) ! Ceci fait bondir de Guignes, qui note que les enfants achetés n'étaient nullement traités comme des esclaves, mais souvent considérés comme faisant partie de la famille. Pour lui, Barrow inventait : il prétendait qu'on exposait des milliers d'enfants, qu'on les ramassait pour les conduire hors de la ville et les jeter dans des fosses communes sans même se préoccuper de savoir s'ils étaient vivants (Barrow *Travels* 169). Fantasma dicté par l'aveuglement anticlérical, qui faisait bon marché de l'existence d'hôpitaux pour enfants trouvés (De Guignes *Observations* 9–10) !

Finalement, estimait l'auteur des *Observations*, Barrow ne faisait que reprendre – voire même recopier – non les arguments, mais les préventions du plus grand ennemi des Chinois au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Cornelius de Pauw (1739–1799), auteur de *Recherches philosophiques sur les Égyptiens et les Chinois* (1773), dirigées contre les délires égyptomaniaques de de Guignes père, mais aussi férocelement hostiles aux Chinois – parce que c'étaient les missionnaires jésuites qui les avaient fait connaître. Il contredisait les jésuites sur tout : les mandarins étaient illettrés (et, d'ailleurs, l'écriture chinoise rendait impossible toute véritable réflexion philosophique structurée... !), les marchands cantonais méritaient le titre de fripons, le pays était inculte et inhabité ; les quelques villes connues n'étaient que des bourgades, etc (Broc 39–49). Pourtant, c'est en lisant De Pauw que

<sup>34</sup> Voir Pfister et les lettres éditées par Cordier « Les Correspondants de Bertin » (465–72).

<sup>35</sup> Il paraissait pourtant, aux yeux de Henry Dundas comme le diplomate le plus qualifié pour cette mission, du fait qu'il avait été envoyé extraordinaire en Russie, auprès de Catherine II – souveraine autocratique – en 1765.

Voltaire conçut l'idée des *Lettres chinoises, indiennes et tartares* (1776) qui, s'inspirant d'un poème de Qianlong, rectifiaient le tir en transformant les lettrés confucéens en honnêtes déistes (Trousson 669).<sup>36</sup> En fait, De Pauw – « the sagacious philosopher of Berlin » (Barrow *Travels* 27) qui avait fait ses études chez les jésuites, mais appartenait au cercle de Frédéric II de Prusse – était un esprit paradoxal, enclin aux supputations philosophiques les plus provocatrices, un érudit en chambre, qui n'avait jamais voyagé dans le monde, mais jugeait les peuples avec une espèce de bonne conscience européocentriste née peut-être de son incapacité à concevoir l'intégration rationnelle des « sauvages » dans la sphère de l'*Aufklärung*. Adversaire déclaré des missionnaires, qu'il accusait de fraudes pieuses et de mensonges destinés à bernier les gens crédules, il avait publié des *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou mémoires intéressants pour servir à l'histoire de l'espèce humaine* (1768) qui lui avaient donné une piètre opinion des sociétés indigènes. Pour lui, ces dernières étaient la détestable sentine de populations « abruties », où les mères lèchent leurs petits comme des animaux (!), le réceptacle d'usages mortifères (comme les mutilations sexuelles), de dégénération, d'humeurs délétères et de vices de complexion propices au développement des maladies – les plus connues étant les maladies vénériennes, etc... Aussi déconseillait-il fermement à son royal mentor prussien de tenter toute aventure coloniale, qui n'aurait pour conséquence que la néfaste « créolisation » de ses sujets.<sup>37</sup> En réalité – la conclusion est paradoxale – ce que donne à lire une telle interprétation, c'est la dénonciation de l'universalisme des Lumières, de sa prétention à propager des standards universels : tout ce que révèle l'existence d'un peuple prisonnier de son altérité, engoncé dans d'innombrables minuties et des routines stériles, comme la pratique des caractères, ou les examens impériaux confondus avec des épreuves de conformité vérifiant les lieux communs d'un système culturel sclérosé.

## Variations impérialistes

Finalement, la confrontation entre de Guignes et John Barrow est révélatrice de l'affrontement entre deux types d'impérialismes : l'un, culturaliste et « lettré » ; l'autre, d'un mercantilisme agressif et activiste, celui

<sup>36</sup> Voir aussi Mervaud.

<sup>37</sup> Voir à son sujet : Zantop ; Mercier ; van Berkel.

des capitaines de *clippers* et des agents de l'*East India*, totalement étranger à la tradition d'auto-suffisance d'un peuple rebelle à la commercialisation, condamnée par l'appareil idéologique de l'État confucéen comme une source de corruption.

De cet antagonisme témoigne une remarque intéressante de Balzac, qui note :

Hélas ! la France en est réduite à l'influence acquise à force de supplices par nos Missions étrangères. Notre Compagnie des Indes est rue du Bac (Balzac 17).<sup>38</sup>

En 1842, au moment où Balzac écrivait son compte rendu, la Chine avait été contrainte, à l'issue de la première guerre de l'opium (1839–1842), de donner suite à la demande anglaise d'ouvrir ses ports, et de signer le traité de Nankin, qui permettait désormais à l'Angleterre de disposer d'appuis côtiers. Quant à la France, qui n'avait pas participé à la guerre, elle avait organisé, sous la direction du ministre plénipotentiaire Théodore de Lagrené (1800–1862), une nouvelle ambassade – la première officielle depuis Louis XIV en 1685 – chargée des négociations avec le gouvernement chinois ; et elle avait signé, le 24 octobre 1844, le traité de Huangpu (Whampoa) qui lui accordait les mêmes avantages commerciaux qu'au Royaume-Uni, et lui permettait de s'installer dans cinq ports de la côte de Chine (Canton, Shanghai, Fuzhou, Xiamen et Ningbo).<sup>39</sup> L'ambassade Lagrené réunissait une série de délégués chargés d'enquêter sur de nombreux aspects des techniques chinoises dans les domaines agronomique, scientifique et artisanal, mais se solda par un échec, sauf sur un point qu'a mis en évidence Pierre-Étienne Will (Mau et Will 34), et qui deviendra l'axe principal de la diplomatie française en Chine : la protection des missionnaires et de la religion catholique. Cette conclusion, qui découle nettement de l'article 22 du traité de Huangpu, rejoint les réactions de la presse française de l'époque, qui note : « L'Angleterre et l'Amérique n'ont obtenu que des avantages commerciaux ; nous les avons obtenus comme eux. Mais à nous seuls

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<sup>38</sup> L'écrivain avait consacré son article au compte rendu de l'album *La Chine et les Chinois* de son ami, le peintre Auguste Borget (1808–1877), publié dans le même périodique. Sur l'intérêt de Balzac pour Borget et la Chine, voir Bui. Sur les relations entre l'écrivain et le peintre, voir James. La rue du Bac est le lieu d'implantation de l'association diocésaine des *Missions étrangères de Paris*, qui envoyèrent en Chine de nombreux missionnaires.

<sup>39</sup> Sur cette ambassade, voir Mau et Will.

appartiendrait l'honneur d'avoir représenté en Chine le christianisme et la civilisation, en faisant abolir des édits d'intolérance et de persécution ». <sup>40</sup>

Dans la première moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, la France continuera en effet à privilégier l'action missionnaire plutôt que la conquête des marchés. Elle fut une des premières nations occidentales à obtenir l'autorisation de restaurer la mission chrétienne en Chine. Le rétablissement de la Compagnie de Jésus par Pie VII en 1814 fut le point de départ d'un important renouveau missionnaire <sup>41</sup> : trois religieux s'embarquèrent pour la Chine en 1841 : ils se voulaient les continuateurs et les restaurateurs de l'ancienne mission de Chine, dont ils souhaitaient reprendre la méthode d'apostolat indirect, fondé sur l'activité scientifique et l'enseignement. <sup>42</sup> Ils n'évitèrent pourtant pas la persécution, comme le note Balzac, qui évoque le martyr du missionnaire lazariste Jean-Gabriel Perboyre (1802–1840), exécuté par strangulation en 1840, canonisé en 1996.

C'est que la confusion entre activités missionnaires et pratiques commerciales était totale : après tout, les missionnaires et les marchands arrivaient par les mêmes bateaux, les *scrambling dragons*. Les premiers faisaient littéralement figure de « revenants », puisqu'ils émergeaient eux-mêmes de la proscription révolutionnaire, certains revenus de leur exil en Russie, conservateurs de la « tradition », cramponnés aux valeurs d'un passé antérieur à la Révolution et à l'Empire, ce qui ne les empêchera pas de vivre plus tard en bonne intelligence avec les autorités républicaines. Contrairement aux jésuites de l'ancienne mission, qui vivaient à la cour impériale, déconnectés de la réalité européenne – parfois même coupés du Vatican, ceux-ci restaient en contact avec les autorités diplomatiques de leur pays ; ce qu'exprime assez bien le titre d'un livre récent de Corinne de Ménonville, *Les Aventuriers de Dieu et de la République. Consuls et missionnaires en Chine, 1844–1937* (Les Indes savantes, 2007) : la République française, laïque et anticléricale, a toujours pratiqué en contexte colonial une autre politique religieuse qu'en métropole. C'est que la France persistait à se percevoir elle-même dans le rôle de « Lumière des nations », à l'avant-poste de la civilisation ... un fantasme politique entretenu par tous les régimes qui se sont succédés jusqu'à l'époque contemporaine – et qui n'a pas totalement disparu de

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<sup>40</sup> Cité par Wei tsing-sing (343).

<sup>41</sup> Voir : Baumont ; Marin.

<sup>42</sup> Voir : Wiest ; Truchet.

la politique étrangère du pays de la *Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* – mêlant l'ancienne théorie de l'élection divine de la France (Rémond 4321–51), et l'exaltation jacobine de la *Grande Nation*.

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## **ESSAIS CRITIQUES / REVIEW ESSAYS**





# Comparative Gender Studies: Where We Are Now

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When the ICLA Comparative Gender Studies committee was first established, in 2002, it was not without resistance. Was not a concern for gender outdated and gender studies “too *passée* [sic] to become the concern of the ICLA” (Higonnet “Gender”)? A standing permanent committee since 2014, the Comparative Gender Studies Committee now represents a lively and booming branch of comparative studies. This essay aims to offer an overview of the state of the art in comparative gender studies. To undertake this ambitious task, I received help from several scholars in comparative gender studies.<sup>1</sup> Still, it is far from complete, as it is well beyond the scope of a single review essay to survey the international field of comparative gender studies in all of its diversity and complexity, attending to the nuances of its tempi and rhythms of development, its

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge the help of Ipshita Chanda, Rita Terezinha Schmidt, Yong Wern Mei and Pierre Zoberman, who have provided me with invaluable input and critical feedback at various stages in the development and writing of this article; and take this opportunity to thank them for it. Though this review of the state of the art in comparative gender studies could not have been written without their aid, the final product is mine and ultimately remains limited by my partial perspective. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Anna Geurts for her critical reading of the article, as well as Maaïke Leendert, Marlijn Metzlar and Hester Julia Voddé, student assistants at Radboud University, who have helped me with the research on comparative gender studies in the national associations of comparative literature and the bibliography. Finally, my thanks to Marc Maufort for inviting me to write this review essay. While the mapping of comparative gender studies turned out to be a much more challenging task than I realized when I accepted his kind invitation, it also proved to be a wonderful opportunity to gather perspectives on comparative gender studies and so hopefully contribute to the further development of the field.

different foci of attention, and to local accents, specific geopolitical and institutional contexts, and particular concerns. I therefore offer this essay as an initial sketch of the field, hoping its drawing of the contours of the complex, diverse, and dynamic terrain of comparative gender studies will inspire further research and international collaborations.

## Introducing the Field

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that comparative gender studies is a transdisciplinary field of scholarship that is situated at the intersection of scholarship and activism, and that its links to politics locates it in a complex geopolitical landscape. In recent years, “gender” has come to stand at the forefront of public debates and culture wars worldwide, developing multiple lives as an academic term, a theoretical concept, and a common word used to designate sexual difference. On the one hand, there is increasingly visible and loud criticism of heteropatriarchy (i.e., heterosexual male social dominance), more visibility and acceptance of LGBTQI+ people both of colour and white, movements such as #MeToo and #ReadWomen, and calls for considering gender *intersectionally*; that is, as always intersecting with other social categories and therefore requiring attention to “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall 1771); and, on the other hand, a widespread transnational “resistance to feminism” (Verloo and Paternotte), the rise of anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQI+, misogynistic, racist, xenophobic, nationalist political leaders, attacks on gender rights and campaigns against “gender ideology” and “la théorie du genre” (understood as the rejection of a natural, God-given gender essentialism and complementary male-female binary), and rampant gender-based violence. Made legible by the theories and methodologies of gender studies, these public manifestations of gender anxiety directly impact on the field and its scholars while at the same time forming interesting if disturbing objects of study for them. In 2018, the Hungarian government removed gender studies from its list of approved master’s programmes and discontinued funding gender studies in Hungary, claiming it is “not a science” (Oppenheim). A year earlier, Judith Butler, professor in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley and author of the paradigm-shifting and agenda-setting book *Gender Trouble* (1990), was confronted in São Paulo, Brazil with a group of right-wing religious fundamentalist

protesters burning an effigy of her as a witch at a conference on democracy she helped organize (Jaschik). Such examples of backlash against gender studies and theory, no less than the backlash against women, queer and trans people both of colour and white, rich and poor, situate comparative gender studies in a polarized socio-political field. It is evidently important to recognize the social and political forces working against gender studies as they impact the field and the daily life of its scholars. Nevertheless, the focus of this article will be on what can be seen as a worldwide feminist *réveil*: a waking-up, awakening or reawakening to the importance of gender as a “useful category of analysis” (Scott) that exceeds its reduction to a female gender or a male / female binary and that intersects with other axes of inequality and difference.

This article identifies main trends and key foci in comparative gender studies, defined as the intersection of comparative literature / comparative studies (broadly defined, including the arts) and gender studies (also broadly defined, ranging from women’s studies, masculinity studies and sexuality studies to queer studies / theory and trans studies). This, then, includes: traditional comparisons across national and linguistic borders as these relate specifically to gender and / or sexuality; comparative work across historical, postcolonial, and transnational contexts focusing on gender and / or sexuality; and scholarship using gender and / or sexuality as sites of comparison themselves, or as they intersect with race, class, ethnicity, national and religious affiliation, and other sites of difference.<sup>2</sup> Comparative gender studies goes “both ways,” to use Hayes, Higonnet and Spurlin’s suggestive formulation (6), approaching gender studies comparatively and doing comparative literature in a way that is sensitive to issues of gender and sexuality and heeds queer resonances and trans possibilities. Already the Bernheimer report – Charles Bernheimer’s 1993 report on the state of the discipline of comparative literature, mandated by the bylaws of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), and which included sixteen responses and position papers – acknowledged the relevance of gender and sexuality to comparative studies, arguing that “comparatists should be alert to the significant differences *within* any national culture” and pointing out that “[a]mong these are differences (and conflicts) according to region, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and colonial or postcolonial

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<sup>2</sup> See the statement of purpose of the ICLA Research Committee on Comparative Gender Studies at <https://www.aicl-icla.org/committee-on-gender/>.

status” (Bernheimer 43–4). For Margaret Higonnet, past president of the ACLA and of the ICLA Committee on Comparative Gender Studies, these differences to which comparatists should be alert mean that “Gender studies should [always] be comparative” (“Comparative” 155; the inserted “always” is derived from the self-quotation in Hayes *et al.* 6); an imperative gender studies has taken to heart, given its growing commitment to intersectionality as a central category of analysis. But what about comparatists’ alertness to gender+, that is, to gender, sexuality, and their intersections with other categories of difference and inequality (such as race, religion, class, and age)? Haun Saussy’s 2004 ACLA State of the Discipline Report, *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, included two essays that engaged with questions of gender and feminism (by Françoise Lionnet and Gail Finney) and the most recent ACLA State of the Discipline Report, Ursula Heise’s *Futures of Comparative Literature*, includes three essays on gender, sexuality, and queer and trans approaches (Berman; Hayes; Lanser). A quick survey of recent conference programme booklets of the ACLA reveals a steady presence of gender, feminist and queer concerns and perspectives at the organization’s annual meetings, with around 30 papers annually using the term gender in their title, a little bit more using the term queer, and about 15 using the term feminist.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the programmes of the triennial conferences of European Society of Comparative Literature / Société Européenne de Littérature Comparée (ESCL / SELC) uses the term gender six times in total throughout the years 2015–2019, with no mention of queer at all and one use of the word feminist in a paper title.<sup>4</sup> For ICLA, the score is similarly low: in 2016, there were two papers using the term gender, two papers using the term feminist, and two sessions plus two papers using the term queer in their title. In 2019, the score reached a record low, with one session only using the term gender (organized by the Comparative Gender Studies Committee) and four papers using the term queer (all presented at the session organized by

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<sup>3</sup> We counted the terms gender, masculine / masculinity, feminine / femininity, sex / ual / ity, feminist, queer and intersectionality in paper and session titles, as well as their translations where appropriate, using digital conference programmes made available on the organizations’ websites. For ICLA the research covered the 2013, 2016 and 2019 conferences; for comparison, the same time period was taken for sister organizations such as MLA, as well as national and regional comparative literature associations.

<sup>4</sup> One of the “gender” references in 2015 is to (trans)gender.

the Comparative Gender Studies Committee). Similarly, scrutinizing the summaries of 38 issues of the Brazilian Journal of Comparative Literature (*Revista Brasileira de Literatura Comparada*) yielded only two articles on women writers, one on the image of woman in literature and one on ecofeminism, and none on queer-related themes. To be sure, our mining of the Comparative Literature Associations' conference programme booklets for the use of the terms gender, feminist and queer does not necessarily reveal all papers devoted to issues of gender and sexuality. Sometimes other terms are used, such as femininity or masculinity. Other times the terms only appear in the abstract or in the presentation at the conference. However, the word count is revealing when conferences are contrasted: in contradistinction to the ICLA meeting in Macau, the International Comparative Literature Forum co-hosted in 2019 by the Chinese Comparative Literature Association (CCLA) and Shenzhen University had three sessions devoted to feminism and ecofeminism while the symposium of the Spanish Society of General and Comparative Literature (SELGYC) that was held in the Spring of 2019 had as one of its major themes "Transcomparatism: Gender and Genres: Feminism and sexuality in comparative literature." Furthermore, conferences of the Modern Language Association of America gather hundreds of papers and sessions that engage with issues of gender and sexuality annually, with in 2020 a whopping 120 sessions in whose title the term gender appears, 93 session titles using the terms sex and / or sexuality, 36 sessions titles that use the words feminism or feminist, and 59 session titles that include the term queer. There are, then, huge differences in the amount of attention paid to issues of gender and sexuality in comparative studies worldwide, as there are huge differences in the visibility of this scholarship and the recognition given to it within the broader, or intersecting, field of comparative literature / comparative studies.

## **Comparative Gender Studies and Intersectional Feminism**

Because of its commitment to social justice, there is a strong connection between comparative gender studies and feminism. Always inflected by specific local / glocal geopolitical configurations, gender studies scholarship and feminist activism converge on issues ranging from redistribution, recognition and representation (see Fraser), addressing issues of economy, culture and politics, to labour, governance

and private sphere, including the rights and freedoms to live in peace and dignity amongst diversity. At universities in the Global North, gender studies started as women's studies in many places, expanding to include perspectives focusing on sexuality (lesbian and gay studies), masculinity, and identifications beyond the traditional binaries – e.g. queer, trans, genderfluid – and mindful of the ways in which these identities, identifications, or categories intersect with other axes of difference and inequality such as race / ethnicity, religion, class, and region. The emphasis on identity and recognition is offset by work in comparative gender studies that focuses on sexual and gender violence, on matters of livelihood, empowerment, state and citizenship, and the discourses and ideologies that legitimize women's political, economic, and social oppression. In the wake of scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Trinh T. Minh-ha, the Argentinian-born Maria Lugones explores the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality as they inform the systematic violences inflicted upon women of colour in what she terms “the coloniality of gender” in postcolonial and transnational contexts. In South Asia, which had the dubious distinction of occupying three slots among the top ten countries with the worst records for crimes against women according to the Thomson Reuters Survey conducted in March 2020, comparative approaches to gender and feminist activism combine to seek to understand the complex intersections between language-cultures and religions which inflect local patriarchies and articulate them to the economies of globalization and globalized capitalist patriarchies (Jayawardena; Chanda), often centring cross-border and cross-religious research on gender within the same local language, for instance Urdu and Bengali.

This intersectional and pluralistic perspective makes of gender studies an inherently comparative field: it always asks what difference gender makes, and what other differences a single focus (on gender, or race, region, religion,...) overlooks or even obscures. Comparative Gender Studies is then not only a plea to make comparative studies more sensitive to gender+ issues, though it is that too; it is also a name that brings gender studies within the purview of comparative studies and identifies it as such, highlighting the comparative dimension that is – or should be – integral to gender studies. A strongly self-reflective field, then, Comparative Gender Studies asks questions it believes are pertinent to all scholarship, such as those of perspective and location. Whence do we approach a literary text? Knowledge is situated, feminist science studies

scholars have pointed out: it is embodied, located, and partial (Haraway). There is an epistemology as well as a politics of location – a politics that becomes all the more evident when wielding a comparative perspective, as Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), written astride cultures and languages, makes clear.<sup>5</sup> While it is important to acknowledge one's own position as a scholar and to recognize the implications of this positionality for the scholarship produced, in terms of methodology – of a theory of method, that is (Harding) – the implications of location and perspective reach further to include reflection on the different legitimacies that attach to differently and differentially positioned perspectives: dominant, hegemonic or subjugated and subaltern (Haraway; Spivak; Lugones); internal (participant, implicated) or external and an outsider's perspective – a linguistically, historically or culturally exogenous point of view (Horchani). In addition, given the constructedness of locations such as nations and regions as politically necessary and resolutely historical fictions – an issue much debated in the context of Asia, for instance – it is important to recognize how such fictions are created through the flows of people, goods, and ideas, including ideas about gender, and how these in turn come to construct national or regional gendered identities (Johnson, Jackson and Herdt).

An important development in comparative gender studies is therefore the rise of men's and masculinities studies. Whereas men have long functioned as the neutral default, with women's and gender studies focusing on the constructedness of femininity, the field has recently broadened to include the critical study of men and masculinities. Literature authored by men is still rarely read as "men's literature" (Plate "The Arena") – unless the said men are identified as non-hegemonic (e.g. the "lad lit" of 1990s Britain). Comparative studies of men and masculinities are burgeoning around the world (e.g. Ruspini *et al.*) and the representation of men and masculinities is flourishing, for instance in Stefan Kramer's *MannsBilder: Literarische Konstruktionen von Männlichkeiten* (2007), Jennifer Vaught's *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (2011), Elahe Haschemi Yekani's *The Privilege of Crisis: Narratives of Masculinities in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature, Photography, and Film* (2011), Stefan Horlacher's *Configuring Masculinity*

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<sup>5</sup> See Gloria Wekker's chapter in Buikema *et al.* Wekker explains that the concept of the "politics of location" was formulated by Adrienne Rich "based on discussions with black feminists such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, and Michelle Cliff" (68).

in *Theory and Literary Practice* (2015) or the volume *Masculinities and Literary Studies: Intersections and New Directions* (2018) edited by Josep Armengol, Marta Bosch Vilarrubias, Àngels Carabí and Teresa Requena. Masculinities continue to be the focus of much research in queer studies, for instance Paul Baker and Giuseppe Balirano's *Queering Masculinities in Language and Culture* (2018), a field within gender and sexuality studies which, in its focus on non-normative sex, sexualities, and sexual orientations, is inherently comparative, given its concern with deviations from the norm.<sup>6</sup>

## #ReadWomen

#ReadWomen is a hashtag started by the English writer Joanna Walsh in 2014, to address the enduring gender imbalance in the global publishing industry. In the United States, VIDA: Women in the Literary Arts ([vidaweb.org](http://vidaweb.org)) is an organization that has been counting the gender breakdown in major American literary publications and book reviews since 2009, and similar initiatives have been developed elsewhere, for instance in the Netherlands, where an anonymous “lezeres des vaderland” (female reader of the fatherland) kept track of gender imbalances in literary reviewing from 2015 to 2017 (Snelders). It is to counter bias in reading, publishing, and reviewing that the hashtag #ReadWomen was launched; to draw attention to the ways in which women still face discrimination in the (globalized) literary industry, which silences and censors them, albeit in different ways, across the globe (see Menon; Burrell).

#ReadWomen is a hashtag that also pertains to scholarship in comparative gender studies engaged in recovering women writers of the past and rescuing their texts from oblivion, (re-)inserting them into the canon (or changing the canon or doing away with it altogether), and offering critical readings of emerging bodies of texts by new generations of women writers. Over the past decades, many anthologies have been published, enabling the comparative study of women's writings, such as: the four-volume *Women Writing Africa* (2003–2008) and the three-volume anthology *Escritoras Brasileiras do Século XIX (Nineteenth-Century Brazilian Women Writers*, ed. Muzart, 1999–2009), *Women*

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<sup>6</sup> To the extent that queer is always queer in relation to the normative, queer is always already comparative.



*Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (ed. Chang and Saussy, 2000), Margaret Busby's *New Daughters of Africa* (2019), and *Chinese Women Writers on the Environment: A Multi-ethnic Anthology of Fiction and Nonfiction* (ed. by Isbister, Pu and Rachman, 2020). Gynocriticism, a term coined to refer to the study of women's writing (Showalter; see Plate "Gynocriticism"), continues to be of vital importance to comparative gender studies, especially as it evolves into "multiple gynocriticisms" (Friedman) and comparative ones, for instance Sadaf Ahmad's *Pakistani Women: Multiple Locations and Competing Narratives* (2010), Meera Kosambi's *Women Writing Gender: Marathi Fiction Before Independence* (2012), Michiko Niikuni Wilson's *Modern Japanese Women Writers as Artists as Cultural Critics* (2013), Kay Schaffer and Xianlin Song's *Women Writers in Postsocialist China* (2014), Ileana Rodríguez and Mónica Szurmuk's *The Cambridge History of Latin American Women's Literature* (2016), Fedwa Malti-Douglas's *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (2019), and Bharati Arora's *Writing Gender, Writing Nation: Women's Fiction in Post-Independence India* (2020). These studies sometimes trace the history of women's writing and representation within a single language but across national and / or religious borders. Rakhshanda Jalil and Debjani Sengupta's *Women's Writings from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh: The Worlds of Bangla and Urdu* (2019) is a recent example of comparative gynocriticism exploring the ways in which Urdu and Bangla have shaped women's creative universes in three nations of the subcontinent.

Gynocritical scholarship includes the study of women's and feminist rhetoric, for instance Lindal Buchanan and Kathleen Ryan's collection of essays *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics: Landmark Essays and Controversies* (2010) and Kirsti Cole's *Feminist Challenges or Feminist Rhetorics? Locations, Scholarship, Discourse* (2014), as well as comparative studies of specific tropes and topoi of women's writing. The multivalent relationship between women and borders is such a topos, for instance in *Episodes from the History of Undoing* edited by Reghina Dascal, which inquires into the nexus of gender and "trespassing" in different cultural contexts – to wit, American, Brazilian, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, and Turkish – while recalling and refreshing the stories of feminine daredevils; but also in *Zubaan Series on Sexual Violence and Impunity in South Asia* (eds. Butalia et al.) with volumes on Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Topoi in contemporary gynocritical studies include #MeToo

and related hashtags (e.g. #NotInvisible, which focuses on the violence and indifference faced by Native American and First Nations women and their families, or the #MeinBhi movement in Pakistan); anger, personal and political (e.g. Brittney Cooper's *Eloquent Rage* and Patrícia Melo's novel *Mulheres empilhadas* [*Piled up Women*] addressing the issue of feminicide); and maternity and motherhood, for instance in so-called mom lit (see Blackwood). Gynocriticism includes critical focus on a broad variety of genres of women's writings, from fiction and poetry to auto / biography, letters, magazines, and periodicals, for example Jameel Akhter's two-volume history of women's Urdu periodicals *Urdu mein jaraaed-i-niswaan kee taareekh* (2016), which gives rare and historical information on 250 periodicals published since the late nineteenth century in Urdu specially for women; or explores new genres such as women's comics and graphic narratives, for instance Hillary Chute's *Graphic Women* (2010), which focuses on American comic writers mostly but includes a chapter on the Iranian-born French Marjane Satrapi.<sup>7</sup> It also includes critical crossings with such emergent interdisciplinary fields as cultural memory studies, for instance in the volume *Women Mobilizing Memory* (2019) edited by Ayşe Gül Altınay *et al.*, a transnational inquiry into the politics of memory-making in relation to experiences of vulnerability and violence, focusing on Chile, Turkey, Europe, and the US.

But what *is* a woman? Recent controversies in the Global North over the exclusion of and discrimination against transwomen have rekindled debates about who is included in and who is excluded from the category "woman" and what kind of social, cultural, and affective work the category does. These debates then are about the definition of gender, conceived as sexed or sexual difference, and one's (and / or other people's) positioning with respect to the man / woman dichotomy. As Lennon and Alsop among others have argued, in English-language countries but also outside, the meaning of the term gender has changed over the past decades. Feminist insights into the constructedness of a binary biological division into male and female – that is, "as itself mediated by cultural assumptions

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<sup>7</sup> Needless to say, feminist, gender-sensitive, or queer readings also extend to other texts, and to feminist ecocriticism, a developing field in comparative studies (see Gaard; Wei; Du; Najera). While the specificity of women's reading was the focus of theoretical debate in the late twentieth century, today, the focus is more on queer reading, i.e. exploring queer modes and methods of reading, for instance by "taking up arguments about misreading, rereading, reading askew, reading with regard, wrong reading, and not (yet) reading" (Luciano; see also Kubowitz).

about gender and by norms of heterosexuality” (1) – have undone the famous sex-gender distinction of 1970s white western feminism, while new uses of the term in popular parlance and legislation recognizing non-binary or third genders further reinforce a sense of the term as signifying “without commitment as to whether this positioning is biological or social” (2).<sup>8</sup> A comparatist approach, taking into view the many different ways in which gender is done, in discourse and in practice, around the globe confirms wide divergence among genders (however defined and understood) worldwide.<sup>9</sup> It also lends credence to Paul B. Preciado’s thesis that “the notion of [dimorphic] gender belongs to the biotechnological discourse that appeared in the US medical and therapeutic industries at the end of the 1940s” and that it served the purpose of subjugating “an infinite variability of bodies and desires (multiple chromosomal, gonadal, hormonal, external genital, psychological, and political variables)” to the imperative of heterosexual reproduction (99; 104).

## Gender Travels

As a concept and a category of analysis and understanding, gender does not travel well. Sure it travels; but the difficulties scholars encounter in seeking to translate the term and employing it in a foreign context are plenty, as many have pointed out, referring sometimes to the term’s Anglo-American pedigree (e.g. Fusco; Di Cori; François and Zoberman), other times insisting on its western or Global Northern bias (e.g. Berry et. al; Shah). The way gender intersects with other categories, for instance caste in India (e.g. Rao; Banerjee *et al.*; Gosh and Banerjee), also differs across space (and time).<sup>10</sup> Crucial, moreover, is indeed the (conceptual)

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting here that the Gender Summit, an international “platform for dialogue where scientists, policymakers, gender scholars and stakeholders in science systems examine new research evidence showing when, why, and how biological differences (sex) and socio-cultural differences (gender) between females and males impact on outcomes,” still holds on to the sex / gender dichotomy (and dimorphic gender) in its self-presentation on its website (<https://gender-summit.com>).

<sup>9</sup> The idea of “doing” gender was first articulated by Candace West and Don Zimmerman in “Doing Gender” (1987). The phrase resonates with Judith Butler’s performative theory of gender as found in *Gender Trouble* (1990), her seminal book widely read, studied and translated around the globe. See also *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture* (2017) edited by Buikema, Plate and Thiele.

<sup>10</sup> As Ciotti points out, already in the 1990s Dalit feminism drew attention to the nexus between caste and patriarchy and challenged the categories of ‘genderless caste’ and

separation between sexual orientation and gender identity, which may be relevant in the West, but does not neatly apply to non-western contexts, as hijras in Bangladesh and Thai toms and dees, for instance, illustrate. Careful consideration of gender and sexual variance around the world and of the complexities of drawing on western theory and terminology to engage with varying cultural contexts are therefore called for, as is attention to different configurations of meaning and power that may be operative in, or articulated through, them. Indeed, as “tom” and “dee” also illustrate, as gender travels, it also changes, adapts, mutates, and transforms, with English words becoming names for distinctive subject positions elsewhere. Thus “tom,” derived from the English word “tomboy” and referring to female-bodied individuals who hold a masculine identity or are marked as masculine by others, is “paired, both linguistically and romantically, with feminine-identified women who are called ‘dees,’ a shortening of the English word ‘lady’ (la-dee).” Together, they emerged in Thailand in the 1970s and have now largely overridden regional linguistic variations to form a new Thai discourse on sexual / gender subjectivity (Sinnott 119). Therefore, as Ana Tsing points out, “instead of following Western originals across non-Western cultural transformations, we can follow the narrative contexts through which foci of cultural difference are identified”; and “instead of debating the truth of Western-defined universals, we can debate the politics of their strategic and rhetorical use across the globe” (254). These latter arguments are also supported by Inácio, who claims that there was in Portuguese a queer aesthetic expression before the queer itself had been named as such.<sup>11</sup>

The problems posed by the categories of gender and sexuality are further underscored by comparative work in queer theory, for instance Rahul Gairola’s reading of the gay body as a colonial queer translation in its travels to the non-West, Héctor Ruvalcaba’s exploration of the meanings queer acquires in its translation into Latin American cultural codes, and Robert Diaz’s scrutiny of the term “bakla,” which is used in the Philippines to denote “gay male identity, male-to-female transgender

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‘casteless gender’ (Rege). Since then, insights into the way in which caste inflects gender have led to the analysis of the gender workings within caste itself.

<sup>11</sup> See also Mineke Schipper’s *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet*, which looks at proverbs about gender and sexuality originating from hundreds of languages and more than 150 countries, and observing many similarities among them. The book has been translated into 15 languages.

identity, effeminised or hyperbolic gay identity, and gay identity that belongs to the lower class” (721). Queer is, like gender, yet another term that does not travel well. Queer has been used as a synonym for gay and lesbian or LGTBQI+ and to refer to non-normative sexualities; it is increasingly used to challenge all kinds of normative categories (Buikema *et al.* 270). There is no direct translation for queer in any language; it is also a most contested term, subject to critical interrogation even as it is employed, as for instance in Luther and Ung Loh’s *Queer Asia* (2019), which offers a pan-Asian perspective that places queer Asian identities and movements in dialogue with each other, rather than within a western framework.<sup>12</sup> Expanding the meaning of translation to include the culturally and geopolitically signified and situated body, comparative queer studies problematize and destabilize established and normative categories of gender and sexuality. To return to the example of bakla: serving as a term that problematizes gender and sexuality categories that come out of the West, in its deployment, bakla at the same time acknowledges its own limitations. As such, bakla is exemplary of the queer: it is not simply a translation of queer, but it does queer.

## Gender, Sexuality, and Translation

Translation has long been recognized as an important site of comparative work. Not surprisingly, it is also an important area of comparative gender studies. Research here focuses on gender and translation / women and translation, feminist translation studies, and queer translation studies. It also looks into the travels of theories and theoretical concepts into new linguistic and / or cultural domains or areas of study, as when scholars study “the uneven migrations” of the category “gender” (Costa 68) or the term queer (Ruvalcaba), examining the work these translations do while “highlighting the significance of translators as power brokers within the linguistic and cultural borders that organise power relations” (Hill Collins xiii).

Building on an established tradition of research into issues of gender and translation (Jouve; Lotbinière-Harwood; Simon), comparatists across

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<sup>12</sup> Here we may also want to note the important work done by the “Queer Asia Series” published by the Hong Kong University Press, which has been publishing books focusing on non-normative sexuality and gender cultures, identities and practices across all regions of Asia since 2009. See Berry *et al.*

the globe have been exploring how the performativity of gender and the performativity of translation intersect, for instance in the collection *Translating Women* edited by Luise von Flotow (2011) and its sequel, *Translating Women: Different Voices and New Horizons* (2017), edited by Flotow and Farzaneh Farahzad. Such research continues the important labour of (re)discovering and re-evaluating the work of women as translators, raising issues of power dynamics implicit in gender relations, and exhuming forgotten texts. What kinds of problems do translators run into when seeking to translate gendered or historically gender-neutral terms, for instance in the works of seventeenth-century French moralists (Zoberman)? How are women's experiences and women's ideas being translated across cultures? What contextual influences – religious, cultural, political, commercial – come into play in the production of these translations?

Over the past decades, the problematics of translation have also become an important domain of feminist contention. In her article “Lost (and Found?) in Translation: Feminisms in Hemispheric Dialogue,” Claudia de Lima Costa breaks a lance for the study of translation as central to understanding, and to forging, a transnational, feminist politics. Opposing “feminism-as-cultural-imperialism” and the spurious universality of the term “global sisterhood,” she argues for looking at translation as a practice and a metaphor that offer an apt understanding of the mechanisms through which gendered identities are forged, exploring “how ‘foreign’ theories and concepts are brought into friction and dialogue with local experiences so as to enable identifications and de-identifications, as well as configurations of alternative theoretical cartographies” (65). Particularly important to this process are the ways in which, and the means by which, “feminist concepts / discourse / practices gain temporary (or even permanent) residence in different representational economies” (67), as well as the “formidable roadblocks and migratory checkpoints” they sometimes encounter when they attempt to cross borders (63). Since texts that travel across linguistic contexts require a “visa” – “they always entail some sort of ‘cost,’” Costa writes (67) – this includes looking at the material conditions and circumstances organizing translations, as well as the contexts of political, cultural, economic, and institutional power. Thus, in the context of the Americas, Costa points out the important role that the academy and feminist NGOs play in the production, circulation, and reception of feminisms while observing how ongoing economic crises in Latin America have put serious constraints on

the circulation of feminist theories and noting the still pervasive dismissal of subaltern knowledge within the US academy.

Translation is “a privileged site for the negotiation of difference in a world of increasing cross-border movements and cross-cultural contacts” (Costa 72), at once a place of (transnational) connection and a space of epistemic violence, as when the translation of foreign concepts enters in conflict with local vocabularies of activism. This entails attention to feminist translation as intersectional feminist activism, as well as inquiry into the connections between translation and transnational feminism. It also entails attention to pseudotranslation and its political potential (Taronna) and to feminist paratranslation as a key geo / political and analytical tool of feminist translation (Abou Rached).

The cultural turn in translation has also led to research at the intersections of gender and sexuality studies and translation. Indeed, the recognition that translation is “a multidimensional site of cross-lingual correspondence on which diverse social tasks are simultaneously performed,” as William Spurlin writes (“The Gender” 202), inaugurated the study of queer translation studies, exploring “translating queer, queering translation, queer as translation and translation as queer” (Epstein and Gillett 7). Key questions are:

How do we work with translating terms for naming genders and sexualities in comparing texts and cultures of the past which may not be translatable to modern understandings of gender or to contemporary understandings of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer difference? How might we work with the specificity of queer, which has its origins in western Anglophonic cultures, when translating texts from non-Anglophonic and non-western contexts? How has translation functioned as a site of social change when dissident forms of sexuality in certain source texts, considered to be foreign to a particular target culture, become part of, and challenge, that culture’s official discourses through the dialogical processes of interlingual transfer and cultural exchange? What new translation issues arise when we work within postcolonial cultures, for example, where terms for same-sex sexual desires may not be inscribed discursively in indigenous languages, or, if they are, may have emerged under a different set of material, ideological, and cultural conditions, such as colonial history and the effects of transnational migration and diaspora? How do race and class differences impede the straightforward translation of gender and desire?

(Spurlin, “The Gender” 205)



A number of recent articles, collections, and monographs are exploring such issues, studying the translation of queerness and applying queer thought to issues of translation. Following Spurlin's groundbreaking special issue "The Gender and Queer Politics of Translation: Literary, Historical, and Cultural Approaches," B.J. Epstein and Robert Gillett's *Queer in Translation* (2017) and Brian Baer and Klaus Kaindl's *Queering Translation, Translating the Queer* (2018) are two important volumes that explore how the rendering of queer phenomena across languages and cultures challenge our understanding of translation as a theory and a practice and how attention to translation can keep queer scholarship "honest – that is, true to its anti-hegemonic orientation, by forcing researchers to interrogate deep-seated Western, and perhaps specifically Anglophone, biases" (Baer and Kaindl 3). Here, research may focus on strategies and techniques used by various translators in dealing with queer texts, as well as the representation of queerness in literary works across different countries. Exploring translation studies and queer theory together as sites of performative practices and mediation, Epstein and Gillett's volume uses queer theory to challenge traditional views of the ideal translation as being invisible, that is, as being able to "pass" as the original, to call into question the "legitimacy of the allegedly authentic" (3). *L'intraduisible* as "a queer space, one that challenges any normative idea of straightforward translatability," to quote Spurlin, brings home the ways in which translation is a queer praxis (172). For as he also argues in "Queering Translation," the slippages of meaning, the differences, that occur in working across languages and cultures, speak to the very queerness of translation as a critical praxis and site of knowledge production. While some of the essays focus on the failure and impossibility of translating queer texts and subcultures, others set themselves the task of uncovering hidden non-heteronormative sexual practices excluded due to target cultural norms or the translators' conscious or unconscious censorship. Importantly, Nour Abu Assab's warning of the ways in which "reclaiming a gay and lesbian history in the West has affected perception of homosexuality in the Arab world" (31) underscores the politics of translation and the tensions implicit in the articulation of queer dissidences across languages, geographies, and cultures. Addressing the ethics of ethnocentrism and monolingualism, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* in 2016 devotes a special issue to "Translating Transgender," calling for multilingual and translational critique to challenge the dominance of Anglophone frameworks



and resources in transgender studies, while Douglas Robinson, in *Transgender, Translation, Translingual Address* (2019), seeks to understand the “translational” or “translingual” dialogues between cisgendered and transgendered people in a similar effort to bring translations studies and transgender studies in dialogue.

If western studies of gender, sexuality, and translation originated in the context of Francophone Canada and in discussions about transatlantic translations – the translation, in the late twentieth-century, of so-called French Theory in general and “French Feminism” in particular into a U.S. context – by now, reverse movements (marked, for instance, by the late arrival in France of translations of Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick; see Tomiche and Zoberman) as well as area-focused debates complicate the geopolitics of feminist and queer translation studies and complexify the nature of the international conversations on gender, sexuality, and translation. To the more broadly international exchanges staged in Epstein and Gillet, Baer and Kaindl, Castro and Ergun, and Flotow and Farahzad, we might add the collection edited by Sonia E. Alvarez and Claudia de Lima Costa, *Translocalidades / Translocalities: Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin / a Américas*, which as its title indicates focuses on the Americas. Exploring Latin American, Caribbean, and United States-based Latina feminisms and their multiple translations and cross-pollinations, its contributors advocate a hemispheric politics based on the knowledge that today, many sorts of Latin / o-americanidades – Afro, queer, indigenous, feminist, and so on – are constructed through processes of translocation as many people in the Latin / a Américas move back and forth between historically situated and culturally specific, increasingly porous, places, and across multiple borders. Here, then we may also mention Héctor Domínguez Ruvalcaba’s *Translating the Queer: Body Politics and Transnational Conversations* (2016), which focuses on queerness in and about Latin America, exploring the complex ways in which Latin American social and intellectual circles interacted with Anglo-American queer theory and scholarship.

Conversely, given the many languages spoken on the Indian subcontinent, most scholars in South Asian gender and sexuality studies work in at least two languages apart from English. Not only are general surveys necessarily comparative (e.g. Fernandes) but the practical and experiential basis of gender studies and research entails use and capability in at least one local language, as it enhances capabilities in field research and enables engagement with discourses of gender in different

language-cultures both within these multilingual nations and across national borders.

## **#CiteASista: Women, Queer, and Trans Scholars in the Profession**

To the key practices of reading, writing, and translating as vectors of comparative gender studies, we need to add the scholars themselves. For it is not only texts, ideas, and concepts that travel, but also the people who do the reading, writing, and translating, giving lectures, attending conferences, and participating in seminars and expert meetings across the world. To the politics of #ReadWomen we need to add the politics of #CiteASista: the politics of citation, i.e. who gets cited. For as Sara Ahmed writes, citation is “a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies.” Who gets cited matters, for citations translate into recognition, impact, and more (awards, money, etc.). Established in 2016, the hashtag #CiteASista, like the Cite Black Women movement started in 2017 (#CiteBlackWomen; [www.citeblackwomencollective.org/](http://www.citeblackwomencollective.org/)), centres Black Women’s work, writing, and voices and functions as a disruptor of white supremacy. As such, it gestures towards the politics and ethics of citational practices in comparative scholarship. For comparative gender studies, it is crucial to look beyond the canon of white feminist and / or queer scholars, cite feminist and queer scholars of colour, and reflect critically on the geopolitics of citational practices.

Moreover, to the politics of citation we may want to add the politics of invitation, i.e. who gets invited to lecture, give a keynote address, or participate in a research project. Rita Terezinha Schmidt recalls the importance of the “Woman in Literature” research group, established in 1986, for the development of gender studies in Brazil, and the intense, sometimes bitter debates it sparked at conferences and workshops; debates that were, in part, about who got cited, referred to, or invited, not least because of the spectre of intellectual colonialism raised by scholars’ references to theories associated with the US historical presence as an imperial power south of the Equator and its decisive role in the 1964 Brazilian coup d’état. Likewise, in their “Bibliography of Studies on Women and Gender in China since 2008,” Robin Yates and Danni Cai point out the role the previous bibliography played in promoting scholarship on

women and gender in the China field, helping to integrate, and so to institutionalize, women and gender studies across a wide array of fields, disciplines and sub-disciplines. Citational, invitational, and institutional practices are entangled, for instance through the establishment of gender studies committees in learned societies (Higonnet “Gender”).

Obviously, and as this article has hopefully made clear, such practices need to be attended to much more carefully than could be done within the compass of a single essay. Much more research on the vibrant and thriving field of comparative gender studies is needed: a more thorough mapping of its complex, diverse, and dynamic terrain, so as to facilitate more exchange and debate among its scholars, and to make their work more visible to each other and to the field of comparative studies at large.

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# **From Climate Crises to Crises of Language: Redefining Magical Realism in the Anthropocene**

**Ben Holgate. *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as  
Environmental Discourse*. New York: Routledge, 2019.  
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Interdisciplinarity analyses require, besides accurate insights into each individual field of study, mastery of specific discourses, a critical eye for nexuses and commonalities, as well as a keen sense of the permeability of borders. In his monograph *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse* (2019), Ben Holgate ventures into the exploration of a narrative mode that has been around, at least nominally, for about a century – magical realism –, a relatively recent genre of writing that attempts to document the human impact on the environment and the current climate crises – environmental literature –, and the growing theoretical field of ecocriticism. Amidst the expanding reach of magical realist scholarship, historically, geographically, and disciplinarily (postcolonial studies, psychology, trauma theory, clinical practice, etc.), Holgate’s work directs its critical focus onto a timely topic, the rapid and irreversible degradation of the planet’s ecosystems as a result of unbridled human intervention, and the literature that paints the picture of pre-industrial societies living in harmony with nature and its non-human coinhabitants, and fighting back against economic and political forces out of bounds. The challenges of the task, concedes Holgate, were mitigated to some extent by the fact that magical realism has “porous borders, constantly changing boundaries that make it inherently unstable

as a generic kind,” so that “each new work changes the nature of the narrative mode” (230). Adhering to a minimalist definition of the term allows for its application across a wide range of texts from different cultures and historical periods. Thus, Holgate settles on the working definition of magical realism as “literature that represents the magical or supernatural in a quotidian manner and which is embedded within literary realism” (230).

In the introduction, the author eases his way into the magical realism – environmental literature nexus by mentioning Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) as an early example of magical realist fiction “overlapping” with environmental literature, which unavoidably begs the question whether two concepts belonging to different theoretical categories, form and content, can be said to overlap. However, pedantry set aside, it is noteworthy that the critic establishes several connections between magical realist fiction and environmental literature by laying out four characteristics that the narrative mode shares with ecocritical fiction: a postcolonial perspective in contrast with colonial legacies; the development of new worldviews and forms of expression in opposition to the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment; a biocentric perspective based on the interconnectedness of all things in the universe; and a “transgressive nature that dismantles binaries, such as human and non-human, and animate and inanimate” (2–3). Holgate attributes the apparent lack of scholarship on environmental literature using magical realist techniques to historical factors: magical realist criticism and theory started about a century ago (in 1925, when Franz Roh coined the term), whereas environmental criticism began around four decades ago (in 1978, with the introduction of William Rueckert’s term “ecocriticism”). The author also emphasizes that the book is about not only “*how* magical realism is a natural ally of environmental literature but also *why* magical realism is a dynamic, constantly evolving narrative mode that can address the challenges of imagination posed by the crisis of climate change” (8–9). The main goal of the study is to provide new insights into both the narrative mode and environmental studies, similarly to other twenty-first-century scholarly works examining magical realist fiction in light of the Holocaust, historical violence, and cosmopolitanism (10), a helpful backdrop aimed at contextualizing the following analyses.

Over several pages, the book offers a brief survey of the concept of magical realism, a particularly thoughtful choice meant to present an audience only tangentially acquainted with magical realist theory with

a quite helpful *mise en situation*. After touching on the theoretical contributions to the definition of the term by Franz Roh, Massimo Bontempelli, Arturo Uslar Pietri, Angel Flores, and, following the “internationalization” of magical realist fiction in the 1980s and 1990s, by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, who describe the narrative mode as “literature that presents the supernatural as an ordinary everyday occurrence” (13–15), Holgate settles for a minimalist working definition, “a minimalist approach to the narrative mode that is flexible and able to accommodate markedly different literatures from around the globe that are incessantly changing and evolving” (18). Besides magical realism and ecocriticism, another important thread in Holgate’s theory is postcolonialism, given that postcolonial literature has often been analyzed in a causal relationship with the magical realist writing mode in extant scholarship. According to the critic, the texts discussed in the monograph challenge the prevalent, binary, conceptions of postcoloniality. Specifically, Holgate targets Stephen Slemon’s theory of magical realism as postcolonial discourse by using the example of Alexis Wright’s novels, which represent “three oppositional systems [rather than the usual two]: the Indigenous colonized, the white-‘settler’ colonizer, and global economic forces that help perpetuate the ongoing colonization” (19). With regard to the origins of magical realist fiction, the critic proposes the term “polygenesis,” meaning that “the narrative mode did not originate in any particular country, or culture, or at any particular moment in history, but rather emerges in a multitude of literatures from different countries, different cultures, and at different times in history (25), a viewpoint that negates the largely accepted notion of magical realism as a postmodern literary phenomenon, the only exceptions being the works of writers that employ magical realism *avant la lettre*: Nikolai Gogol, Thomas Mann, D. H. Lawrence, and Henry James (25) – as well as Franz Kafka and Guy de Maupassant, I would add.

Magical realist fiction with environmental themes generally directs its focus on the cultural and spiritual aspects of individuals and societies, and a depiction of how they both interact with, and depend on, the local environment (28). Because different environments, human experiences, and ideologies are not static, this type of environmental literature “suits the fluidity of magical realism as a narrative mode” (29). Holgate aims to demonstrate how writers of magical realism utilize the narrative mode to invert, destabilize, and challenge accepted notions of the environment. The first two novels discussed are *Carpentaria* (2006) and *The Swan*

*Book* (2013), by Indigenous Australian writer Alexis Wright. Wright's fiction draws on the Indigenous Australian Dreamtime, "a philosophy and spiritual framework that is inextricably connected to the Australian landscape, but which is substantially different from Western philosophies" (42). The writer employs magical realist techniques as a postcolonial strategy, and conveys Dreamtime in a written literary form, building on traditional storytelling. Holgate points out the logical equivalency of the magical thinking of pre-colonial Indigenous Australian society with the scientific thinking of modernity. He draws on Claude Lévi-Strauss's view on magical thought, which the anthropologist considered to form, in premodern societies, a system just as valid as modern scientific thought (44–45). Magic, as a legitimate form of knowledge, links an Indigenous Australian environmental unconscious (Lawrence Buell's concept) with traditional spirituality. Wright's fiction also employs magical realist techniques in order to represent historical events of extreme violence – "such as massacres, genocide, or natural disasters," specifies Holgate (57) – and their traumatic memories. However, the infliction of collective trauma on both the human and the non-human, as an irreversible and long-lasting consequence of the slow and steady destruction of the environment and of the resulting climate crisis, constitutes a topic that may have deserved more ample treatment, and would have certainly benefitted the book's environmental criticism. Particularly Meera Atkinson's *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma* (2017), for example, might have been a valuable reference for the discussion of Wright's novels. In her analyses of *Carpentaria* (2006) and *The Swan Book* (2013), Atkinson points out that human trauma transmissions may impact not only the environment but also other sentient beings, and emphasizes the urgency of saving nonhumans in jeopardy of becoming extinct at a faster rate than ever before in recorded planetary history. The latency of trauma and its transgenerational transmission play too important a role in shaping the present relationships – still laden with tension – between the former colonized and their western masters to be ignored in modern democratic societies.

The following novels, Richard Flanagan's *Death of a River Guide* (1994) and *Gould's Book of Fish* (2001), portray an empathetic bonding between Indigenous Australians and the British convicts in Tasmania during the colonial era. Flanagan's magical realism is intertwined with a biocentric view of the world, in which humanity is but one element of the universe, and not the center of it. According to Holgate, the dismantling



of the human-animal binary is part of the writer's subversion of European colonialism. "By dissolving the boundaries between human and animal, *Gould's Book of Fish* dismantles what may be termed a 'species boundary,' in the sense of 'a strict dividing line' between what is human and what is animal" (86). The underlying themes "are the loss of food and the destruction of the natural environment, the memory of that loss, and the shift in conceptual paradigms from the land, as a public collective source of knowledge, to a private individual's source of materialist riches" (82).

New Zealand Māori writer Witi Ihimaera's novel *The Whale Rider* (1987) utilizes magical realism as postcolonial strategy in order to reassert the primacy of Māori culture and tradition. Ihimaera uses "mythopoeia to portray an alternative, indigenous version of reality that challenges the empirical rationalist philosophy imposed by British colonists" (95). In his novel, he endows whales with consciousness, intelligence, and the ability to communicate across species, which, according to Holgate, "exhibits a metaphysics of biocentrism that contrasts with the anthropocentric and humanistic approach of much postcolonial fiction" (103). It is in the myth of the whale rider, the merging of the human and the non-human, that magical realism and environmental literature intersect, or, in other words, where the stark realism of the text undergoes a magical "intervention." The whales' self-awareness, empathy, memory, and rational thought drive the novel "beyond basic ecocriticism to zoocriticism, which is concerned with the rights and representation of animals" (103). Ihimaera's fellow-Māori writer, Keri Hulme, employs magical realism in an environmental context to "disrupt the conventional binary of colonizer / colonized in order to reflect the complexities of contemporary New Zealand as a multicultural society" (117). Her only novel, *The Bone People* (1984), is a subversion of colonial discourse. Holgate updates Fredric Jameson's point, made about thirty years ago in his seminal essay "On Magic Realism and Film," that the anthropological view of magical realism highlights the contrast between a primordial past and industrial modernity: "Modernity, or the materialism and spiritual vacuity associated with capitalism, strips premodern societies of their cultural heart" (118). However, according to Holgate, Jameson's viewpoint does not hold up with much postcolonial magical realist fiction, which is often set in the late-capitalist phase.

Moving its geo-cultural focus to the Indian subcontinent, the analysis engages three novels by Amitav Ghosh: *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), a piece of "historiographic metafiction" that foregrounds the artificial construction of fiction and history"; *The Circle of Reason* (1986), a

juxtaposition of “police fiction” with elements of magical realism; and *Sea of Poppies* (2008), whose magical realism, contends Holgate, has so far gone unnoticed by scholars. Even though the author admits that Ghosh employs magical realism in a relatively small portion of his work, the chapter treats the Indian writer’s work at quite some length. The supernatural, magical element in the novel is the discovery by an Indian laboratory assistant of a “weird strain” of malaria that can transfer human personality traits from one individual to another. Thus, Ghosh challenges the British colonial version of the nineteenth century, according to which Sir Ronald Ross was the discoverer of the cause of malaria, and rewrites history through a fictionalized recovery of Indian science. The end product of this artistic process, infers Holgate, is an example of historiographic metafiction. Intertextuality plays a central role in Ghosh’s endeavor: he writes “against the grain of colonial history by constructing a counter-narrative, by reinterpreting various colonial texts, such as memoirs, diaries, letters, notebooks, histories, both actual and fictional, and by reimagining the spaces in between those texts” (135). The merits of this analysis notwithstanding, the argument for the integration of Ghosh’s text into the central topic of the monograph reads somewhat constrained rather than complementary to the other chapters: “*The Calcutta Chromosome* features the environment in biological terms. [...] The transmission of malaria by mosquitoes serves as a constant reminder that the health of humans is entirely dependent on the natural world, including tiny organisms like flying insects” (137). Even though the following subchapters treat other relevant aspects of Ghosh’s text in a clear, articulate, and soundly argued manner, they fail to address the proposed thesis and themes of the study – an inconsistency that may be due to the inclusion of admittedly previously published work by the author.

The chapter treating Chinese writer Mo Yan’s work amounts to a remarkably thorough and well-researched analysis covering Chinese history and philosophy, social and economic themes, as well as the locus of magical realism in Chinese literature and its relation to classical Chinese fiction. However, as Holgate accurately remarks, “Mo Yan is a writer who presents a quandary for scholars of magical realism” (196), and yet, the chapter dedicated to his work (more than twice the lengths of all the other chapters in the monograph) leads to the dilution of the analytical focus (as in the Amitav Ghosh chapter). Lengthy analogical references to Yan Lianke’s *The Explosion Chronicles* (2013), a “prime magical realist

example” in Chinese literature (178), while theoretically sound and convincingly argued, constitute yet another disruptive tangent in the flow of the argument. Multiple pages treat the presence of magical realist elements – the supernatural, the grotesque, and the fantastic – in classical Chinese fiction; the use of the narrative mode in a post-communist society; the author’s biography against the sociopolitical background of the time; and Chinese beliefs and customs – all in all, an informative, well-researched, and carefully articulated exposition. The only novel by the 2012 Nobel-Prize winning writer that falls into the category of environmental literature and supports Holgate’s thesis is *Red Sorghum* (1987), Mo Yan’s debut novel, in which nature and the “magical” inform one another in a reciprocal relationship. The sorghum plant is both a metaphor for Chinese spiritual purity and the backdrop of the narrative; the sorghum fields also carry a “life-affirming symbolism: [they] provide people with both nutrition and spirituality” (168) as well as a sanctuary, allowing the Chinese villagers to ambush the invading Japanese, and a refuge in which to escape the Japanese colonizers (170). The sorghum is also attributed human emotions, which suggests that the plants represent ancestral spirits (171). The analysis of *The Garlic Ballads* (1988) foregrounds the writer’s use of the supernatural in order to reimagine an alternative historiography that challenges the official version of Chinese history, and the other novel included in the chapter, *The Republic of Wine* (1992), satirizes corruption and the commodification of society in a post-Mao, market-oriented Chinese economy while dwelling on the literary trope of cannibalism “as a satirical vehicle,” which, as justly pointed out by Holgate, “creates a grotesqueness that is typical of much magical realist fiction” (160).

The last analytical chapter discusses Taiwanese author Wu Ming-yi’s *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (2011), a novel that aims to convey a global focus on environmental concerns, rather than a solely regional one, and to address the ecological crisis of the past half-century. Holgate reiterates his argument that the aesthetics of such texts reflects the increasing “internationalization” of much magical realist fiction “as writers adapt the narrative mode to portray domestic issues and events within the broader context of global political, economic, and cultural forces” (208). He draws on Ursula Heise’s concept of “eco-cosmopolitanism,” which underscores the need for contemporary environmental fiction to represent a “planetary consciousness as a form of resistance” (209). The title character, the man with the compound eyes, serves as a metaphor

for a “holistic, environmental and multispecies perspective, one that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all things in the universe and their interdependence upon one another” (210). Thanks to his eyes resembling an insect’s, with tens of thousands of “ommatidia” (the optical units in a compound eye, for those who skipped biology class), he sees everything in the natural world, and emphasizes the importance of the memories of non-human organisms, which are indispensable for survival (213). As magical realist fiction and environmental discourse, Wu’s novel “literally gives voice to nature,” in other words, to the voiceless and the marginalized environment (214).

In the conclusion, Holgate briefly discusses Japanese-American writer Karen Tei Yamashita’s novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990), an environmental magical-realist work that, similarly to Wu’s novel, takes a planetary perspective. Without dedicating an entire chapter to it – because the geographical setting of the narrative, the Amazon rainforest, lies outside the geo-cultural purview of the monograph, the critic acknowledges its originality in foregrounding the agency of nature: “Yamashita’s book complicates the concept of the Anthropocene [...] because it suggests that nature remains an active geological agent, and that humans may not actually be *the* primary geological agent, even after the inception of industrialization” (226). Before concluding his monograph, Holgate suggests a few topics for further exploration of magical realism as environmental discourse. Among them, bringing into the fold of magical realist scholarship the ubiquitous medium of our times, film, would be a valuable contribution to analyses of magical realism. Witi Ihimaera’s *The Whale Rider* and Mo Yan’s *Red Sorghum* have already been adapted for film, as was Salman Rushdie’s magical realist novel *Midnight’s Children* (and Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, Laura Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate*, and many others, I would add). In this context, it would be worth mentioning E. Ann Kaplan’s study *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction* (2015), which, along many others recently published, might be a good starting point for applying magical realism and trauma theory to environmental criticism in cinematic narratives.

Building on Amitav Ghosh’s statement that “the crisis of climate change is essentially a crisis of the imagination” (231), cited in the introduction, Holgate caps his study by stating that “[w]hat is needed is a reimagining of how best to live within and in harmony with the natural world.” Coincidentally, scientists, writers, and scholars from

multiple disciplines have recently pointed out that clinging on to the old way of thinking, founded on the possibility of turning back the clock of environmental degradation and on the primacy of human agency, is no longer tenable: hence the necessity to “reimagine” future courses of action. In his essay “What If We Stopped Pretending?” published last year in *The New Yorker*, Jonathan Franzen urges against looking through rose-colored glasses at the reversibility of climate change and global warming:

[...] A false hope of salvation can be actively harmful. If you persist in believing that catastrophe can be averted, you commit yourself to tackling a problem so immense that it needs to be everyone’s overriding priority forever. One result, weirdly, is a kind of complacency: by voting for green candidates, riding a bicycle to work, avoiding air travel, you might feel that you’ve done everything you can for the only thing worth doing. Whereas, if you accept the reality that the planet will soon overheat to the point of threatening civilization, there’s a whole lot more you should be doing.

(Franzen n.p.)

While arguably more optimistic in tone, Holgate’s final sentence aligns, in fact, with Franzen’s cautiously hopeful viewpoint: accepting the dire reality of the point of no return necessarily entails an act of reimagining humanity’s relationship with nature. Even though the irreversible damage done to the environment might foreclose any idealistic idea of starting over with a clean slate, a united humanity will need to reset its self-destructive habits as soon as possible (that is, to start over with an unclean slate, as it were), and to shift from the old, anthropocentric worldview to a biocentric one, based on the recognition of a shared agency between humans, nature, and non-humans, if it wants to survive the current climate crises.

More than just a narrative mode, magical realism is a complex mode of perception of reality and a multifaceted way of thinking, in which the explainable and the unexplainable coexist not in a conflictual but in a symbiotic relationship. Discarding the latter (the mystery of reality) and relying exclusively on the former (its empirical side) would lead to a Cartesian fallacy, to a division of the subject and object of knowledge in an arbitrary and potentially harmful fashion. As represented or suggested in most of the works discussed in *Climate and Crises*, precolonial cultures have something to teach industrial and post-industrial societies: that refusing to acknowledge the agency of the non-human and the environment, as well as their interdependence, will come at the West’s

own peril. Magical realism, concludes Holgate, “can play a critical role in enabling writers to offer alternative visions of how humans may live in the world in order to limit, if not reverse, environmental degradation. This is possible by the *conjunction of the magical and the real*, allowing a *reimagining of the world*, possibilities of what may be, rather than what is or has been” (229; my emphases). His study, *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse*, is built on solid theoretical grounds building up to a complex and intriguing argument. The strength of the book lies both in the novelty of its theoretical and thematic approaches to magical realism and in the geo-cultural range of the literatures discussed – India, China, Taiwan, Australia, and New Zealand – the latter trait bringing a welcome shift in scholarly focus from the Americas and Europe to Southeast Asia and the southern hemisphere. If some points occasionally come across as strained or veering off topic, the scholarly depth remains intact and appealing to *literati* and students alike.

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## **COMPTES RENDUS / BOOK REVIEWS**





**Ulrika Maude and Mark Nixon, eds. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Modernist Literature*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018. Pp. 545. ISBN: 9781780936413.**

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In her book *Planetary Modernisms* Susan Stanford Friedman writes, “Why is the energetic, expanding, multidisciplinary field of modernist studies so filled with contestation over the very ground of study?” (Stanford Friedman 19) This question resonates throughout this handsome volume from Bloomsbury which vigorously reflects the critical energy and methodological expansion in the field. Part One of *The Bloomsbury Companion to Modernist Literature* features 21 chapters by leading scholars in the field, structured into four sections. The first of these, “The Modernist Everyday,” considers the relationships between modernism and everyday reality. “The Arts and Cultures of Modernism” looks at the influence of popular culture, music and film on literary modernisms, while the third part, “The Sciences and Technologies of Modernism,” deals with connections between art and science. The expansion of Modernist Studies in the present is outlined in the fourth section, “The Geopolitics and Economics of Modernism.”

In her accessible, fluid and extensive introduction, Ulrika Maude succinctly summarizes the current state of modernist studies and sets out the emphasis of the book on the formal and thematic questions raised by modernist literature. She provides deft analyses of innovative works by a number of key modernists including Joyce, Beckett, Conrad, Yeats, Eliot, Woolf, Bowen, Mansfield and Lawrence, to illustrate various recurrent themes in modernist literature. Scott McCracken's chapter on

modernism and the everyday effectively traces the journey of the bar of lemon soap in Leopold Bloom's pocket in Joyce's *Ulysses* to draw out the complexity of the use of real and everyday objects in modernist writing. McCracken's clear and accessible argument demonstrates the links between the everyday and commodity culture, illustrating convincingly how modernist artworks can help us to understand "a world that is in the process of rapid change" (39).

Andrew Thacker emphasizes modernism's connections with geography, re-directing debates on modernism from the temporal to the spatial, stressing the urban character of modernism and incorporating global and transnational perspectives. This chapter does excellent work in defining modernism's preoccupation with space and place. Thacker usefully summarizes older theories of geographical approaches to modernism, noting its focus on location, mapping, center and periphery and race, as well as new theoretical approaches including planetary modernism, geomodernism and geocriticism. In so doing he identifies a major problem arising from the spatializing of modernism, namely running the risk of "losing focus entirely and turning all twentieth and twenty-first century literature into some form of modernism" (49). Thacker expands his argument through three brief case studies on the work of Conrad, Joyce and Woolf. He demonstrates Conrad and Woolf's contrasting approaches to the city of London, the former stressing its cosmopolitanism which has the effect of "unplacing" individuals, while the latter uses the geography of the city to illustrate how "external spaces interact with the interior lives of its characters" (57). In contrast, Joyce's writing about Dublin in *Ulysses* traces the colonialist politics of space in ways that "resist the imperialist map of the city" (56). Thacker convincingly shows how modernist literature exemplifies Franco Moretti's notion that geography is an "'active force' that continues to shape how we understand modernist culture and its diverse locations" (58).

The remainder of the first section provides a useful summary of other connections between modernism and the everyday. Shane Weller examines the relationships between modernism and language, using a historical survey to illustrate how modernist literature has emphasized the limitations of language to express feelings and emotions. Weller explores the complex relationship between the "word and the world," tracing a profound skepticism towards language beginning with the Symbolists and Dadaists, the High Modernists' search for an "essential language," and a return to language skepticism in Late Modernism. Using examples

from Woolf, Lawrence and Eliot, Kirsty Martin recalls and questions modernism's "famous protestations against emotion" (95), arguing persuasively that some modernist literature is characterized by intense engagement with emotion. Similarly, Michael Bell suggests that although modernist literature reflects the increasing secularization of society, there is a continuing preoccupation with myth and religion in the work of writers like Eliot, Rilke and Lawrence.

The second section entitled "The Arts and Cultures of Modernism" begins with Tim Armstrong examining relationships between modernism and music. Conor Carville deals with modernism and the visual arts, while Laura Marcus looks at the complex interactions between modernist literature and film, producing fresh readings of works by Woolf, Chaplin and Beckett. Lawrence Rainey's chapter on modernism and popular culture presents a fascinating critique of Andreas Huyssen's argument in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Rainey questions Huyssen's separation of modernism (which he saw as hostile to popular culture) and the avant-garde (which embraced it). Using close analysis of *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, Rainey illustrates the deep engagement of these modernist masterpieces with popular culture. Rainey's chapter exemplifies the contribution of the book as a whole to providing a thorough re-evaluation of the critical debates around modernism, to problematizing simple definitions and to reassessing the creative contribution of modernism culturally and politically.

The following chapter reinforces this argument, as Faith Binckes explores and analyzes the extensive contribution of magazines to the development of modernism. Binckes analyzes not only the legacy of periodicals founded specifically with a modernist agenda – such as John Middleton Murry's *Rhythm* or the Vorticists' *BLAST* – but also the considerable impact of modernism on popular magazines such as *Vogue*, *Good Housekeeping* and *The Listener*. Binckes suggests reversing the term "modernist magazines" to "magazine modernism," emphasizing the central role periodicals have played in disseminating and popularizing modernism art. Dirk Van Hulle brings a focus on writers' process in considering genetic criticism and intertextual cognition in modernist writing. Contradicting critical skepticism about the value of genetic studies of the artist, Van Hulle argues that there is a place for the study of manuscripts and the author's life and working conditions, particularly as so many modernists "were preoccupied with the attempt to evoke the workings of the human mind" (223). Using examples from Beckett and

Joyce, Van Hulle demonstrates that “knowing how something was made can contribute to an understanding of how it works” (212).

Section Three, “The Sciences and Technologies of Modernism,” features a fascinating set of essays connecting modernism to science and technology. Paul Sheehan considers literary modernism in relation to Einstein’s theory of relativity, productively linking relativity theory with modernism, specifically in relation to their close engagement “with the nature of the real” (231). Through analysis of texts by Lawrence, Joyce, Lewis and Woolf, all of whom demonstrate “awareness of irreducible temporal and spatial differentials” (244), Sheehan makes fresh connections between relativity theory and the treatment of time in literature. Jana Funcke beautifully articulates the connections between modernist writing and rapidly changing understandings of gender and sexuality. She argues that not only was modernist writing powerfully shaped by the redefinitions of gender and sexuality sparked by the new scientific and political movements of the early twentieth century, but also that gender and sexuality have a “constitutive role” in “producing new forms of knowledge and expression” (250). Contrasting politically significant works such as Radclyffe Hall’s lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* with the modernist experimentation of works such as Woolf’s *Orlando*, Funcke builds a rigorous and compelling argument about the ongoing relationships between gender / sexuality discourses and modernist literary strategies. Ulrika Garde explores modernist literature’s relationship with psychoanalysis and neurology, informed by what she calls “the embodied mind.” She focuses mostly on Sigmund Freud, who was an avid reader and interpreter of texts as well as a clinician. She argues persuasively that Freud can be seen as a modernist writer, and provides compelling readings of literature which brings together mind and voice, such as Beckett’s play *Not I*. Laura Salisbury’s chapter expands and deepens upon some of these arguments, illustrating ways in which psychoanalysis and other psychological approaches influenced both the writing and interpretation of literary modernism. While she too explores the echoes of Freud in various writers, she also investigates the very considerable influence of Jung’s analytical psychology, emphasizing the contribution of Eugene Jolas, who in publishing an early version of Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* “thought he had found a mode of writing able to tap into a universal linguistic unconscious” (301). Throughout this section, the tensions between modernism and modernity emerge in different manifestations, a point highlighted in the final chapter by Julian Murphet, who illustrates

ways in which modern technologies impacted deeply on both the subject and form of modernist literature. Murphet draws on Marxist concepts to theorize the tensions between industrial production and cultural labor, between literary production and the mediatization of art, emphasizing the adversarial relationship between technology and nature, and giving a wide range of literary examples to show how these tensions have played out in cultural production.

The authors in the first three sections of the book rely heavily on the canonical names of high modernism for their case studies. Therefore it was refreshing to reach the first chapter of Section Four, “The Geopolitics and Economics of Modernism,” which begins with a brilliantly succinct summation of the history and themes of European modernism before launching straight into the question “Can there be a global modernism?” Authors Emily Hayman and Pericles Lewis argue that many postcolonial writers are strongly influenced by the modernist canon which they were required to read in colonial education systems, contending that writers around the globe “have used modernist techniques to explore the dislocations of identity in an age of constant change” (330). Hayman and Lewis give six compelling examples – Joseph Conrad, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar, Jorge Luis Borges, Arthur Yap, Orhan Pamuk and Héctor Pereda – as global modernists. They draw connections between narratives set in Singapore, Istanbul and Buenos Aires between 1880 and 2001, making a convincing case for these works being seen as modernist, and examining how all six authors deal with the challenges of globalization (345). In the following chapter, Benita Parry similarly questions the Eurocentrism of the canon, focussing on the “peripheries and semi-peripheries” (351) of modernism. She goes further than other New Modernist Studies scholars by arguing that so-called “peripheral” writers transcend “the normative modes attributed to modernist literature” (352). She makes her point strongly in a detailed and compelling study of the 1974 novella *Xala*, by Senegalese writer / filmmaker Ousmane Sembène. Tyrus Miller examines the political dimension of modernist literature, highlighting ideological contradictions between the political convictions of some of the canonical writers. He argues that modernism cannot be aligned with any fixed political ideology because the work by its very nature “resists decoding and interpretation” (377). Miller deepens his analysis through a close study of three contrasting case studies – the revolutionary Messianism of Hugo Ball and Lajos Kassák, Wyndham Lewis’ satiric novel *The Childermass*, and John Dos Passos’ *U.S.A* trilogy. These

studies support his thesis that there is in modernist writing a “politically charged tension” between the present and “a changed future that is implicitly or explicitly indexed by the work” (390). The final chapter of Part One is a fascinating discussion by Ronald Schleifer probing the relationships between modernism and economics. Through examining aspects of modernism through the lens of economic theory, he succinctly demonstrates how modernism can be interpreted through the changing social and economic conditions in the early twentieth century, proposing that modernism can be seen as “a function of changing understandings of the meanings of value, property, ownership and even well-being itself” (409–10). There are pleasing resonances between Schliefer’s argument and Scott McCracken’s observations on commodity culture in the first chapter, contributing to a sense of unity in the overall structure of the book.

One of the most useful aspects of *The Bloomsbury Companion to Modernist Literature* is the package of critical resources which forms the second part of the book. These constitute an alphabetical list of key terms, an annotated bibliography of selected modernist criticism and a timeline of modernism. All of these resources are immensely useful for cross-reference and elaboration on the chapters, as well as for further study. The A to Z of Key terms, compiled by Alex Pestell and Sean Pryor, contains many useful definitions of key concepts such as “Consciousness,” “Difficulty” and “Object,” each supported by a short bibliography. This, however, is extremely selective. While High Modernism and Late Modernism are clearly defined, there is no definition of Postmodernism, despite this being referred to in passing in the Late Modernism section. The timeline usefully juxtaposes landmarks in modernist literature with significant historical events. However, given the emphasis on global modernism in several chapters, the timeline reflects a rather old-fashioned view of modernism, beginning in 1857 with Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* and ending at the Second World War. This timeline even excludes Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953), which is foregrounded in the introduction to the book, and does not reflect the considerable discussion of the geographical and temporal expansion of modernist studies explored in the fourth section of the book.

Much of the critical writing on modernism emphasizes the difficulty of definitions. *The Bloomsbury Companion to Modernist Literature* clearly defines and analyzes trends in modernism criticism, and through many fresh and conceptually challenging case studies provides new energy

in the field. The comprehensive approach means that modernism is clearly located historically, geographically and politically, while making an original contribution to the continuing re-definition of Modernist Studies in the twenty-first century. Thus it is suitable for newcomers to the field, as well as for experienced scholars who will obtain new insights and ideas from the wide range of ideas explored. The careful curating of the chapters gives a pleasing coherence to the volume, as discussions move logically from one topic to another. The book is a rich and encyclopedic study that earns a distinguished place among the plethora of recent collections on modernism. The book as a whole illustrates superbly what Emily Hayman and Pericles Lewis refer to as “the persistence of modernism” (344), the re-incorporation of certain shared themes, issues and challenges “through the advanced literature of the past century and a quarter” (344).

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**Eugene Eoyang. *East-West Symbioses: The Reconciliation of Opposites.*  
Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2019. Pp. 224.  
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*East-West Symbioses: The Reconciliation of Opposites* is a collection of 17 essays penned by a veteran comparatist, Eugene Eoyang. Over the past three decades, Eoyang has written extensively on the encounters between “East” and “West,” on comparative literature, translation studies and world literature. Two things about this book immediately caught my attention. Once again, Eugene Eoyang has placed his unique mark on what he chooses to write about and how he does it. After reading Eoyang’s first monograph, *The Transparent Eye: Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature and Comparative Poetics*, a friend of his said to him, “It’s very you.” I would say the same about this book. In addition, this latest book embodies a way of reading that is simultaneously “close” enough to acquire as much intimate knowledge as possible and “distant” enough to establish objectivity. As someone who has lived, personally and professionally, between two worlds, Eugene Eoyang is the ideal reader. He reads as both native and foreigner, as insider and as outsider. His insights challenge the status quo and make us aware of the cultural biases and pseudo-universalist assumptions that we often take for granted.

*East-West Symbioses* is divided into four parts, each consisting of several chapters. Part One (Chapters One, Two and Three) discusses paradigms that inform our understanding of cross-cultural encounters. In Chapter One, Eugene Eoyang charts a progression through three stages: “Cultural,” “Intercultural” and “Intracultural.” In the “Cultural” stage, he examines the nationalistic perspective that considers each

country monolithic, a view according to which each country has one unique culture. In contrast, an “intercultural” perspective recognizes that any culture is made up of disparate elements, some of which are “foreign.” By “Intracultural,” Eoyang has in mind Heidegger’s sense of *heimat* (homeland) not only in one’s own country but also in the *World*. Eoyang mentions two of the most prolific translators of Chinese in the early twentieth century: Ezra Pound and Arthur Waley. Both were intracultural pioneers, “because they tried to incorporate what was alien and strange into their own sensibilities – to create a nativized, anglicized China!” (18).

Chapter Two targets some cultural assumptions which, by their prevalence and near-ubiquity, become universalist presumptions, which Eugene Eoyang terms ethnotopes. For instance, “west” when used to designate occidental cultures, is an ethnotope, since only in the “West” – and specifically Europe – is Asia due east. For someone in the Americas, Asia is, of course, due west. The use of the term “the west” to designate Europe stems from a European perspective, not an Asian one, not even an American one (26).

Chapter Three discusses the Chinese phrase *maodun* and its dubious English translation as “contradiction.” *Maodun* alludes to the Han Feizi story, which couples the “invincible spear” with the “impenetrable shield.” In its strictest logical sense, this identifies a contradiction, and hence the impossibility of this pair to co-exist. But the problem of translating *maodun* as “contradiction” is that in some contexts *maodun* as a Chinese concept does mean “the unity of opposites,” or the co-existence of a seemingly impossible pair.

Part Two (Chapters Four through Nine) offers case studies involving some sort of cross-cultural misreading. Chapter Four examines contemporary *chinoiserie* and its “fanciful interpretations of Chinese styles” (39). It discusses the novels and texts that exploit the strangeness of the other, not its approachability. Their uses of stereotypical western images of China, like mah-jong, bound feet, joss sticks and inkstones, quaint poet-recluses, give the mainstream reading public its longed for representation of China, as opposed to what is really happening there. Chapter Five focuses on François Cheng’s translation of classical Chinese poetry into French. Through a close reading of Cheng’s translation of Wang Wei, Du Fu, Du Mu and Liu Zongyuan’s poems, Eoyang points out that Cheng, as a translator, often proceeds at the expense of the original when faced with compromises. His instinct is not so much to Sinicize

French as to Francophonize Chinese. His China was not a real country but an imaginary Cathay constructed out of a French sensibility (62).

Chapter Six traces the arduous incorporation of Chinese literature into the most widely used textbook, the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*: Chinese texts were not included until as recently as 1992. Chapter Seven corrects one of the most famous translations in the 1915 edition of Ezra Pound's *Cathay*, Li Bai's poem "Jewel Stair's Grievance." Chapter Eight explores the widespread mistranslations and misunderstandings of some basic Chinese words and concepts in English. For instance, Eoyang astutely points out that the traditional translation of *ren* as "benevolence" or "virtue" undermines the meaning of *ren* as a fundamental truth about human beings: that we all derive from two people and that each of our parents derived from two other people, and so on through the generations. The best explanation of *ren* is John Donne's: "No man is an island,/ Entire of itself./ Every man is a piece of the continent / A part of the main" (91). Chapter Nine discusses the inadequacy of translating the Chinese word *zui* as "drunk." While "drunk" suggests a slobbering lack of control, *zui* connotes a lack of inhibition, the release of brilliant insights and inspiration.

Part Three (Chapters Ten through Fourteen) contains case studies of creative fusions. Chapter Ten showcases Octavio Paz, the Mexican Nobel Laureate, whose understanding of the familiar Chinese notion of *maodun* marks him as a truly *intracultural* figure. His ability to see opposites reinforcing, rather than contradicting, each other, proves that his sensibility is not just a Mexican one but a world one. Chapter Eleven focuses on Matteo Ricci's unique work, "On Friendship," which cites Confucius as well as Cicero, reflecting Taoist / Daoist dialectics as well as Roman stoic philosophy (112). In combining these western sources with versions of Chinese teachings, Ricci establishes a perfect model for East-West symbioses.

While Chapter Twelve discusses a creative translation of Shen Congwen's short story "Xiaoxiao," Chapter Thirteen considers three perspectives on chaos: 1) the traditional western perspective, which sees it as rampant disorder that needs to be controlled; 2) the ancient Chinese (and specifically Taoist) perspective, which considers chaos as primordial and natural, something that is neither threatening nor negative; and 3) the contemporary scientific perspective, which detects in chaos a paradigm of non-linear forms yielding patterns of astonishing beauty (133). Chapter Fourteen explores how some American ethnic

writers trigger the bicultural, if not bilingual, sensitivities of readers. It takes as its example three novels: Chang-Rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, John Okada's *No-No Boy*, and Frank Chin's *Donald Duk*, analyzing how these intracultural writers, by using different fictionally mimetic techniques, embody both the strangeness of a minority culture and yet manage to make that strangeness accessible to the majority reader (146).

Part Four (Chapters Fifteen, Sixteen, Seventeen) clarifies some issues in our understanding of the encounters between "East" and "West." Chapter Fifteen explores the hidden and subliminal biases that complicate the notion of "Westernization." For instance, even without the explicit acknowledgement of western superiority, the West assumes priority by imposing its chronology upon world history. The way the world reckons time is decidedly millennial and Christian (160). The chapter calls for a careful examination of these subtle and unrecognized "Westernizations" that skew and constrain our discourse.

Chapter Sixteen draws a contrast between western "Agon" vs. eastern "Ritual." Where the culture of agon (the Greek term for "assembly associated with contests") "strives toward the annihilation of the other, the culture of ritual strives for communion with the other. Where one seeks victory by destroying the enemy, the other strives for hegemony by co-optation" (168). The book discusses the underlying premises between these two viewpoints, and the potential misunderstandings that may result in exchanges between individuals representing these opposing perspectives.

Chapter Seventeen concludes with the importance of translation. People often ask "What is lost in translation?" Far more important questions, however, should be: "What would be lost, if nothing were translated?"; "Where, indeed, would we be without translation?" (196). The chapter also emphasizes the role of the translator as both an insider and an outsider: "In the formulation of Kenneth Pike, the insider's knowledge is 'emic,' and involves intuitive recognition; the outsider's is 'etic,' and involves analytical insight. The translator's challenge is to take the 'etic' insights and to create an 'emic' experience for the reader who cannot read the original" (193).

In sum, readers of *East-West Symbioses* derive from this study many thought-provoking observations and insights into misperceptions and cultural biases that we often take for granted. What Eugene Eoyang has accomplished in this book is, in a way, the task of a translator, to

take the “etic” insights and to create an “emic” experience for anyone who is seeking more than a superficial understanding of cross-cultural encounters.

I would like to end this review by discussing the images printed on the cover of the book. They provide a juxtaposition of two landscape paintings: “Pure and Remote View of Streams and Mountains” by the ancient Chinese painter Xia Gui (1195–1224), and “Weymouth Bay: Bowleaze Cove and Jordon Hill” by the British landscape painter John Constable (1776–1837). As its cover illustrations suggest, Eugene Eoyang’s new work has created a perfect East-West symbiosis.



**Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel, eds.**  
***Historizing the Dream / Le Rêve du point de***  
***vue historique.* Würzburg: Königshausen &**  
**Neumann, 2019. Pp. 463. ISBN: 9783826067389.**

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It would seem that, over the last few years, the University of Saarland has aspired to become the center *überhaupt* for studying the dream from diverse perspectives not anchored in the authority of natural sciences. The University's Graduiertenkolleg "Europäische Traumkulturen," generously (and rightly so) funded by DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, German Research Community), is a living proof of this thriving multidisciplinary program. Saarbrücken thus becomes a center of dialog between most of the arts and humanities scholars studying the dream in Germany as well as some of the best international specialists in the field. This very visible intellectual effervescence ([www.traumkulturen.de](http://www.traumkulturen.de)) is actually the continuation of another vast research project, initiated, under the aegis of the International Comparative Literature Association, by two professors from the University of Saarland, Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel: The Research Committee *Dream Cultures: The Cultural and Literary History of Dream* ([www.dreamcultures.org](http://www.dreamcultures.org)), which was active between 2013 and 2019.

We could easily gauge the satisfaction of the ICLA yearly vetting of its research committees by considering the quantity and substance of the volumes published to this date. After detecting the poetics and stylistics susceptible of having been distilled from, or of overtly or insidiously shaping the dream, in the collective volume *Writing the Dream / Écrire le rêve*, published in 2017, and after surveying, in the 2018 *Theorizing the Dream / Savoirs et théories du rêve*, conceptual-expressive accretions

that signal an articulate and deliberate reflection on the origins, nature, functions, consequences of dreaming, in 2019 the indefatigable Dieterle and Engel edited an equally massive volume dedicated this time to *Historizing the Dream / Le rêve du point de vue historique*.

A layman to the project, judging only by the above-quoted titles, would probably consider that a historical perspective could not have been avoided for the two previous volumes as well. It stands to reason that any collection of studies addressing the avatars of the *écriture* or of theory related to dream would be, even if not advertised as such, inherently historical, or “historizing.” But we have to admit in all editorial honesty that clear-cut thematic boundaries are in general difficult to come by, and would be far more so when scouting oneiric territories. On the other hand, the implicit, practically inescapable historical perspective on a subject matter is of a logical and epistemological order different from the specific treatment not only of historical occurrences, but also of “history” and “historicity” as such. And this is very much how the two editors organized the curated essays: namely, around strategically different understandings of the notion placed in the pole position of the (English) title: “historizing.”

The main understandings of the notion are reflected in the partition of the table of contents in a “Synchronic / Synchronique” and a “Diachronic / Diachronique” sections. While the association of historicity with the diachronic is highly intuitive, given that history is basically understood as a sequence of events, synchronicity might appear a bit misplaced in the context. But only to those who omit that what we perceive as historical is not necessarily an unfolding of sorts, but also the intrication of cultural codes that let a more or less distant epoch (or chronotope) appear as clearly distinct from our own. In this second sense, historizing the dream means inserting / entangling / weaving dreams back into their finely textured original cultural context. And this is indeed how the “Synchronicity” section works. The cultural reconstruction is meant to function as a dream-catcher, placing the investigated texts at an intersection of cultural, stylistic, social, ideological, political specificities that strongly suggest a given historical “bubble.”

Nevertheless, the distribution of the essays according to a standard (and assumedly global) chronology might seem a little self-subverting with respect to the intentions of the editors (made explicit in the introduction, but also in the fact that, on the back cover, they list all the authors discussed in the volume in a purely alphabetical order that manifestly



defies any preordained temporal axis). The structure of the contents also follows a rather conventional cast of “antiquity.” In spite of the temporal abyss that separates them, the Sumerians and Romans might not argue against being placed in a closed horizon, as they would be comforted by the remarkable quality of the studies dedicated to the subtle connections between their recorded dreams, their religious sensitivity, and their sense of power, studies authored by Annette Zgoll and, respectively, by Gregor Weber. But things may turn quite differently, for instance, for the Chinese, summoned to illustrate a “classical” civilizational area, through the dream encounters in four novels that extend from 1300 to 1800 (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*; Tang Xuanzu’s *The Peony Pavilion*; Wang Shifu’s *Romance of the Western Chamber*; Cao Xueqin’s *Dream of the Red Chamber*). The deep knowledge of these texts exhibited by Johannes D. Kaminski allows him to present evolutions in sensitivity and mentality that clearly warn against taking at face value imperial China’s own immutable vision of itself. A temptation the editors do not seem to have resisted, when including Kaminski’s sophisticated historical account into the “Synchronism” section. The temporal conundrum does not end here: there is no explicit rationale for relegating China exclusively to some global state of premodernity (not fully distinct from an extended “antiquity” or “classicality”), without further discussing the impact of its modernization(s) on its dream culture. There might be a perfectly reasonable and practical reason for this decision, but the reader should not be left to his / her own speculations on the matter.

Further on, the core of the first section illustrates a standard cultural chronology that successively appends Middle-Age, Renaissance, Baroque, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Realism, Modernism. In general, the case studies proposed by the contributors are treated as beads on a thread, in accord to the “Synchronicity” label. But methodology can never be as disciplined as we would wish it. Therefore, the two successive essays authored by Manfred Engel, covering the (West-)European 19th century, represent perhaps the most eloquent example in the book of treating history diachronically, as a process, rather than synchronically, as a comprehensive structure. Taken together, the two chapters, “Enlightenment and Romanticism – the Psychological Fall and the Imaginative Rise of ›Big‹ Dreams” and “Dreams in 19th-Century Realist Narrative Fiction,” reconstruct, through a number of careful textual analyses, a large process of oscillation (a possible cultural equivalent of an economic Kondratieff cycle), from the dominant rationalism of the 18th

century that tends to stultify all non-natural interpretations of dreams, to the Romantic resurrection of “natural supranaturalism,” and then, in a second move, to a new wave of “realistic” reluctance towards Romantic spiritualism. This very nuanced and polyfaceted perspective on change seems naturally prolonged into (West-European) literary modernity by Bernard Dieterle’s contribution on “Le rêve et les paradis artificiels.” Placed at a considerable distance, (it marks the end of the “Diachronic” section, and thereby, of the whole book), this essay tracks the dialectics of naturalistic and non-naturalistic visions on the dream (i.e. the interplay between dream, memory, and the use of hallucinogens) from Thomas de Quincey to Henri Michaux.

Highly interesting is the illustration of the last section of the historical template underlining the “Synchronic.” The choice of a contribution focusing on African francophone literature, and of an essay on “Indigenous contemporary drama” (i.e. written by “First Nations” authors of different parts of the Commonwealth, but especially from New Zealand) may seem primarily as a bow to political correctness meant to attenuate an all too Eurocentric general perspective. But the complex analyses of represented dreams as cultural forms of negotiating between ancestral mythologies and modernity by Tumba Shango Lokoho (for the African case) and Marc Maufort (for Oceania) decidedly disperse this impression. Actually, by trusting the representation of the post-modern epoch to these “eccentric” cultural areas, the editors both collected two remarkable essays on short circuiting the European sense of historical succession (Maufort hypothesizes on reading magical realism as a general expression of this process), but also consolidated their non-teleological tenet on historizing, through the subtle analogies the modern cases scrutinized by Shango Lokoho and Maufort entertain with some of the ancient literary-cultural instantiations of dream and dreaming that open the “Synchronic” section.

While the French version of the title does not pose immediate semantic dilemmas, the use of “historizing” over the more common “historicizing” elicits the heightened attention of the reader. The two are mostly synonymous and refer to recreating a historical context, or looking at things from a historical *point de vue*, but “historizing” may additionally refer, pertaining to context, to the fact, and allegedly the manner of telling a story. Among Romance languages, Romanian seems best positioned to render this synonymy, since it derives from history / *istorie* the verb *a istorisi*, literally meaning *raconter une histoire* (to wit,

*des histoires*). Therefore, we have to take into account another semantic split: “historizing” as an analytical and hermeneutical process undergone by the critic, vs. “historizing” as the very praxis of “telling” one’s dream in a given space and at a given time. Can the personal imprint (that would help us put “story” back into historizing) be detected within the greater trans-personal interaction of discourses generating different cultures of dream? Many contributions answer positively to this challenge, through their focus on specific works and authors not perceived as automatic illustrations of cultural “systems.” Given the distance in time and space, Dorothy Figueira’s empathetic recovery of the intensely personal element of dreaming in Sanskrit drama and poetry is particularly remarkable. A quick mention can barely do justice to similar efforts of detecting the marks of a personal historizing of the dream in German medieval verse narrative (Agnes Karpinski), the sonnets of Italian Renaissance (Dietrich Scholler), Austrian relations on the 1683 Ottoman Siege of Vienna (Andreas Bähr). The most existentially charged approach, which brings to an extreme literariness the idea of historizing as traumatic penetration of “history” into the deepest oneiric fiber of human consciousness and corporeality, is Christiane Solte-Gresser “Cauchemars d’après-guerre: Approches d’une poétique concentrationnaire (1953–1963).” The most spectacular contribution, exposing the manner in which dream could become an individual (even if much larger than life) project and method of collecting the historical memory of mankind is Gerald Gillespie’s exploration of the multi-labyrinthine *Finnegans Wake*.

Let us stress, while nearing the conclusions, that the ramifications of the meanings of historizing, and subsequently of “history” are not limited to the “Synchronic” section. The “Diachronic” one, even if covering a mere fourth of the whole contents, still exposes clearly distinct understandings of the central operational concept. Murat Ates attempts to circumscribe “oneiric existence” through a kind of debate between Plato and Nietzsche, which indicates a traditional sense of *Geistesgeschichte* implying a virtual (con)sequence of ideas transcending the contingencies of factual history / historicities. Marlen Schneider analyzes the Baroque through romantic pictorial representations of the biblical dream motive of Jacob’s ladder in rather epistemic terms, through the lenses of a progressive advancement of secularism. Meanwhile, Ricarda Schmidt’s “Ideal, Conflict, Destruction: Lovers’ Dreams in the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries” favors an approach closer to the *histoire des sentiments* of the *Annales* School.

The ambiguities between Synchronic and Diachronic aside, the volume edited by Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel is remarkable through its state of the art case studies, its simultaneous explorations of possible understandings of “historizing,” and last but not least, through its interdisciplinarity and even tentative multimodality (two of the contributions suggest a future opening of the “Dream Cultures” project towards film history: Caroline Frank’s piece on Surrealist cinema, and Julian Lucks’ study of dreams in Contemporary US TV Series, focused on *The Sopranos* – to the indubitable delight of its many die-hard fans). It is also true that the choice of cultural areas sidestages the usual *zones blanches* of western mental maps, such as eastern Europe (present strictly through the observation that Romanticism “caught up only slowly and much later in France and other Romanic countries, and in Eastern Europe,” 167). But, on a sincere and confraternal note, would anyone be seriously surprised by such omission(s)?

**Gerald Gillespie. *Living Streams: Continuity and Change from Rabelais to Joyce*. Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2018. Pp. 207. ISBN: 9782807610217.**

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Anyone familiar with Gerald Gillespie's work will be aware of his immense erudition, his ability to identify threads that connect different literatures and ages, his gift for weaving them into canvases that reveal larger, overarching patterns of recurrence and transformation. This latest book, collecting twelve essays written in the last two decades, tracks major themes that form a "durable consciousness" (11) of western culture: hence the "living streams" of the title.

The themes explored traverse different chapters, as do key authors and texts. Among the main ones are Rabelais, Goethe (especially *Faust*), Mann (especially *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Der Zauberberg*), Proust, Joyce (particularly *Finnegans Wake*). These suggest a predilection for the western canon, but Gillespie prefers the term "repertory." The word is apt, invoking as it does a collection from which the writer who elaborates the themes and the critic who interprets them can draw in their creative-critical performances. Alongside the major figures, less mainstream ones thus also recur: some can be expected, like Grimmelshausen or Lohenstein (the latter was the subject of Gillespie's doctorate, 1961); others are more surprising, such as Kepler, the great astronomer whose *Somnium* is surely not a staple of literary criticism; films like Griffith's *Intolerance* or Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* enrich the analyses. European and North American post-medieval literatures are where Gillespie's expertise lies, and where his readings accordingly focus. The reader is invited to be as creative with the book as the book is with the literary and cultural repertory through which it wanders: we can follow alternative strands

according to our inclinations, read the chapters in different order, even skip some. Whichever way we choose to regroup the chapters, they have been organized for us in two parts. The first, “The Joys of Vision and Rewards of Retrospection,” has a broadly literary-historical focus and combines the movements of forward and backward glance to examine literature’s power to envision futures and make them possible by revisiting and transforming traditions. Part 2, “Hindsighted (Post)Modernism and Polysemous Multiplexity” concentrates more particularly on modernist and postmodernist texts and how they recover, revise and reactivate themes inherited from the wider repertory.

Rabelais is the starting point of many of the book’s “streams.” A “pioneering humanist,” he actively built into the repertory of the European cultural system “the thrill of boundary-crossing and of discovery” (21) as Europe began its massive expansion, geographically through travel and of knowledge through scientific discoveries and the printing press. In chapter 1, “The Dangerous but Joyful Venture of Cultural Rebirth from Rabelais to Joyce,” the combination of the desire for touring the world with desire for universal history is found in the compendiums of myths by Italian humanists such as Petrarch and Boccaccio, and in Ariosto’s narrative retrospection about the middle ages; while Kepler imagines journeying to the moon (Ariosto did too). But it is Rabelais that contributed to shaping the modern western repertory by internalizing in the comic epic form the principle of self-criticism, the habit of contestation and questioning, of risk-taking and creative innovation, ensuring it would become constitutive of “high culture.” This major “stream” will flow, in different but related ways, through Cervantes, Sterne, and Joyce – “the ultimate apostate” who in *Finnegans Wake* abolished the recognizable structures of epic narration and radically challenged the values of his time, not just to critique past (and present) institutions, but to “encourage us in a liberating attitude” (33–34). In the later chapter “‘Paradox Lust’: The Fortunate Fall According to Joyce,” Gillespie pursues other ways in which *Finnegans Wake* extends and transforms the course of the encyclopaedic-humoristic tradition initiated by Rabelais by constantly merging opposites, whether eastern and western strains of culture, dying and being reborn, the masculine and the feminine, and of course fall and salvation.

Overarching fictions that recapitulate human history attract special attention. Gillespie turns more than once, for example, to D. W. Griffith’s film *Intolerance* (1913), with its epic historical sweep from the

fall of Babylon, through the passion of Christ, the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, to the plight of poor immigrants to America: the filmic equivalent of a Baroque panoramic canvas, its ending reproduces the spirit of the conclusion of Wagner's Ring cycle. Like Mann's contemporaneous *Der Tod in Venedig* or the longer *Der Zauberberg*, and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, these works draw upon the rich heritage of myth, anthropological habits and psychological analysis to seek an understanding of contemporaneity.

If the first chapter considers cultural rebirth and figurations of larger worlds that provide alternatives to ours, but seen from perspectives firmly placed within our world, the second, entitled "Looking Through Windows of Time: Illustrative Moments of Vision in Literature since the Renaissance," examines "apertures in time" through which the divine intervenes into our world to guide us and impart information on what is yet to come; but the chapter also pursues a complex of pessimistic themes which infiltrate European discourse and grow in prominence, especially after the French revolution, figuring hellish labyrinthine worlds, as in Byron's *Cain*. This darker outlook is taken up again in chapter 4, "Traveling into the Abyss." The abyss here is seen in its secular dimension, experienced partly in the real world, partly in the self, and linked (in an alternative to the "joyful ventures" of chapter 1) to the expansion of travel and the encounter with new and strange worlds and people. In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* the encounter with the other, the cannibal, and with other forms of religiosity leads to defamiliarization and to a "necessary self-alienation from an original homeland in the course of an expansion of moral consciousness" (64). The transformation of the world by capitalism, industrialization and urbanization provides writers with new sources of creative power, as in the thread that runs from Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), through Thompson's *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874), all the way to Donoso's *El Obseno pájaro de la noche* (1970). The journey through hell, or the related harrowing of hell, can become anthropological and / or psychological journeys, as in *Heart of Darkness* or *Der Tod in Venedig*, and rejoin the quest for religious or transcendent understanding, as in the conclusion of Poe's *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym of Nantucket* with its final vision of perfect whiteness, where the abyss can no longer be grasped in the historical terms that Defoe had helped establish.

Chapter 3, "The World as Music: Variation on a Cosmological Theme," outlines literature's aspiration to transcendence by linking the desire to recover the authenticity of Edenic language with the desire to chart the

perfect mathematical-musical proportions of the cosmos. This aspiration to endow language with an imperishable quality like that of maths and to find deeper, stable correspondence between sound and meaning is traced through writers as diverse as (the list, here as elsewhere, is very partial) Kepler, Rabelais, Fray de Leon, Donne, Hölderlin, and especially Schopenhauer, who organizes the arts in gradations of perfection, from the lowest, architecture, via the visual arts and literature (also ordered through degrees of increasing objectivity) to the highest, music.

Several chapters are dedicated, in different ways, to the feminine. In Chapter 5, "Some Shape Shifting of the Divine Feminine in Nineteenth Century Literature," a third polarity is added to the Venus and Virgin sides of the "eternal feminine": the ominous, haunting, oppressive yet life-endowing "all-mother." Often associated with statues, it can be petrifying or seductive; or it can be a dominatrix figure as in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*; before her, men regress to a condition of infantile obedience. In Chapter 8, "Swallowing the Androgyne and Baptizing Mother," the motherhood of God and the androgynous nature of the flesh of the Incarnation is detected in such disparate representation as Van Eyck's *The Lamb of God*, Caravaggio's *The Doubt of Thomas*, in Novalis, Proust, Joyce, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, and Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. The sacramental value of imagery is thrown into relief: while the performance of baptism is generally associated with masculine authority, in Joyce it is just as often feminine and brings together in union male and female, in a confluence of baptism and marriage. In the "Paradox Lust" chapter, the androgyny of the godhead and its relation to rebirth and return is correlated to the way the consubstantiality of father and son in *Finnegans Wake* juxtaposes with that of father and mother, and thereby of parents and children, to include all of humankind in profound continuum.

There are more streams than I can describe here. Chapters can feel at times like cumulative lists of brief references, but the aim is to demonstrate how comparative literary studies, even in survey form, can enhance our perception of the multifarious complexity of living cultural interactions. There are moments that cause discomfort, however. These are especially concentrated in "North / South, East / West, and Other Intersections," a chapter driven by a polemical vein. Observing that each culture will have its specificities, and each of us our own mentality that will color our perception, Gillespie finds in "honesty and not ideology" (102) the best policy to address these differences; he sees comparative literature as crucial because it is "in the business of framing an *elitist*



transterritorial metanarrative which describes a rich variety of lower-order theories and processes in particular repertoires or intraterritorial metanarratives” (102, my emphasis). I fully appreciate Gillespie’s honest recognition of the elitism inherent in comparative practices that require a high level of education and specialization, not available to everyone. But why should approaches that openly recognize the ideology that underpins them therefore be *dishonest*? In a no-punches-pulled diatribe, “ideologically ‘committed’ or obsessed scholars” are said to “falsify or distort” information “to promote an ideological agenda”; they confuse students; they waste the time of more adequate comparatists; the “more egregious falsifiers” among them are a “species of ‘sociopaths’” (102). Particular excoriation is reserved for postcolonial studies that discuss imperialism without due consideration of, for example, ancient empires, or that study slavery without due recognition of its much longer history than just in the last centuries, or that slavery was practiced not just by Europeans but by many other peoples. No-one will disagree with the importance of informed historical perspectives, but why should this lead to the dismissal of critical models that expose how injustices whose effects still structure societies today and affect real lives now, have been ingrained and normalized also through the great literature of the western canon – that is, through the works that shape our culture?

This is not to deny, of course, that the greater the linguistic, historical, textual expertise the reader brings to the text, the more informed and capable of informing the reading; but the implication that comparative literature training can demonstrate the superiority of some cultures over others is troubling. Gillespie states that the “variety of cultural norms” should not lead to infer that “no constellation of standards could have or lay claim to a superior moral validity,” and “analyses promoted by comparative literature can feed back positively into the formation of improved ‘final’ or evaluative judgments which may strengthen particular cultures or individuals who are receptive to such insights as comparative literature practitioners generate.” Comparative literature can empower to “formulate sounder judgments, rather than let us be petrified into quietism by fear of the demon of relativity” (107–108). The elite of comparatists seems to be given a role of moral guidance – Shelleyan moral legislators of the world, perhaps. It would be problematic if the recognition of the elitism conferred by the privilege of an advanced, specialized higher education segued into an assertion *therefore* of the moral superiority of those that have had the privilege of such education,

as the words above appear to imply. Surely no comparatist, however well-read, can claim immunity from prejudice (after all, as Lubrich has shown, there was a National Socialist variant of comparative literature [Lubrich]). The hostility against “ideological” approaches may seem surprising when authors that Gillespie celebrates, like Joyce or Rabelais, offer trenchant ideological critiques of phenomena that affect societies, individuals and cultures. But this is precisely the point: a scholar of the old school – he will forgive me for saying this – trained and formed at the time when comparative literature was re-emerging out of the rubble left by nationalist, imperial wars and was seeking to move beyond approaches determined by (national or other) identities, will see comparative literary analysis as necessarily self-sufficient in its textual focus, and will wish to shield it from the taint of ideological structures that must appear, even more than a distraction, a return to divisive and ultimately anti-humanistic practices. Belonging to a generation who grew up intellectually in the heyday of structuralism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, gender studies, it is normal for me to see these approaches not as “rubble heaps” (103) but as part of the complexity of the cultural field, and a necessary constant challenge to the facility with which we let our biases morph into norms assumed to be neutral. Inevitably, I will have my own blind spots.

Despite my disagreement, therefore, I can continue to enjoy Gillespie’s detailed knowledge of texts and contexts, his ability to perceive streams that, in the karstic terrain of culture, can disappear underground to reappear elsewhere; the ability to pick an apparently minor detail and tease so much out of it. Chapter 10, “Ondts, Gracehoppers, and Quarks; Joyce Never Gets Quit of Faust” offers a gratifying example of this gift by focusing on the journey of the word “quark.” As is known, the Nobel laureate physicist Murray Gell-Mann adopted this word from Joyce’s *Wake* to designate a new particle he had hypothesized. As I learned from this chapter, however, Joyce had in turn borrowed it from Goethe’s *Faust*, where Mephisto describes humanity as a presumptuous grasshopper that wants to jump heavenwards but falls, Icarus-like, into the trivial earth: “quark” in the original German. Joyce, who is re-elaborating the medieval romance of Tristan and Isolde, inserts in his account a reference to Goethe and to the paradox of opposites coming together, of flight and fall, of hope and damnation, through a word that will then be picked up to describe a sub-atomic constituent of matter. How Rabelaisian.

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**Jón Karl Helgason and Marijan Dović, eds.**  
***Great Immortality. Studies on European Cultural Sainthood.* Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019.**  
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*Great Immortality. Studies on European Cultural Sainthood* has grown out of Marijan Dović and Jón Karl Helgason's 2017 monograph entitled *National Poets, Cultural Saints: Canonization and Commemorative Cults of Writers in Europe*. This earlier project worked out an impressively complex but cautiously nuanced matrix for studying the 19th-century nationalist cults of "cultural saints." The authors' notion of "cultural sainthood" pointed to the transformation of religious veneration into the secular worship of authors and poets under the aegis of romantic nationalism. Appropriating a wide range of religious practices and concepts, from ritual to idolatry to relics to martyrdom for their purposes, national movements capitalized on the symbolic and social prestige traditionally reserved for saints proper. This cultivation of cultural sainthood provided the "emotive pole" (Dović and Helgason *National Poets* 6) to the immense intellectual, as well as legal or political, work invested into nation-building. As such, the idolatry of cultural saints, together with the "common symbolic imaginarium" and the shared aspirations they channeled (*National Poets* 6) aimed to secure cohesion, integrity, and survival in national communities.

Dović and Helgason's model is not based on a mere analogy between literary and religious canonization. Rather, it highlights the persistence of religious mentality, rhetoric, and ritual in every aspect of secular cultural worship, ranging from writing hagiographic biographies of representative men of letters, to creating sacred sites of

memory, displaying their relics, salvaging their bodily remains, and establishing their canonical written corpus. Those fascinated as I am by the force of abstract systematization in translating myriads of local details and particularities into well-ordered comprehensiveness might want to examine Dović and Helgason's two-page table summarizing the various aspects of the "Canonization of Cultural Saints," subsumed under the main rubrics *Vita*, *Cultus*, and *Effectus* (see *National Poets* 94–95). Based on this richly layered yet flexible frame, *National Poets, Cultural Saints* compared the elevation of France Prešeren and Jónas Hallgrímsson to the status of national poets in Slovenia and in Iceland, respectively. This unlikely, and thus fascinating, comparison demonstrated that the veneration of representative literary figures relied on similar reconfigurations of traditional religious sainthood in European regions far removed from one another.

The volume *Great Immortality* that Dović and Helgason edited in 2019 offers a test field for this model and their previous findings within a wider geographical and historical scope. This collection of fifteen case studies travels from Iceland to Georgia, from the 13th century to the present. In addressing their own particular cases, most of the essays explicitly draw on the conceptual model developed previously by Dović and Helgason. Several poets, such as the Polish Adam Mickiewicz and the Romanian Mihail Eminescu, whose affinity with cultural sainthood was but suggested in the previous volume, are now receiving full attention. Priority is given again to the European "semi-periphery," which has apparently produced and continues to produce extravagant examples of cultural saints. In these regions, national cultural cults have flourished even amidst seemingly unfavorable circumstances: witness the veneration of Taras Shevchenko despite the lack of national intelligentsia and codified language in Ukraine. While it is unfair to expect absolute comprehensiveness, it might have been instructive to include chapters on the Hungarian Sándor Petőfi and the Czech Karel Mácha. Admittedly, both are mentioned here and there in the volume as emblematic examples of the East-Central European worship of national poets. Although addressing directly their cultural sanctification would have predictably resulted in similar findings, it also could have opened up new avenues of inquiry. One of those could be devoted to the contested ethnic belonging of cultural saints. For instance, Petőfi managed to fashion himself as the Hungarian national poet (and the embodiment of everything regarded as Hungarian) with a

Slovak background. Moreover, reminding us of Petőfi's prominence in the *tabula rasa* craze in Hungary in the 1850s would have strengthened the transcendental dimension connecting some cultural saints, as testified by the unauthorized exorcisms practiced by the Catalan poet Jacint Verdaguer or the beyond-the-grave telepathic communication between Jónas Hallgrímsson and his late worshippers.

Two of the contributors had already fed into the theoretical background of the previous volume. Harald Hendrix's survey of the cultic veneration of Dante and Petrarch demonstrates that the obsession with the cultural saints' bodily remains (and the irresistible temptation to open their graves and investigate their bones) prefigured similar passions in 19th-century nationalist cults, along with the erection of tombs as destinations of pilgrimage and / or literary tourism. In exploring the interplay of secular and religious elements in "mobilizing the masses for the cause of nation" (26), Joep Leerssen's essay, written in the best tradition of the history of ideas, draws an imposing arc from Rousseau's ideas on civic religion underpinning the secular state, to Carlyle's worship of visionary and charismatic heroes (including poets) and the Durkheimian sociology of rites and liturgy stabilizing political order. Leerssen's insights opening the volume neatly contrast with Jernej Habjan's closing chapter, an intriguing coda which revisits the chiasmic conceptual and tropological relations on which much of the book relies. Approaching the "transition from the culture of saints to the saints of culture" as part of the Weberian "disenchantment of the world" (331), Habjan views this transformation – along with dichotomies discussed by Benedict Anderson, Bakhtin, and Althusser – as a departure from religion, monologue, and the Church toward nationalism, dialogue, and the School.

As the editors stress in the introduction, as regards the recycling of the procedures of religious canonization in secular cults, one might witness a "surprising degree of unity in virtually all European cultures" (5). Indeed, similar patterns recur throughout the volume and concern the hagiographic rendering of literary biographies (prominently tackled in Alenka Koron's essay on Prešeren); the endless vicissitudes of the corpse, which suggest "a posthumous mobility of nationalist heroes" (195), as Andreas Stynen puts it in his discussion of the Flemish movement in light of its two main burial grounds in Ghent and Antwerp (also see the repatriation of Adam Mickiewicz's body from Paris to Cracow in Roman Koropecky's chapter). Other recurring elements have to do with the controversies around where and how to raise the statue, monument

or tomb of the saint (a topic examined in Christian Noack's intriguing essay on Shevchenko), and with the staging of ritual ceremonies and festive commemorations, or reburials, at the occasions of centennial or bicentennial celebrations.

The subject matter of most of the contributions in this volume does align with Dović and Helgason's conceptual matrix. Yet, in seeking to confirm this frame, contributors usually take a markedly critical or ironic distance to their subject matter; perhaps only Bela Tsipuria's essay shows some degree of deference toward its subject, Georgian writer Ilia Chavchavadze, finding his ethos recommendable even today. The easiness with which the overall framework can be confirmed through individual cases suggests that Dović and Helgason have captured an all-pervasive pattern in romantic nation-building and modern cultural self-awareness. The fact that roughly identical patterns are smoothly transferred between remote cultures might signal that the urge to imitate practices that have successfully been implemented elsewhere is embedded in the pattern itself. On the one hand, this allows for the reorganization of nationally relevant traditions in comparative perspectives. On the other, it conveys a sense of monotony to the volume. However, in spite of occasional derivativeness or repetitiveness in the arguments, the culture-specific particularities and the local twists to the editors' foundational model keep the individual case studies intriguing. Each cultural saint constitutes a borderline case to the overall frame. For example, in David Fishelov's chapter, it is not Christian sainthood but the figure of the Hebrew prophet that lends cultural authority to Hayim Nahman Bialik and his canonical position as the Jewish national poet. In Andrei Terian's discussion of how Eminescu has been portrayed, with the help of "junk science" and conspiracy theory, as a precursor of the theory of relativity, it is the "lateral canonization" (296), i.e. a consecration of writers in fields other than literature, that stands out.

Thus, the most memorable moments in the volume are those when Dović and Helgason's model itself is being contested. Ironically, the thesis of the transformation of religious adoration into secular nationalist cult is both reaffirmed and subverted by those instances for which cultural sanctification is followed by proper religious canonization: Chavchavadze has been the saint of the Georgian Orthodox Church since 1987; the Montenegrin national poet Petar II Petrović Njegoš, as discussed in Bojan Baskar's contribution, received religious consecration in 2015. Cultural canonization prompted the



eventual religious beatification of two architects, the Catalan Antoni Gaudí and the Slovenian Jože Plečnik. Luka Vidmar provides an interesting comparative analysis of these figures.

The cases in which canonization takes place at the crossroads of rival national narratives both confirm and upend the cultural sainthood matrix. This is evidenced in the consecutive canonizations of Njegoš as a Serbian, a Yugoslav and a Montenegrin national poet, and of the medieval Icelandic writer Snorri Sturluson in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. The Catalan Jacint Verdaguer was appropriated by both anarchists and Spanish nationalists, as the joint paper by Magí Sunyer and Jaume Subirana shows. As he focuses on Snorri Sturluson's creative output and historical and mythological work in transmitting ancient knowledge as a chronicler, Simon Halink argues that "Snorri transcends the category of cultural sainthood" (237–38) because the heritage of medieval authors – such as Dante, Petrarch, and Chaucer, all active in a *pre*-national age – is more easily mobilized for *supra*-national causes. Thus, Snorri could become the "symbol of national specificity in several countries, and of supra-national, Nordic unity at the same time" (235).

Andraž Jež's chapter deals with the lack of an undisputed cultural sainthood in the Illyrian movement, while keeping an eye on the Slovenian-Croatian poet Stanko Vraz. This is perhaps the most ambitious piece of the volume, for it tackles the very center-periphery dynamic that underpins the main model. Jež makes the observation that as far as "[a] cultural saint represents the attitude of the Romantic genius in a periphery; that is, where the Romantic genius could not develop as a social phenomenon" (125), the very idea of a "'Romantic genius from a peripheral culture'" is "a theoretically productive *contradictio in adiecto*" (132). For Jež, this explains that in East-Central Europe, a region overdetermined by pre-modern social structures, romanticism gave rise to cultural forms lacking in excessive individualism and dissent. From this perspective, cultural saints, who were usually active before the development of a proper public sphere, were "exceptional for their environment" (143). When their legacies were coopted by the local liberal *and* nationalist bourgeoisie after 1848, these "outstanding figure[s] with [...] exceptional attitude[s]" (148) came to both represent and dissolve the nation's unity. This phenomenon resonates with Roman Koropeckyj's argument that Miczkiewicz acquired a charismatic role in casting modern Polish national identity, while his romanticism was simultaneously "tamed."

Drawing on similar approaches to contemporary pop icons (see Hamner's article on "Cultural Saints"), on recent literary scholarship devoted to "national poets" (e.g. Neubauer, Nemoianu, Juvan), and on cultural memory studies examining the "centenary fever" (e.g. Leerssen and Rigney), *Great Immortality* contributes in meaningful and significant ways to the new surge of nationalism studies. The latter are in great part fueled by the magisterial comparative projects *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe* and the online "Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms" developed by the University of Amsterdam.

As we have all witnessed in recent times and in various places of the world, nationalism has returned with a vengeance. In many of the national cultures addressed in this book, the political class has reinvigorated the monument business, either by recycling the cults of the very same cultural saints or by fashioning new, more modern ones. It is consoling to see that Brill's book series "National Cultivation of Culture," in which Helgason and Dović's excellent volume appears, keeps on producing such fine scholarship to investigate these complex matters further.

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**Wieslaw Krajka, ed. *Some Intertextual Chords of Joseph Conrad's Literary Art*. Lublin: Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press / New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. Pp. 272. ISBN: 9788322791868.**

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Though formulated with a slight Eurocentric tone, René Wellek and Austin Warren's insights into the comparative and relative nature of all literatures – proposed in their defining work *Theory of Literature* – have by no means lost contemporary relevance:

Universal and national literatures implicate each other. A pervading European convention is modified in each country: there are also centres of radiation in the individual countries, and eccentric and individually great figures who set off one national tradition from the other. To be able to describe the exact share of the one and the other would amount to knowing much that is worth knowing in the whole of literary history (Wellek and Warren 53).

Such a stance still is pertinent today in the authors' emphasis on the necessarily symbiotic connection between individual work and collective literary history, an internationalism that always requires a comparative mode of thought operating beyond national and textual limitations. A newer generation of comparatists would stretch the matter even further and forsake conventional spatial-temporal methods, foregrounding literary analyses based on philosophical depth and intellectual solidarity, as outlined in Claudio Guillén's remark:

Comparatists, and other colleagues in this area, indeed live and think history. But precisely for this reason they come up against the limits of historical or historicist knowledge, and perhaps also against the limits of those themes

that seemed to us potentially ‘universal,’ indivisible, ones. A new dialogue begins, no longer between locality and world, but between evolution and continuity (Guillén 18).

Thanks perhaps in part to the rise of a pragmatic turn that protracts an incongruous tussle between universalism and realism, the discipline of comparative literature now embraces diverse and vibrant interpretations addressing texts across genres, histories, and methods. It is in such spirit that *Some Intertextual Chords of Joseph Conrad’s Literary Art* demonstrates a virtuosity and flexibility in the practice of literary comparison, while (re)establishing the importance of Joseph Conrad’s works. The nine articles collected in these conference proceedings exhibit some of the finest Conrad scholarship, combined with genealogical and intertextual studies. This careful combination underscores the relevance of Conrad in our contemporary world. The volume offers curious and innovative exegeses of not only such classical works as *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo*, *Lord Jim*, and *Under Western Eyes*, but also of some lesser-known pieces like “The Inn of the Two Witches,” “The Black Mate,” and “The Return.” Through detailed examinations of the narrative structures and rhetorical devices used by Conrad, we come to a deeper awareness of his antagonism towards European colonialism, his interests in the problematics of madness and witchcraft explored in Gothic writings, as well as his critical attitude toward Darwinism and utilitarianism. Collectively, these essays shed some new light upon the already substantial body of Conrad scholarship while revitalizing the comparative spirit put forth by Wellek and Guillén.

Peter Vernon’s opening essay underlines Conrad’s creative use of strangeness in *Under Western Eyes* from the perspectives of character construction, fictionality, and intertextual references within and beyond Conrad’s oeuvre. Vernon contends there exists a constant conflict between Conrad’s style, characterized by polysemy, and the realist or positivist line of thought that makes the readers believe in the factuality of the narrative. In *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad develops a masterful “strangeness” that blurs and alters our mental depiction of the Russian character – a stylistic tactic that invites multifarious interpretations: “The paradox of this writing is that Conrad revels in polysemy but the more language creates ambiguity, the less it can function as a language of facts. Conrad finds words intractable, problematic, and inadequate for his purposes, whilst being forced to use them in the only medium he has available—exemplary of much modernist writing” (22). Vernon thus

invites us to evaluate the novel not simply with respect to its intricate plot structure, but also in terms of the linguistic experimentation that generates multiple, interlacing narrative voices within the text.

The second essay examines the *katabasis* storytelling tradition Conrad seems to have followed in *Heart of Darkness*, placing it in conversation with the journey narratives of Dante, Ovid, and Virgil. The protagonists of those works, Megha Agarwal argues, have all descended to the nefarious underworld and eventually ascended back to the world of the living. Unlike the classical and medieval authors, Conrad intends to keep Marlow at a distance from what he observes in the Congo, which entails an implicit act of redemption of the character. This character's ascetic ideal constitutes the notion of the "heart" alluded to by Conrad and consequently may serve as a new model for classical literary criticism. Still, questions remain about whether the directions of the journeys in the compared works can be regarded as sufficiently homogeneous. Indeed, Marlow's descent is only metaphorical.

The next essay uncovers the supernatural elements of Conrad's novella "The Inn of the Two Witches" that is indebted to and simultaneously complicates the Gothic tradition. Agata Łukasiewicz carefully elucidates the portrayal of the witch figure in this work. She shows how – in an echo of Vernon's argument – Conrad relies on an ambiguous style blending the rational and the irrational; the real and the fictional. Particularly interesting is the author's formulation of a Conradian notion of the supernatural: "The supernatural phenomena present in Conrad's text evoke extreme fear, repugnance, undermine human confidence, and at the same time seem to be taken from an out-there space and have some unnatural powers at their disposal" (74–75). However, as Łukasiewicz further indicates, Conrad then departs from the Gothic convention by grounding the source of the supernatural within the natural and the ordinary: "[...] all the supernatural elements are explained in a rational way, leaving the reader with the impression that the writer's only intention was to defamiliarize something that is perceived as usual or familiar" (75). Such a rather provocative account helps us understand Conrad's unique vision. It also offers useful theoretical insights for the study of horror and fantasy narratives.

As many contributors have pointed out, a certain dynamic and conflictual state serves as the foundation of Conrad's fictional worlds, as the author rejects any theory aiming to offer universal and permanent truths. Focusing on the character of Captain Johns in "The Black Mate,"

Jacek Mydla argues that Conrad feels an intense distaste for doctrine, i.e. a fixed set of discourses confining the character. The captain perfectly embodies this attitude, being portrayed as “a caricature in which somehow the doctrines of social Darwinism, utilitarianism, and spiritualism unite. This in itself suffices to render this figure absurd [...]” (98).

Clearly, Conrad endorses a dynamic perception and understanding of the world as a flow of matter and spirit. Such a vision may have, as many authors in this volume would suggest, resulted from Conrad’s adventurous journeys to Africa. Valerie Kennedy’s contribution is a case in point. She seeks to unveil the layered meanings of light and darkness as well as map and mapping in *Heart of Darkness*. Here she contends they do not merely function as figurative devices, but as symbolic references to the public perceptions of Africa through European eyes. In contrast, Graham Greene’s apt use of comparable imageries in *Journey Without Maps* reveals the author’s personal memories. Thus, Kennedy concludes: “Conrad’s critique is more generalized [...] although he does exempt British imperialism from the worst of the colonial atrocities while at the same time criticizing the destructive effects of its imperial trade [...]. Greene’s text is far more personal than Conrad’s” (125).

The problematic of Conrad’s ambiguous attitude towards colonialism is further picked up in Wojciech Kozak’s article entitled “Conrad’s Africa Revisited: The Case of Muriel Spark.” In it, the scholar compares the African travel journals of Conrad and Spark in an attempt to highlight some common ground in their literary and political affiliations. Kozak firmly underlines Conrad’s reserved critique towards British imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*, as he states: “In fact—provided that one looks at Marlow as Conrad in disguise, of course—many comments in ‘Heart of Darkness’ imply that its author has not unquestioningly rejected the ideology of his times” (151). Similarly, the working-class Muriel Spark voices unconvincing discontent with the colonizing enterprise, as she sounds only mildly progressive and revolutionary. However, Subhadeep Ray does not share Kennedy’s and Kozak’s critical stance. Drawing on the avant-garde and post-colonial artworks of such Bengali artists as Manik Bandyopadhyay and Ramkinkar Baji, Ray remarks that the anxieties and reservations manifest in Conrad’s writings “are in many ways an anticipation—in a global context—of the rise of totalitarianism, corruption, militarism, xenophobia, terrorism, fundamentalism and communal violence since the second half of the twentieth century” (197).



The last two essays, authored by Katarzyna Sokołowska and Kaoru Yamamoto, endeavor to situate Conrad's work within the disciplines of literature, plastic arts, and philosophy from a comparative perspective. Sokołowska reads Conrad's short story "The Return" as a counterpoint to the classical Platonic principle that privileges idea over appearance as well as the intellectual over the visual: "In 'The Return' Conrad gives voice to this uncertainty about conceptualizing the visual as the purely empirical and as an unquestionable source of knowledge, but also wonders whether it is possible to pierce through the appearances and to reach truth conceived of as the essence abstracted from the flow of impressions" (206). Yamamoto examines Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte's visual adaptation of Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly*. He contends that the floating and anachronistic style of Magritte's paintings questions the validity of Derrida's famous thesis according to which our desire for an archive is always directed toward an authentic origin.

Although each article in this collection takes a rather unique angle on the material studied, one can only regret the presence of some overlapping and sometimes conflicting arguments. However, taken together, the nine essays gathered here offer a substantial contribution to Conrad scholarship. Perhaps more importantly, they celebrate the thriving spirit of comparative literature.

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**Frédéric Regard et Anne Tomiche, dir. *Genre et Signature*. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2018.  
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Michel Foucault's "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" (1969) did exactly what a text of theory should do: it did not answer its title question, but displaced the topic. Instead of closing the circuit of question and answer, displacement causes the question to be asked again and differently. As readers will know, Foucault responded by sketching out an "author-function," variable from time to time and place to place, that both evacuates authorship and explains it.

As if to answer a certain historiography that remarks bitterly that the "death of the author" came just in time to cast a pall over the rise to canonical status of female and minority authors, this collection demonstrates that the questioning of authorship produced, not a negation, but a mutation and proliferation of the question of the author. Historical reflection, benefiting from Foucault's theoretical displacement, can now return to the scene of previous dramas of authorship, canonicity and signature to discover in them similar displacements of authorship.

"Signature," both a moment and an artifact, designates the performative aspect of authorship: it is the inscriptive event that links a work with a person. But what kind of person? When social and legal impediments stand in the way of an effective signature, as has long been the case for women writers, we see with unparalleled clarity how the mechanisms are supposed to work, what the conditions and qualifications are. Several chapters of this book explore the feints and expedients whereby women authors could, according to their several necessities, retain and disavow their literary creations.

“By a Lady”; “By the Author of *Sense and Sensibility*”; “By a Young Lady”: such dodges, gendered and generic, enabled title-pages to conceal rather than, dangerously, to reveal authorship, but Anne Rouhette’s chapter, “*By a Lady*: une signature genrée?” (189–204) indicates that the authorial persona of the unnamed “Lady” did journeyman work for a number of men as well. Hence “a certain irony in Austen’s choice [of title-page signature]: by saying I am a lady, I will trigger doubts as to my femininity although I am indeed a woman” (203; translation mine).

Another famous signature, the “Edited by Currer Bell” that appears on the title page of *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, is shown by Catherine Lanone to have emerged from a decades-long pursuit of pseudonymous and imaginary identities among the Reverend Patrick Brontë’s children, an ebullition of concealed reference that pours over into the fictions too, as in the episode of *Wuthering Heights* where Lockwood, the late-come chronicler, finds Catherine’s fate inscribed in multiple versions of her name traced with a finger on the dust of a windowsill: “a glare of white letters started from the dark, as vivid as spectres—the air swarmed with Catherines.” Whether within the novel or on its outside cover, signatures are embattled, multi-layered, tale-telling (Catherine Lanone, “La signature à la dérobée,” 81–97).

Although it is known that Harriet Taylor participated integrally in the creation of the works attributed to John Stuart Mill, her name appears on none of the title pages and was even removed from the dedication of *The Principles of Political Economy*. One might think that if any woman in Victorian Britain enjoyed the conditions for recognition as an independent thinker and writer, it would be she; but as Françoise Orazi shows (“Pourquoi Harriet Taylor ne signe-t-elle pas?” 205–14), outright authorial signature was a step beyond what she could permit herself, even in death.

Avoidance of the signature is another mode of authorship. The collective *des femmes* used, for a time, first names only, as a gesture of refusal of the disempowering possibilities (patronym; “maiden name”; married name) offered women by the civil administration (Audrey Lasserre, “Une révolution de l’autorité et de l’auctorialité: la signature au sein du Mouvement de libération des femmes,” 233–46). Claude Cahun’s adoption of a name that on the one hand betrays no gender difference (Claude), on the other inscribes the author in a different branch of her family (the Cahuns, in preference to the Schwobs), is of a piece with her

efforts to create a persona apt to sign the works that she published. “We might consider that ‘Claude Cahun’ grows out of a deadly masquerade and personifies a kind of inner tragedy. Yet a certain jubilation is visible in the photomontages and self-portraits where Cahun stages herself, as if she gave herself the power to escape definition and to add, progressively, to her possibilities” (Alexandra Bourse, “Claude Cahun, un auteur?” 99–111). And as if to follow up on this “jubilation,” Andrea Oberhuber opens up the self-cancelling logic sometimes predominant in Cahun to a plurality of subjects. Cahun’s multiply pseudonymous writing, like her collaborations with a visual artist, “maintains ambiguity concerning a body of work that seeks to erase the narrow boundaries defining forms of artistic expression, genders, and literary genres” (“Noms de plume et de guerre: stratégies auctoriales dans la démarche collaborative de Claude Cahun et (Marcel) Moore,” 113–28).

In such company, the French Grand Siècle could hardly appear as the periwigged revival of classical order. Pierre Zoberman and Myriam Dufour-Maître demonstrate how in the age of salons and mixed manuscript and print culture, it was possible for women to write but not always possible for them to be recognized as writers. In one rendering of the results, “fictive women take the place of real women to reinscribe a masculine(ist) discourse together with fictive men” (Zoberman, “Affirmation, négociation, effacement / appropriation du féminin: signatures du / des genres au début de l’époque moderne,” 159–72). In the other, authorship resides in “the ethical invention of Madeleine de Scudéry,” namely an “anonymity bearing the mark of the feminine” which leaves twenty-first century scholars, seeking to assign provenance to works collectively produced, at a loss (Dufour-Maître, “Genres, signatures et attributions: le cas de Madeleine de Scudéry,” 173–88). Curiously, the resulting anonymity within plural authorship echoes certain ambiguities in the career of Assia Djébar, as analyzed by Chloé Chaudet (“Signature et auctorialité voilée chez Assia Djébar,” 145–55).

The remaining essays in the volume take up various moments, modes and problems in the history of gendered authorship. Some deal directly with the theory of authorship, others explore historical cases, and yet others respond to present-day polemics. The editors have carefully recruited and thoughtfully organized sixteen contributions to the never concluded wrangling between empirical person and authorial signature. This comparatist regrets only that the horizon of the investigation is

limited to France, England, Catalonia, Algeria, and New Zealand, and could not include, say, China and Japan, where the crossings of gender and literature have resulted in somewhat different options. As we see, it matters a great deal “who speaks,” but it is not as if this “who” could be answered with a pointing finger or a name.

**Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu and Takayuki  
Yokota-Murakami, eds. *Policing Literary  
Theory*. Leiden: Brill / Rodopi, 2018. Pp. 218.  
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With its ambiguous title, *Policing Literary Theory*, the collection of essays edited by Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu and Takayuki Yokota-Murakami gestures toward a double object of study. On the one hand, it references institutional efforts, notably at the hands of state authorities, to control cultural theory. On the other, it scrutinizes the capacity of cultural theory itself to act as a disciplining agent over other branches of literary studies. Beyond the term “policing,” the volume defines its field of investigation as “surveillance,” even “spying” – unappetizing practices carried out both within cultural theory and without. Inevitably, the names of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze loom large in this collection. This is indeed the case in Part I, which focuses on theoretical issues. Part II and III, by comparison, investigate how the interfacing of policing and literature expresses itself in the framework of academia and primary literature. These two latter sections explore the history of specific academic institutions, as well as specific literary authors and genres. The experience of central and eastern European Soviet authoritarianism is prominently referenced there. The volume also touches upon the cultural politics of East Asian totalitarianism, notably in North Korea and wartime Japan.

The “Editors’ Introduction” lays out some of the basic concepts through which the nexus of policing and cultural theory may be approached. This includes Michel Foucault’s distinction between the *Ancien Régime* spectacle of punishment and the Industrial Revolution’s regime of surveillance, as well as Gilles Deleuze’s dichotomy of

disciplinary societies versus less overtly coercive “societies of control” (5). On this basis, the editors underscore the difficulty in determining how cultural practices can be both constrained by outside authorities while deploying their own “counter-policing” (8). The latter issue stands at the center of the first two essays – Vladimir Biti’s “After Theory: Politics against the Police?” and Reingard Nethersole’s “Theory Policing Reading or the Critic as Cop.” The two authors take stock of the “irrevocable passing” of “what one might call ‘high theory’” – the academic practice whose policing effects are, they contend, beyond dispute (16). Yet, neither of them is satisfied with the severance of literary studies from reflexive practice altogether. Biti argues that the less dogmatic figures of high theory – Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt – must still be engaged with in order to spare critics from the emergence of post-theoretical literal studies based on naïve, pre-theoretical premises. Nethersole finds in Edward Said’s *The World, the Text, and the Critic* a template for a critical practice eschewing the “absurdist wave of ‘deconstruction’” (37) while maintaining the capacity to “valoriz[e] all texts” as carriers of “(often conflicting and contentious) meanings and resonance” (41–42). One discerns a similarly cautious line of thought in the third essay of Part I, Mihăilescu’s “Le cercle carré: On Spying and Reading,” which develops virtuoso reflections on spying in contemporary politics and culture. The “modern culture of suspicion,” Mihăilescu claims, demonetizes knowledge, yet paradoxically asserts the clear-sightedness of its spying gaze (52). Against this logical impasse, Mihăilescu praises Charles Sanders Peirce’s process of “abduction” (47). Under this term, Peirce designated a thought process eluding the false confidence of deduction and induction, and making it possible to elaborate probable judgments in the absence of absolute certainty. Abduction, Mihăilescu argues, underlies John Le Carré’s subtle spy fiction. It might also serve as paradigm for critical modes of reading.

Several essays of Part II analyze how academic actors negotiated the policing strategies of their totalitarian environment, sometimes acquiring a status of partial autonomy. Marko Juvan’s “The Charisma of Theory” and Kyohei Norimatsu’s “Within or beyond Policing Norms: Yuri Lotman’s Theory of Theatricality” develop arguments reminiscent of the theories of subversion articulated within late-twentieth-century cultural studies: they suggest that academics in communist regimes – respectively Slovenian literary comparatist Dušan Pirjevec and Soviet semiotician Yuri Lotman – finessed the strictures of government-imposed socialist



realism and Marxist historicism from within the system itself. Juvan indicates that Pirjevec's scholarship evolved "from historical materialism to existentialism" (101). Pirjevec's yearning for autonomy was fostered by his capacity to fashion for himself a charismatic professor's persona, whose model Juvan locates in the writings of Max Weber. Norimatsu's discussion of Yuri Lotman points out that the Soviet theoretician was not officially a dissident: he published his scholarship through Soviet academic channels. Yet, he secured for himself a position of "[n]egative freedom" (113) with regard to official constraints. The very choice of his discipline helped him succeed in this endeavor: the late-1950s post-Stalinian political thaw rendered possible the elaboration of a technically focused semiotics distinct from Marxist Leninism. More subversively, Lotman's analyses of the theatricality of aristocratic life under the Russian imperial regime read as a covert critique of the pieties of Soviet decorum. Similarly, Péter Hajdu, in "The Oppressive and the Subversive Sides of Theoretical Discourse," argues that the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences adopted a strategy of covert resistance during the Cold War. Meant to enforce Marxist orthodoxy in the humanities, the Institute maintained a stance of academic neutrality, insolently revealing that there were "various competing trends" within Marxism itself (143), and rendering accounts of western literary theoretical paradigms. In this fashion, Hajdu contends, "even descriptive literary theory became subversive in the context of dictatorship" (143). Less optimistically, Sowon S. Park's "Dear Leader! Big Brother!: On Transparency and Emotional Policing" reminds us that there are political contexts defeating subversion. Her essay focuses on the memoirs of North Korean defector Shin Dong-hyuk, who was born in a "total control" camp, and was later interned in a concentration camp again (84). Park uses this harrowing corpus to analyze North Korean strategies of "emotional policing" (77). She points out that "[u]nsurprisingly, there isn't a great deal of the 'polyphonic' or the 'dialogic' in North Korean literature" (82).

Despite their diversity, the essays of Part III are bound by a common thread: they highlight how literary narratives of policing and spying bring out the ultimate inability of discourses of authority to fashion subservient subjects. Except for the novel analyzed by Yvonne Howell, Vladimir Dudintsev's *White Robes*, none of the narratives surveyed in Part III chart a clear epistemological pathway from ignorance toward discovery. Neither do they present subjects that might be entirely compliant, innocent, or

consistent. Norio Sakanaka's "Roman Nikolayevich Kim and the Strange Plots of His Mystery Novellas" draws our attention to the metafictional thrillers of a Soviet writer who has enjoyed only limited attention in the West. Kim's fictions, Sakanaka indicates, do not condescend to stage the epistemological simulacrum of the revelation of hidden truths behind coded messages. They thereby demystify both the logic of mystery narratives and of identity construction. John Zilcosky's "Kafka, Snowden, and the Surveillance State" refreshingly revisits such classics as *The Trial* and *The Castle*, arguing that they constitute only awkward paradigms for post-WWII fantasies of nightmarish police states. Kafka's Josef K is indeed no blameless subject, nor are the authorities he is wrestling with effective and all knowing. Still, Kafka's depiction of the use of slander as a power strategy, Zilcosky argues, is relevant to contemporary surveillance cases such as the Edward Snowden whistleblower affair. Takayuki Yokota-Murakami's "In Lieu of a Conclusion: Policing as a Form of Epistemology – Three Narratives of the Japanese Empire" demonstrates that spy narratives in a colonial context interestingly complicate the construction of identity spelled out by poststructuralist theory. The world of spies and double agents surveyed by Yokota-Murakami generates subjects too complex to fully lend themselves to Louis Althusser's scenario of subjectification: multi-layered from the start, they fit awkwardly in any neat "process of interpellation" (197). Yvonne Howell's "The Genetics of Morality: Policing Science in Dudintsev's *White Robes*" is, as I pointed out above, less sanguine about the capacity of surveillance narratives to undercut subjectification. Dudintsev's late 1950s novel, Howell contends, uses its spying plot to denounce the censorship to which Soviet geneticists were subjected. However, as Dudintsev exposes Soviet authoritarianism, his novel reverts to the hero worship characterizing Soviet socialist realism. Ironically, the novel enjoyed considerable success during the 1980s perestroika period.

Overall, the essays featured in *Policing Literary Theory* outshine the volume's framing argument. The collection indeed falls short of demonstrating its premises. In particular, it does not properly define its main topic – theory itself. The latter remains a moving target, designating in turn Soviet socialist realism, the New Criticism, or, predictably, French-derived poststructuralism. At one point, Juvan usefully sketches out the genealogy of the use of "theory" in poststructuralism: he cites Peter Osborne's tantalizing statement that Louis Althusser, the presumed initiator of high theory, mentioned the word "famously briefly" (98).

Still, the lack of definitional clarity in this matter nudges *Policing Literary Theory* toward the unfocused stridency of anti-poststructuralist jeremiads. Likewise, the volume presents only few instances of its most provocative claim – that literary theory restrains the academic study of literature. The book does highlight the repressiveness of socialist realism. Yet only Péter Hajdu demonstrates in detail how a non-Soviet theoretical current – the Anglo-American New Criticism – constrained reading possibilities: Hajdu lists the reading choices the New Critics regarded as “fallacies” (137). One wishes the editors had showed how later stages of literary theory carried out the same work of exclusion. As is, *Policing Literary Studies* features illuminating essays on original topics, yet it does not quite fulfil the agenda sketched out in its title and introduction.



**Lorna Fitzsimmons and Charles McKnight,  
eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Faust in Music*.  
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 648.  
ISBN: 9780199935185.**

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This engrossing collection of twenty-five essays by musicologists is obviously intended primarily for other musicologists. But reading it as a literary critic with a keen interest in classical music and a specialist in British Romanticism, I found the book fascinating and informative. The essays contain generous musical examples illustrating the author's technical analyses, but are equally rich in historical, cultural, and biographical materials. The volume demonstrates western composers' enduring fascination – indeed obsession – with the Faust myth, the man who summons the devil in order to obtain his desires.

Goethe's *Faust Part I* (1829) is subtitled "A Tragedy"; the implicitly comic *Part II* was published posthumously in 1831. They are Goethe's magnum opus and often considered the greatest works in German literature. Radically inconsistent in tone and theme, the two parts offer a kind of cultural Rorschach blot. The composers inspired to interpret *Faust* through music invented a remarkable range of new genres and techniques. The *Oxford Handbook* has three parts: "Symphonic, Choral, Chamber, and Solo Faust Works"; "Faust in Opera"; and "Faust in Ballet and Musical Theater."

Faust's first appearance in something approaching high culture was in English, Christopher Marlowe's *Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (1592?), but Marlowe's sources were English translations of a German folk tale, often performed by puppets. In these early versions, Faust is unambiguously punished for his overreaching; at

the end Mephistopheles drags him off to hell. But Goethe's presentation of his protagonist is far more complex. This is no simple tale of crime and punishment, a warning against invoking the supernatural. In Part I the tragedy is principally Gretchen's, the naive village maiden Faust seduces and abandons to bear an illegitimate child that in despair she murders. This woman doomed by patriarchy is transposed, at the end of Part II, into "*Das Ewig-Weibliche*," the eternal female principle that draws mankind towards salvation by means of his eager striving into the unknown.

Many nineteenth-century composers responded to Goethe much as, according to Harold Bloom, English poets of the same period confronted Milton. They needed to "re-compose" this looming figure. This book shows how Schubert, Berlioz, Schumann, Wagner, Liszt, and Mahler responded to such anxiety. Marjorie Hirsch argues that in setting Gretchen's two lyrics (such as "*Meine Ruh ist hin*" and "*Es war ein König in Thule*") Schubert evolved a means of "musical remembering" in his songs; the first became "*Gretchen am Spinnrade*," surely one of his masterpieces. Berlioz composed two works inspired by *Faust*. The first he called *Huit scènes de Faust* – he probably read Goethe in Nerval's French translation. Julian Rushton speculates that Berlioz was attracted to the work because of its Gothic possibilities: "Berlioz could be excited by a world in which a devil could appear in person" (67). These settings of Goethe's lyrics in fact adumbrate his interest in representing such grotesqueries. *Symphonie fantastique* was completed only a year later. Meyerbeer's popular *Robert le diable* had already pre-empted the character of an operatic devil. So Berlioz found another way to tell this story in music, *La damnation de Faust*, a "concert opera" or "dramatic cantata" that defies generic norms. Laura Tunbridge in "Schumann's Struggle with Goethe's *Faust*" notes that the composer "felt a peculiar affinity with the figure of Faust, his nickname as a schoolboy" (86). He wrote a long and complex *Faustszenen* which he may or may not have intended for performance (90). Wagner also felt Goethe as an ambivalent presence, according to Thomas S. Grey. Cosima records Richard's dreams about the poet. Faust's roots in German folklore obviously appealed to Wagner. Yet he was also sceptical of Goethe's philosophical implications; apparently he disagreed with his muse Mathilde Wesendonck over the question of Faust's failure to seek "his redemption in the conditional, sacrificial love of a chosen female ideal" (131). Grey suggests that most of Wagner's operas respond to and revise Goethe's declaration of the power of the *Ewig-Weibliche*. Liszt's

career illustrates, according to Jonathan Kregor, his “Faust Complexes.” His virtuosity, like Paganini’s, led audiences to suspect that he was “a magician or wizard—a *maleficus* whose technical prowess, sexualized energy, and physical violence broke all the bounds of decorum” (147). (Liszt was, in William Blake’s words, “a true poet and of the devil’s party without knowing it” [Blake xvii].) James L. Zychowicz discusses “Mahler’s Eighth and the Faust Symphonic Tradition,” showing how a response to *Faust* impelled dramatic formal invention in this daunting traditional genre. In “Adrian Leverkühn and Alfred Schnittke” Charles McKnight untangles Schnittke’s reading of *Faust* through Thomas Mann’s imaginary music for his fictional composer in his novel *Doktor Faustus* (1947). Mann was inspired by his contemporary, Schoenberg, who was offended by this literary re-composition of his music.

By far the most familiar example of “Faust in Music” is Gounod’s opera (1859), long beloved by generations of listeners. (As Vincent Giraud notes in his essay, a late nineteenth-century critic called New York’s Metropolitan the *Faustspielhaus*.) This essay, “The Genesis, Transformations, Sources, and Style of Gounod’s *Faust*,” records the opera’s surprisingly complex evolution from an *opéra comique* (with spoken dialogue) to an increasingly conventional grand opera providing what we still treasure: lovely melodies, Gretchen’s thrilling “Jewel Song,” the conventional pathos of a female victim, and an uplifting final chorus. (In fact, this opera introduced the Faust theme to Spanish composers such as Pujol, Sarasate, and Pedrell Sabaté, as Rolf Bäcker shows in Chapter 7, “Gounodian Fausts.”) But Gounod’s *succès fou* was not the first highly successful opera based on Goethe. This was Louis Spohr’s (1818). According to Clive McClelland, he introduced new elements that are not normally associated with the Faust legend. He also developed the use of musical motifs related to specific ideas and emotions, adumbrating Wagner’s technique, and perhaps most importantly, composed “vivid music [...] for scenes involving magic, incantation and damnation” (243). It thus constitutes a bridge between *The Magic Flute* and Weber’s quintessentially German Romantic opera, *Der Freischütz*.

Being a drama, Goethe’s poem would most easily be imagined as an opera. Indeed, this second part of the collection contains essays on a range of operas that not only give the devil his due (e.g. Boito’s *Mefistofele*, Busoni’s *Doktor Faustus*), but also surveys the evolution of operatic styles from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Not only did Goethe’s text evoke contradictory responses; the evolution of art music itself ventured

into the unknown and suffered the consequences, both good and bad in a most Faustian manner. By early in the twentieth century, the Faust legend had clearly become a cultural archetype, detached from medieval Germany and subject to endless reinterpretations. After the Second World War, the Faust myth was, for political reasons, increasingly troubling and in need of revision. The story's implicit Germanic nationalism that Wagner had relished was now decidedly problematic for composers such as Hans Eisler in the German Democratic Republic (Chapter 9). W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman's libretto for Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (1951) invoked the Faustian implications of Hogarth's series of etchings that portray a young man's corruption in eighteenth-century London. Maureen A. Carr argues that both the tale, and the task of setting an English text fuelled Stravinsky's musical imagination" (338). The Mephistopheles figure is named "Nick Shadow," suggesting that Faust's antagonist represents what Jung would call those dark, forbidden aspects of the conscious self, bursting with dangerous and yet potentially creative energies.

Jürgen Schaarwächter's essay, "Havergal Brian's Gothic Opera *Faust*" even more explicitly delineates the psychoanalytic dimensions of a composer's inspiration. Brian described his "extraordinary and vivid dream" about walking through a medieval village which he thought to be Nuremberg, eventually awakening to find himself in his bedroom at Hartshill, Stoke-on-Trent (362). He liked to work at night, by the light of a green-shaded lamp: "If in those midnight hours I sometimes saw Frederick the Great, a shrunken figure at the end of a long life of fighting, John Sebastian Bach, Goethe, Berlioz, sitting in an armchair in the darkness by the fire, I attached no importance to the phenomenon" (365). He went on to write not only a "Gothic Symphony," but a musical setting of the first part of Goethe's *Faust*. Brian's disclosure of his unconscious inspiration inevitably recalls that of Horace Walpole's account of how a dream inspired him to write the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

Three of the last four operas discussed are radically experimental, postmodern ruptures with musical and narrative traditions. These are discussed in André Brégère's "The Serial Concept in Pousseur's *Votre Faust* [(1968)]," Martin Flašar's "Reflections of the Contemporary Schizophrenia in Josef Berg's Two Versions of *Johanes doktor Faust* [(1965–70)]," and Jacques Amblard's "Pascal Dusapin's New Lyrical Style in *Faustus, the Last Night* [(2006)]." The most performed and most



accessible of these last four is John Adams's opera presented in Rebecca Cypess's "History and Faust in *Doctor Atomic*." According to the librettist Peter Sellars, this work was from the beginning conceived as a version of the Faust legend (425). The opera's very title alludes to generations of Doctors Faust. It presents the successful conclusion to J. Robert Oppenheimer and his team's success in building the atom bomb. They summon the unimaginably destructive power inherent in nature. Now infinite evil resides not in the devil but in man's irresistible urge to know and to destroy its enemies. The opera's conclusion leaves the audience plunged in an infernal darkness, the only sound a Japanese woman asking for water, her plea unanswered.

The third, shortest section of the book, "Faust in Ballet and Musical Theater," finds the doctor in unexpected corners of high and popular culture: at the ballet, for instance. In "Faust Goes Dancing," Kristin Rygg begins by citing four ballets based on Goethe that premiered between 1832 and 1848. All of these, according to Rygg, "bear the imprint of early French Romantic ballet" (461). The various ballets disclose "fascinating intertextual webs between the adaptations of Goethe's *Faust* and inventions added by the creators of the ballets"; "their musical interpretations of *Faust* constitute a distinctive sector of Faustian music" (462). David Conway describes Heinrich Heine's frustrated attempt to stage the Faust ballet which he had written, but for "cultural, financial, and managerial" reasons the production never materialized (483). Raymond Knapp's essay on "The American Musical and the Faustian Bargain" discusses the not-so-surprising debt that *Phantom of the Opera* owes to the legend, and its more unexpected relation to *Damn Yankees* or *Little Shop of Horrors*. Elizabeth Wollman in "Faust Rocks the Stage (Not)" points out that there have been only a handful of rock operas on the Faust theme. As she explains, "[i]n the United States, rock's ideology became closely bound with dual Faustian obsessions: the artist who bargains for the devil in exchange for the perfect sound [...] and the artist who trades his 'pure' artistic spirit for fame and money" (524). This inherent contradiction, she argues, creates a tension that inhibits several attempts as *The Golden Screw* (1966), *Soon* (1971), and *Randy Newman's Faust* (1995), none of which achieved commercial success.

This section concludes with "Helen Gifford's Marlovian *Regarding Faustus*." Mark Carroll discusses how this Australian composition of 1983 has chosen to return to the English roots of the Faust tradition in Christopher Marlowe. He argues that this interpretation "lends shape

to the character of Marlowe's Faustus and attenuates the playwright's at times uneasy negotiation of the Protestant morality that underpins the legend" (540). Thus the volume circles back to the first appearance of Faust in legitimate theater. Unfortunately, the space allotted to a single review limits the more careful analysis that each of these essays deserves. The editors of the volume have done splendid work in assembling these informative, authoritative, and readable discussions of this labyrinthine history.

### **Work Cited**

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**Kitty Millet and Dorothy Figueira, eds.**  
***Fault Lines of Modernity: The Fractures and  
Repairs of Religion, Ethics, and Literature.***  
**New York: Bloomsbury, 2019. Pp. viii + 258.**  
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The project undertaken in *Fault Lines of Modernity: The Fractures and Repairs of Religion, Ethics, and Literature* is, by nature of its subject, large, complex, and at times contradictory. It is also fascinating, compelling, and thought provoking. Dorothy Figueira and Kitty Millet have assembled a collection of papers all centered around exploring the relationships between literature, ethics, and religion and drawn from the work of scholars who participated in the 2013 ICLA conference in Paris and a subsequent conference on “Fault Lines of Modernity” held in 2014 in San Francisco. These conferences led to the founding of the ICLA Research Committee on Religions, Ethics, and Literature, and this volume represents the Committee’s first publication. Given the wide range of topics under consideration here in this volume, it is clear that the work of the Committee has been fruitful.

The concept of the “fault line” is utilized to frame the volume’s particular understanding of its subjects: “This collection maps religion as a modern fault line, whose social fissures have split the earth into separate and permanently disconnected sectors, and asks whether or not literature can be reconceived, reimagined, or repurposed as repair in such a world where religion appears to isolate its adherents, disconnecting them from other communities” (1). Millet provides a comprehensive introduction that expands this initial framing, grounding the project in “the philosophical principles that underwrite [the] posited relationships”

between literature, religion, and ethics (1). Millet argues that the West, via Kant and subsequently Hegel, has imagined literature as that which produces space for the transcendental. The senses interact with literature in particular ways, and the transcendental categories thus generated via imagination's mediating operation map a particular set of axes whose vectors describe the possibility and potential necessary to both the religious and the ethical. Thus, as Millet explains, "[i]n this way, literature opens a place for a transcendental, but does this place demand that the transcendental space be occupied by some entity? To some extent, literature produces the coordinates for a transcendental to be housed among mere mortals whether or not that being occupies the space, whether or not that space is filled in by the Divine, whether or not it is ethical to appropriate this position" (14).

This theoretical framing is important because it makes clear the ways in which the pieces in this volume are grounded in a theoretical approach that produces two central themes: the question of literature's utility, and the question of literature's ontology. To one degree or another, each piece here is concerned with what literature does and how that work can be used within a community, or with what literature is and how that identity affects literature's relational mode of being in the world. In this sense, *Fault Lines of Modernity* asks questions that exceed its topical concerns and address the field of literature more broadly, thus increasing its own value and utility in the ongoing discussions of literary studies.

The volume groups the papers into four main sections: 1) the transcendental and transcendence, 2) literature, 3) religion, and 4) ethics. While space does not permit a full engagement with every paper in each section, I will provide a brief overview of each section's content in order to give a better sense of the variety of approaches, views, and concerns developed throughout the volume.

"Part One: The Transcendental and Transcendence" is comprised of three chapters: "Rewriting Grand Narratives as a Supra Temporal Mystical Competition: Illustrations from Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, Goethe, Proust, Mann, and Joyce" by Gerald Gillespie; "'Clearer Awareness of the ... Crisis': Erich Auerbach's Radical Relativism and the 'Wealth of Conflicts' of the Historical Imperative" by Geoffrey Green; and "Secularism and Post-Secularism" by Wład Godzich. Gillespie's work explores the ways that grand narratives within the western tradition serve as connective sacramental tissue that builds culture in bridging past, present, and future through the witness of change. These grand narratives

thus serve as a type of cultural touchstone. While the reading here is invigorating in its comparative ability, Gillespie unfortunately does not address the clear questions of canon and the ethics of the exclusion process that undergird the concept of a grand western (Christian) literary tradition. In contrast to Gillespie's breadth, Green chooses depth in his focus on the work of Eric Auerbach. Green's approach focuses on what Auerbach teaches regarding how to interpret texts in light of the overlapping tensions of modernity, using the work of Ernst Robert Curtius as a foil. Ultimately, Green argues that these overlapping tensions reveal the relationship between religion, literature, and ethics via Auerbach's work. Green provides an inviting way to explore Auerbach beyond *Mimesis*, and clears space for further readings to bring Auerbach in conversation with more contemporary theoretical discussions (e.g., see pages 58–59 and the potential to engage contemporary ecological ethics). Godzich, in turn, examines the relationship between secularism and post-secularism, framing his discussion in terms of each party's relation to the transcendental. For Godzich, secularists today "want to insure that the place of the old transcendental remains vacant" both from any religious incursion as well as any other potentially transcendental ideology (69). Following this line of enquiry, Godzich posits a triangular form to the debate between secularism and post-secularism in which there is the secularist position (formulated above), the religious position (advocating a return), and the globalist position (seeking world order via regulation through occupation of the vacated transcendental space). The piece ends by returning to the book's subjects as a whole in light of the theoretical structures Godzich has just explicated, advocating an increased scrutiny of post-secularist forays into the question of reading and calling for a discussion of post-secular neo-formalism.

With the theoretical ground thus covered, "Part Two: Literature" turns to pieces that engage specific authors and genres. Shawna Vesco provides "Redemptive Readings between Maurice Blanchot and Franz Rosenzweig," which compares the ways in which reading and writing within both literature and Judaism each open onto the question of the relation between ethics and community. Vesco's work turns to the form of revelation as redemptive in both authors given their articulation of language's ability to remain sustained and open, avoiding the collapse into synthesis. Vesco is followed by Ipshita Chanda's "'So What If You Are Big?': The Ethics of Plurality in Indian Literatures of Devotion." In order to read the broadly pluralistic content of Indian devotional poetry,

Chanda utilizes Merleau Ponty's concept of "sedimentation," or the accretion of understanding of the world that forms through continually living in it. In Chanda's reading, the differences of language and culture in Indian devotional poetry are built upon a culturally sedimented foundation centered around an emotional relationship with the divine that allows the poet to imaginatively inhabit a pluralistic society centered around what Chanda terms an "ethics of pluralism" (100). Chanda ends on a provocative question – "whether in literary studies, we can conceptualize the 'modern' as a phenomenological category rather than a temporal one" (117) – and her work here demonstrates the value of readings whose comparativism extends beyond the Judeo-Christian worldview of the majority of the western literary canon. Part Two then concludes with Christopher Weinberger's "Alterity and the Ethics of the Novel in J. M. Coetzee's Quasi-Realism." Weinberger uses Coetzee to explore the complicated question of ethics in the novel, which has traditionally been understood in terms of the novel's ability to produce mimetic identification, provoking either empathetic identification or negative rejection and thus reflection within the reader. Coetzee, Weinberger argues, is an author who, like other contemporary novelists such as Haruki Murakami, Zadie Smith, Salman Rushdie, Ruth Ozeki, and Mark Z. Danielewski, draws "on the anti-mimetic rhetorical strategies of metafiction for expressly ethical purposes" (144). Weinberger's work here raises interest in the potential for other anti-mimetic genres often under explored in literary studies (e.g., speculative fiction) to participate productively in these discussions of literature, religion, and particularly, ethics: for example, consider the works of N. K. Jemisin, Vandana Singh, Rivers Solomon, Tomi Adeyemi, and Akwaeke Emezi, each of which deliberately utilizes the speculative in order to probe the contours of ethical relations.

"Part Three: Religion" brings the theme of the utility of literature into the foreground, as questions regarding how religious figures, forms, language, themes, etc. are used by various poets and authors in order to achieve or convey their particular aesthetic goal are considered. Sara Hackenberg begins this section with "Asmodeus, the 'Eye of Providence,' and the Ethics of Seeing in Nineteenth-Century Mystery Fiction." Hackenberg traces the way in which the figure of Asmodeus is gradually complicated when the narratives are read paying special attention to the theme of vision / sight. As the detectives construct a concept of trustworthy visual epistemology, Asmodeus is likewise

constructed in terms that reflect both the objective scientific sight and the divinely providential eye. For Hackenberg, this fusing of the demonic and the divine “infuses the Asmodeus gaze with a sense of ethics” while simultaneously complicating moral identity so that the perception cannot describe morality (160). Hope Howell Hodgkins then provides “Modernism’s Religious Rhetorics: Or, What Bothered Baudelaire,” in which she reads modernism’s power as being “found in the ultimate, otherworldly fulfillment implied by those religious rhetorics” (166). The promise of the author is aligned with the commitment of the divine so that religious concepts entered modernist terminology. The final piece in this section is Stephanie Heimgartner’s “Poetry and religion: Approaches to Christian transcendence in late-twentieth-century poets.” Heimgartner argues that the works of four poets – Les Murray, Wisława Szymborska, Inger Christensen, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger – “demonstrate a persistent desire among poets to speak of redemption as still a possibility for the modern era” (185). While each poet’s approach to this theme is decidedly distinct (e.g., poetry as supplying divine surplus, poetic irony as opening divine address, use of biblical source material and formal rhetoric), the combined force of their work argues for a continued religious relevance to contemporary literature as a necessary component of cultural literacy. Each of the pieces collected here provide interesting readings, and yet I found it worth discussing as noted above that each approaches religion in various terms of utility. Is there something about focusing on religion in literature that foregrounds religion as used by authors? What would discussions or readings of religion in literature look like without recourse to the concept of use?

The final section of the book, Part Four, then takes ethics as its organizing topic. Dorothy Figueira develops a thoughtful discussion concerning the political and ethical implications surrounding the shift from comparative literature to world literature within the academy in “Instituting the Other: Ethical Fault Lines in Readings and Pedagogies of Alterity.” Figueira argues that the politicization of alterity within the humanities is ethically problematic in the ways that minorities are often limited to self-study in order to satisfy institutional political agendas of perceived equality. She posits that much of the work on alterity has taken place from the position of a hermeneutics of suspicion, and promotes bringing a hermeneutics of belief (via Ricoeur and Levinas) into the conversation in order to address the ethically problematic institutional appropriation of alterity that the field of literary studies apparently is

either disinterested in or even unable to address. Figueira's careful, big picture approach to the question of ethics and literature contrasts usefully with Steven Shankman's focused reading of Dostoevsky in "Thinking God on the Basis of Ethics: Levinas, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Dostoevsky's Anti-Semitism." Shankman sees a Levinasian project in Dostoevsky's work to think God through the ethical relation rather than the ontological question in *The Brothers Karamazov*, but one that is complicated by Dostoevsky's return to an insistence on a doctrinal fidelity to the concepts of immortality and resurrection at the novel's end. Shankman uses this fidelity to pivot to a discussion of Dostoevsky's problematic anti-Semitism, now framed in his commitment to the ethical relation. While this move engages Dostoevsky's ethics in their historical setting, it also misses an opportunity to continue the theoretical thread thus established – Dostoevsky's insistence on both the ethical relation and the commitment to a religious doctrine grounded in the event of the resurrection resonate significantly with Alain Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (2001; originally *L'éthique: Essai sur la conscience du Mal* [1998]) and his development of an eventual fidelity as a ground for truth. Following Shankman, Kitty Millet provides the final piece in the collection, entitled "An Ethics for Missing Persons." Here, Millet adroitly moves between the work of two Holocaust survivors, Jorge Semprun and H. G. Adler, in order to argue that they turned to "literature as their chosen form of representation because of literature's capacity to exhibit a condition eliciting an ethics unique to itself. In this way, the survivor's need to tell becomes the linchpin to a literary ethics" (227). Millet produces a careful, nuanced reading of Semprun's *Literature or Life* (1998) and Adler's *The Journey*, but importantly, refuses to collapse the separately witnessed traumas into a single categorical identity as such an act would, in itself, be unethical in its erasure of the individual experience.

In *Fault Lines of Modernity*, Millet and Figueira have produced a significant contribution to the fields of literature and religion as well as literature and ethics. Pieces that might otherwise have appeared as literary studies are instead gathered into a productive conversation in which the work of literature, religion, and ethics inform and influence each other. The pieces here argue for the enduring relevance of an ongoing dialogue concerning these relationships, which continue to signify albeit in multiplying and distinct forms within contemporary secularism. As a whole, the volume is well produced, readable and accessible, though not without the small typographic errors that plague us all in the world



of contemporary academic publishing. My only significant reservation lies instead with an unfortunate limit to the volume's philosophical conversation partners. While it is expected that this topic would (as it does) take up the work of thinkers such as Levinas, Kant, Ricoeur, Derrida, Taylor, Spinoza, Merleau-Ponty, and Habermas to varying degrees, the theoretical field engaged here is somewhat narrow and repetitive within the otherwise varied articles. I would not have been surprised to find Kierkegaard, Augustine, or Schopenhauer, for example. But even more so, I would have expected to find more in terms of the contemporary philosophical conversations occurring with reference to religious forms. The aforementioned Badiou (e.g., *Ethics* [1998/2001]; *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* [1997/2003]) and the work of Giorgio Agamben (e.g., *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* [2000/2005]; *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath* [2008/2011]; *Pilate and Jesus* [2013/2015]; see also *Agamben and Theology* by Colby Dickinson [2011] for a more systematic overview) immediately spring to mind as areas for theoretical enrichment of this conversation. Additionally, work by contemporary philosophers reading literature and philosophy in order to think religion, such as Adam S. Miller (*The Gospel According to David Foster Wallace: Boredom and Addiction in an Age of Distraction* [2016]; *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology* [2013]), seem likely conversation partners. More broadly, developments like object oriented ontology, assemblage theory, and ecocriticism could be brought into the ethical dimension of these conversations with productive results.

To be clear, I do not take these absences to be a fatal flaw. And the few names mentioned above are not meant to be comprehensive or necessary in any way – they are instead meant to initiate a consideration of the ways in which contemporary philosophical discourse could be engaged fruitfully in what is clearly a fertile field. Figueira and Millet have produced an important contribution to literary studies, one that brings together the creative force of multiple perspectives, scholarship, and approaches. The hope after reading this volume, then, is that these conversations will both resonate and continue to expand.



**Harri Veivo, Petra James and Dorota Walczak-Delanois, eds. *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe*. Leiden: Brill / Rodopi, 2019. Pp. 320. ISBN: 9789004364110.**

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Before it made sense to use such an institutionalized term as “Beat Studies,” there were Beat biographies and hagiographies, Beat Generation cultural histories and illustrated Beat coffee-table books and then, from the late 1980s onwards, a series of single-author monographs: critical studies of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Gregory Corso. Did three or four people really “make a generation,” as Corso and Gary Snyder both asked with an edge of cynicism? For a long time it did because the “major author” approach was the best route to legitimacy for critics and scholars feeling as marginalized within the academy as their subjects had felt ostracized from the mainstream world of letters. Legitimacy meant not only being accepted inside the institution but also creating distance from the outside, the pop cult outside of fandom, where “the Beats” meant not radical, challenging writing but seductively rebellious lives. As David Meltzer famously put it in *Beat Thing* (2004), icon-worshipping got it backwards, as if “it’s really the looks, not the books” (10).

This dichotomy should not matter in the second decade of the 21st century, when Beat Studies is old enough to get on with the work rather than keep insisting on its legitimacy; but, despite its originality and value, *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* suggests that the problem has returned from the opposite direction, and that what needs to matter is once again “the books.” For *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* represents a new, ironic twist in a turn that might be dated back to the shift that took

place after the late 1990s, when the field began to expand with studies promoting gender and to a lesser extent race. The year of Meltzer's book, 2004, coincided with the establishment of the Beat Studies Association, an organization whose title and purpose formalized the term Beat Studies. Six years later, the launch of the European Beat Studies Network extended the remit and reach of the BSA and together they paved the way for the landmark publication in 2012 of *The Transnational Beat Generation*, edited by Jennie Skerl and Nancy Grace, both key players in the BSA. As Grace predicted, transnationalism proved a "fertile turn" for Beat Studies, and a series of books and essay collections have duly followed: from Jimmy Fazzino's *World Beats: Beat Generation Writing and the Worlding of U.S. Literature* and the two-dozen essays of "Global Beat Studies," a Special Issue of *Comparative Literature and Culture* I myself co-edited with Polina Mackay (both 2016), to John Tytell's *Beat Transnationalism* (2017) and *The Routledge Handbook of International Beat Literature* edited by A. Robert Lee (2018). It is not an overstatement to say that the Transnational Turn has turned Beat Studies on its head: from focusing on three or four American writers (all white men, it seems obvious to point out), to adding diversity along lines of race and gender, "Beat" now means the whole wide world.

The dozen literary histories offered up by *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* are, self-evidently but also polemically, an emphatically European project, and in this sense it can be seen as having a very different take on Beat Studies to the universalizing ambitions of Transnational Studies, essentially an expansion of American Studies. The academic institutional origins of these frameworks have already been noted – by Véronique Lane in "French and Beat Literatures," a Special Issue of *L'esprit créateur* (Winter 2018) – and is important to stress here because *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* cannot escape some of the negative consequences that go together with the transnational turn, despite breaking new ground in its definition of the transnational and its redefinition of both the terms in its title. Indeed, the title is doubly misleading, and the editors openly acknowledge half of it in their excellent introduction. Here, they declare that this "book is not about the 'original' Beat"; i.e. the major American authors, or for that matter the more diverse expanded field (1). For them "Beat Literature" means "the dissemination and transformation of the Beat," "a moving field of relations and processes" (3) – a problematic redefinition to which I will return. They also redefine "Europe," albeit implicitly, by dividing it up in a dramatic way. Their Beat Europe is not

that of the Beat Hotel in Paris, where Ginsberg, Burroughs and Corso all lived and wrote in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Indeed, theirs is a Europe without Paris at all. *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* divides off precisely the most familiar cultural scenes in order to give us Finland not France, Norway not The Netherlands, Greece not Germany, Belgium not Britain. Since the book's readership is Anglophone, the deliberate focus on the farthest corners of Europe, from Iceland to Turkey and from Portugal to Poland, seems also deliberately to go together with representing the literatures most unfamiliar to an Anglo-American reader.

The very particular model of Europe represented here accentuates the shocking reminder of the extent to which postwar Europe lived under dictatorships, from Salazar's Portugal and Franco's Spain to the military junta in Greece and the Iron Curtain regimes in Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Poland and Hungary. The democratic countries where the Americans stayed or visited (apart from the much more adventurous Ginsberg) were the exceptions. One result is to see a quite different side of the Cold War than the one that is usually contextualized the origins of "Howl" or *On the Road*; here we realize, for example, that Communist governments in Europe did not always censor Beat writing because they had no issue at all with the anti-consumerist, anti-bourgeois critique that went down so badly in the United States; and we discover how in Poland the authorities responded to Kerouac's novels, which inspired thousands of young people to go on the road, not by banning it but by forming "the Social Committee of Hitchhikers" to register them all. Another result is to be shocked by so many case studies from the postwar decades that have now taken on new meaning, as the tide of history that turned conservative and repressive regimes all across Europe into thriving liberal democracies has now turned back again with the rise of populist demagogues.

*Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* is nothing if not bold, beginning in Iceland, the smallest, most parochial and perhaps least promising context for studying the reception of the Beats. In fact, Benedikt Hjartarson's fine essay turns out to represent some of the common denominators of both how the Beats were received across Europe and how this collection documents and interprets it. On the one hand, Beat texts were seen as extensions of Modernist literature, rather than as products of local historical circumstances in postwar America, and on the other hand they were seen as vehicles to help modernize the local cultural scene in Iceland. This double dynamic seems also to hold in Scandinavia, particularly Finland, and also Greece. The Icelandic reception also mirrors that in

Greece, and indeed Portugal, by connecting the Beats with Surrealism. Beyond these broad narratives of literary history, there are also some telling details; like the little magazine which first published Ginsberg in Iceland, which did so alongside work by St.-John Perse – a pairing of poets long-overlooked until Lane's comparative study, *The French Genealogy of the Beat Generation* (2017).

The Icelandic story typifies the reception narrative in having two distinct stages. There is a first stage when, after a short delay, Beat writing is reviewed, enthusiastically in underground literary circles, negatively in more conservative channels, and quite often conflated with the countercultural movement of the 1960s. That conflation is deeply problematic, although none of the essays here unpack the resulting confusion in any depth or detail, and several themselves fall foul of it. The second stage, after a longer delay, sees works published in translation. The impact of the time lag varies and is not always predictable. For example, while in some cases Beat books were translated “too late” and lost their context or radical potential, Tüt Hennoste observes that although in Estonia “Beat writings arrived late in the day” (very late: the 1990s), they “were not read as ‘dead classics,’ but as having relevance for contemporary life” (97). In other countries, the delay is ongoing both in terms of primary works – many of which remain untranslated – and in the development of Beat Studies. Nuno Miguel Neves openly admits that his essay is “necessarily incomplete” because it has nothing to build on, taking baby steps in a new field of research in Portugal, while Thomas Antonic describes Beat Studies as “still a desideratum in Austrian universities,” tersely concluding his essay: “In Austrian academia, Ginsberg still hasn't arrived” (249, 250). The stress on Ginsberg is characteristic, since he dominates the reception of Beat literature in Europe, both because his work was the most often translated and because of his personal presence in so many countries. For Dorota Walczak-Delanois, Ginsberg was and has “remained indisputably the most celebrated member of the Beat Generation in Poland” (173). The unspoken problem is that “Beat” often means mainly Ginsberg, while “Ginsberg” in turn means an oeuvre narrowed down mainly to “Howl.” From the scattered evidence of how Ginsberg's poem has been translated – whether into Hungarian with all the obscenities cut or into Portuguese with them mangled (“who balled” becoming “who played soccer”) – it becomes increasingly obvious on what narrow and dubious a basis “Beat” has been understood at all.

These problems of definition, translation, and the material base to both popular reception and academic research are central to *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* but are only intermittently addressed as such. For example, Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan, discussing the Spanish reception, acknowledges how far translation narrowed the Beat field and also that the recurrent confusion of “Beat” with “beatnik” was not just unfortunate but deliberate in some quarters of the media and government as a way to denigrate writers and confuse the reception of their work. However, Guerrero-Strachan’s insight follows immediately after the chapter by Walczak-Delanois which refers not only to the “itinerant beatnik” image of the hitchhiker but to “Ginsberg and the other beatniks” and the ideal of “Beatnik freedom” (178, 171). In other words, *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* itself reproduces some of the basic problems of definition besetting the original reception of Beats in Europe.

There are really three problems here. The first is methodological. While the book’s introduction sets out its Transnational Studies framework with energy and sophistication and is well versed in the state of Beat Studies, individual essays typically focus on their own very particular national literary histories. They make very little use of current criticism and if they depend on Beat sources at all, they are usually biographies or primers, the least rigorous scholarship. The second problem is generic. *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* is, like *The Routledge Handbook of International Beat Literature*, which ranges from Canada to China, a victim of its own expansive ambitions. The editors’ polemic for a transnational network of relations and processes does not prevent the collection narrowing down into a mini series of separate national spheres like so many snapshots or postcards home. While there is space enough to document each cultural scene, with potted histories for the benefit of the general Anglo-American reader, there is a trade off against an empty space where the texts themselves should be, along with the “worlded reading practices” promised in the Introduction (2).

This is in fact a double emptiness. The “original” Beat texts that impacted most – usually by Ginsberg and Kerouac, much less often Burroughs – are simply taken as read. There is no detailed comparative analysis, even though the issue of translation is a recurrent theme, and no sense of how major works have been reinterpreted over time. Making sustained textual close readings, monographs like those of Fazzino and Lane have a distinct advantage over essay collections in this respect. Equally, while a focused

reception study – like Erik Mortenson’s *Translating the Counterculture: The Reception of the Beats in Turkey* (2018) – can be highly revealing about both Turkish society and Ginsberg’s “Howl” or Burroughs’ *The Soft Machine*, here the reader learns little without the texts before them. Only the longest of the essays, the 30-page study of the Beats in Poland, quotes at sufficient length to demonstrate rather than merely state a case for stylistic resonance. However, when Walczak-Delanois says it is “worth mentioning” a “satirical portrait of Polish Catholic pilgrimages in *Patnicy z Macierzyzny*” (158), the harsh truth is that it is not worth mentioning, because the Anglophone reader neither gets the reference nor *can* get it, since the text is not available in translation.

Finally, there is the problem of access not only within academia but beyond it. Critical orthodoxies and fashions come and go, but if anything defines the Beats it was a commitment to creative innovation and to speaking truth from the margins. With a few exceptions – chiefly, the essays by Antonic, Franca Bellarsi / Gregory Watson and József Havasréti, which have more idiosyncratic personal voices – *Beat Literature in a Divided Europe* reads like a standard work of reference composed in a functional house style, often with a sociological rhetoric that refers to “the literary system” rather than to works of literature themselves. Clarity of prose is always welcome, but in the bigger picture of Beat Studies the style and approach here symbolize the way institutional methodologies end up being internalized in order to deter questions of legitimacy. I well remember being instructed to write my PhD on Burroughs “as boringly as possible” in order to get away with it. That was thirty-five years ago. *Plus ça change...*



**Claude De Grève. *La Réception de Gogol en France (1838–2009)*. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2018. Pp. 628. ISBN : 9782406061946.**

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Voici un imposant volume qui explore dans tous ses méandres l'histoire de la réception en France de Nicolas Gogol (1809–1952) sur plus d'un siècle et demi, depuis les premières traductions en 1838 jusqu'à 2009, année du bicentenaire de la naissance de l'écrivain. L'auteur est une comparatiste française renommée, professeur émérite de l'Université Paris Ouest La Défense, membre du comité de lecture de la *Revue française de littérature comparée* et dont Gogol a été le grand sujet de recherche : sa thèse d'Etat soutenue en 1984 embrassait les deux faces de la réception de l'écrivain, en France et en Russie.

L'ouvrage a le mérite de s'intéresser à un auteur russe certes connu – une pièce comme *Le Revizor* est assez régulièrement à l'affiche et a fait son entrée au répertoire de la Comédie française – mais qui ne bénéficie pas en France de la même audience que Dostoïevski, Tolstoï ou Tchekhov. Gogol, en outre, n'est pas un auteur facile et reste sur bien des points une énigme. Objet de lectures diverses, il continue à susciter des interprétations contradictoires, ce qui n'a certes rien d'original pour un écrivain. Mais, dans son cas, les paradoxes semblent difficilement conciliables. Originaire d'Ukraine, n'écrivant qu'en russe, proche des slavophiles et consacrant son œuvre essentiellement à son pays, il réside onze années de sa vie à l'étranger, à Rome en particulier. Salué par la critique d'un Biéliniski comme un auteur réaliste, satirique et comique, contempteur sans concession de la société russe, il assure n'avoir d'autre ambition que celle d'un moraliste, ne prétendant réformer que les hommes et non les choses. Au lieu de la suite attendue des *Âmes mortes*, il publie les *Passages*

*choisis de ma correspondance avec mes amis* où s'exprime un message conservateur aussi bien politique, social que religieux. Molière des lettres russes à trente-trois ans, il en devient cinq en plus tard, dira Tolstoï, le Pascal, « mais un Pascal [...] dont la conversion ne lui vaut guère, de son vivant, qu'incompréhension et sarcasmes » (Acouturier ix).<sup>1</sup> Si les études les plus sérieuses s'efforcent de rendre compte des différentes facettes de cette œuvre et de son évolution, d'autres lectures plus sélectives ont eu tendance à donner la préférence à l'un ou l'autre versant de son héritage.

Ce rappel est nécessaire pour fixer le cadre général dans lequel s'insère l'étude du Gogol français.<sup>2</sup> Largement tributaire de la réception russe, la lecture de son œuvre en France oscille principalement entre ces deux images, celle d'un Gogol réaliste et comique et celle d'un Gogol fantastique, mystique et visionnaire. Mais, dans le même temps, certains éléments propres à la situation littéraire et intellectuelle française impriment leur marque à la perception de l'écrivain qu'il s'agisse de l'image qu'on se fait de la Russie et de ses écrivains, de l'horizon d'attente du lectorat français ou du contexte politique. Comme souvent, la diffusion d'une œuvre étrangère tient, en outre, à la présence de passeurs, dans le cas présent, Russes installés en France ou Français russophiles, traducteurs, metteurs en scène, slavistes. Aussi un des grands intérêts du livre est-il de reconstituer, à chaque époque, ce milieu bien particulier, grâce à une analyse détaillée des articles critiques, à une étude serrée des choix de traduction ou des mises en scènes et à de courtes présentations de ces médiateurs. Si l'on retrouve des noms célèbres comme ceux d'Alexandre Herzen, Ivan Tourgueniev (qui en fait n'aurait pas beaucoup contribué à sa renommée)... côté russe, Louis Viardot, Sainte-Beuve, Mérimée, de Vogüé... côté français, on découvre aussi beaucoup de personnalités mineures, inconnues des non-spécialistes, Adolphe de Circourt, Xavier Marmier, Jean-Geoffroy Rohr, Charles de Saint-Julien, Callet, Eugène Moreau, Ernest Charrière, Alphonse Challandes, Céleste Courrière... qui par leurs traductions pas toujours fidèles ou leurs articles souvent

<sup>1</sup> Gogol appartient à cette lignée d'écrivains russes qui ont développé des penchants didactiques et un goût prononcé pour la prédication, comme si l'activité artistique n'était pas un enjeu suffisant. On pense à Dostoïevski, à Tolstoï, et, plus près de nous, à Soljénitsyne.

<sup>2</sup> On trouvera des jalons essentiels pour ces questions de réception au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle dans deux ouvrages classiques du comparatisme français : *La Russie dans la vie intellectuelle française (1839–1956)* par Michel Cadot, et *A l'ère des nationalismes : l'opinion française face à l'inconnue russe 1799–1894* par Charles Courbet.

réducteurs ont assuré la présence, même superficielle, du nom de Gogol dans la vie littéraire française. Leur entreprise est d'autant plus méritante que, lors de ses brefs séjours à Paris, ce dernier n'a pas cherché à rencontrer les écrivains français,<sup>3</sup> ni même à entrer en relation avec les salons russes de la capitale, ne se souciant absolument pas d'encourager la connaissance de son œuvre.

Dans une introduction substantielle, l'auteur explique les raisons de son projet, expose sa démarche et justifie son titre. L'ouvrage suit un plan chronologique avec, le cas échéant, quand le sujet s'y prête, des regroupements synchroniques. Le livre se déploie en quinze chapitres qui suivent les principales étapes de la réception de Gogol en France. Les deux premiers (90) couvrant la période qui va des années 1830 aux années 1850<sup>4</sup> correspondent à l'émergence du phénomène : c'est l'époque des « propagateurs et propagandistes » de Gogol qui s'efforcent de contrebalancer l'image d'un écrivain, simple imitateur de l'Occident. Les chapitres 3 et 4 consacrés aux années 1854–1885 suivent la difficile implantation de Gogol en France, perçu principalement comme un écrivain satirique (60). La période suivante 1886–1914 (chapitres 5, 6, 7) est marquée par l'avènement, à la suite d'Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu et d'Eugène Melchior de Vogüé, du mythe de l'âme russe qui dans le contexte politique favorable des débuts de l'alliance franco-russe suscite un regain d'intérêt pour les écrivains de Russie et pour Gogol en particulier. Si la critique en France reste prudente et n'est pratiquement pas touchée par les interprétations des symbolistes russes, la monographie (1913) du slaviste Louis Leger<sup>5</sup> nuance cependant l'image d'un Gogol strictement réaliste. Deux chapitres (8 et 9) couvrent ensuite la réception de Gogol dans l'entre-deux-guerres. Celle-ci est marquée par une plus large connaissance de son œuvre, due entre autres à de nouvelles traductions (Henri Mongault, Boris de Schloezer), à des représentations théâtrales (*Le Revizor* par Louis Jovet, par Meyerhold en tournée), à des films (*Taras Boulba*) et à des essais critiques qui renouvellent pour certains l'image de l'écrivain (ouvrages de Konstantin Motchoulski, Boris

<sup>3</sup> Un seul français, Sainte-Beuve, l'a rencontré par hasard et a laissé de cette rencontre un témoignage intéressant.

<sup>4</sup> 1852 : mort de Gogol ; 1854 : première mise en scène du *Revizor*.

<sup>5</sup> Malgré la façon dont son nom est orthographié dans les catalogues en ligne et sur le web en général, les slavistes continuent d'écrire son nom sans accent sur le e (cf. Boyer).

de Schloezer...). Si l'après-guerre (chapitres 10, 11) est marquée par une reprise des traductions et des mises en scène, elle est aussi caractérisée par une politisation de la réception, conséquence de la guerre froide, et qui culmine lors des célébrations de 1952. *Grosso modo* une critique procommuniste défendant un Gogol réaliste s'oppose à une approche chrétienne et visionnaire de l'écrivain. Les quatre derniers chapitres (12, 13, 14, 15) sont consacrés à une période relativement longue (près de 60 ans) qui va de la mort de Staline à l'époque actuelle et qui est marquée par le développement d'une véritable lecture du texte gogolien, échappant désormais aux réductions partisans. Cette période correspond pour la France à une véritable consécration de l'écrivain russe qui entre dans la Bibliothèque de la Pléiade en 1966. Le volume, Nicolas Gogol, *Œuvres complètes*, publié sous la direction de Gustave Aucouturier marque l'accomplissement de ce que les études russes en France peuvent donner de meilleur. Ce livre reste aujourd'hui l'édition de référence de l'écrivain,<sup>6</sup> tant par la qualité des traductions (qui regroupent le meilleur de ce qui avait été fait, complété par des traductions inédites de Michel Aucouturier et de José Johannet principalement<sup>7</sup>) que par l'érudition de l'apparat critique et la justesse de l'introduction. Il y aura bien sûr des tentatives ultérieures pour refaire certaines de ces traductions, mais, et l'analyse très fine de Claude de Grève le montre parfaitement, celles-ci n'arrivent pas vraiment à convaincre complètement, malgré certains partis-pris intéressants. Dans le même temps (les années 1950–1960 et au-delà), de nouvelles mises en scène comme celle du *Journal d'un fou* par Roger Coggio, des *Âmes mortes* (Arthur Adamov – Roger Planchon), de nouvelles études, *Nikolai Gogol* de Nabokov, *Gogol dramaturge* de

<sup>6</sup> A quoi on peut ajouter l'édition complète des *Nouvelles*, préparée par Michel Niqueux pour les éditions quarto, Gallimard, en 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Gustave Aucouturier (1902–1985), slaviste de formation, était journaliste de profession et traducteur incomparable du russe. Outre le Gogol, on lui doit plusieurs autres volumes de la Pléiade (Griboïedov, Pouchkine, Lermontov, Tolstoï, Dostoïevski...). Michel Aucouturier (1933–2017), son fils, a enseigné à l'université de Genève et fut professeur à la Sorbonne. Traducteur hors pair, il s'est surtout fait connaître comme spécialiste de Tolstoï et de Pasternak. José Johannet (1924–2013), enseignant de russe à Caen puis à Nanterre, était un philologue passionné par les états anciens du russe, qui s'affirma avec son épouse en tant que traducteur en français de Soljénitsyne, de *L'Archipel du Goulag* en particulier. On regrette qu'il n'ait pu donner une forme plus développée à son étude des *Passages choisis* de Gogol, traduits et présentés par ses soins dans le volume de La Pléiade et dont il a étudié les sources dans un article, paru en 1965, dans la *Revue des études slaves*.

Nina Gourfinkel, les études du slaviste Georges Nivat... contribuent à diversifier l'image de Gogol qu'on finit par rapprocher de l'œuvre d'un Kafka. Les rééditions, nouvelles traductions et présentations se multiplient ; Gogol fait son entrée au répertoire national ; il est étudié au lycée et fait partie du programme du baccalauréat.

Voici retracées à grands traits les principales articulations de cet ouvrage d'une érudition sans faille qui excelle à mettre en lumière les moindres épisodes de l'acclimatation de Gogol au contexte français et constitue une véritable encyclopédie de la question. Le livre contient une bibliographie raisonnée très complète qui comprend, entre autres, la liste de toutes les traductions de Gogol en français, un index des noms et des œuvres. Il faut donc saluer ce travail titanesque qui comble une lacune dans l'histoire de la réception en France des écrivains russes.

On peut se demander toutefois si le souci parfaitement légitime de l'exhaustivité et de la nuance ne nuit pas à une meilleure problématisation du sujet et n'a pas tendance à diluer les principales lignes de force de la question. En effet, malgré la popularité de certains textes, principalement *Taras Boulba*, *Le Manteau*, *Le Revizor*, le rayonnement de Gogol en France reste finalement modeste. Il n'a pas vraiment passionné de grand écrivain français (rien de comparable à l'aura d'un Dostoïevski ou d'un Tolstoï), ni suscité d'étude significative de nature à renouveler sa lecture. Même le meilleur de la critique littéraire russe à son sujet, celle des symbolistes en particulier (Brioussov, Biély, Ivanov, Merejkovski, Rozanov...), peine visiblement à pénétrer en France. La date anniversaire de 2009 a certes suscité quelques manifestations scientifiques, mais pas de véritable boom éditorial. Cette position méritait peut-être d'être soulignée davantage, en plus des quelques développements de la conclusion. Le « je ne remarque pas » est tout aussi important, en effet, que le « je remarque ». Pourquoi Gogol s'intègre-t-il si difficilement au paysage littéraire français ? Pourquoi cette cécité à l'égard de ce que son œuvre doit à des sources européennes, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Thomas de Quincey, Walter Scott, Laurence Sterne... ? L'essai de Mikhaïl Bakhtine « Rabelais et Gogol » qui établit l'origine commune du rire des deux auteurs et met en évidence des parallèles précis ne semble pas avoir suscité le moindre écho. Serions-nous toujours sous l'emprise du jugement de Melchior de Vogüé, conseillant de « laisser Gogol en Russie » ?

Dans un autre ordre d'idées, des indications quantitatives sur les tirages des traductions de Gogol et une appréciation plus synthétique du rôle des passeurs auraient permis une appréciation plus juste de la place

de l'écrivain en France. Si le contexte politique fournit des indications précieuses pour apprécier tel épisode de réception, celui-ci intervient parfois de manière différée et ne joue pas toujours un rôle significatif. Certaines divisions sont ainsi strictement politiques et, d'une manière générale, il y a peut-être un trop grand morcellement en chapitres qui fait que l'on peine à suivre la ligne principale. D'autres regroupements étaient peut-être envisageables, au risque de passer plus vite sur certains épisodes. Un élément tend enfin à complexifier les choses dans le cas de Gogol : c'est un prosateur, auteur de nouvelles et de romans, sans compter cette œuvre inclassable que sont *Les Âmes mortes*, mais aussi un dramaturge, un critique, un moraliste... et tous ces genres s'inscrivent dans des contextes particuliers de réception qu'il était difficile de maîtriser dans le cas d'une approche globale. Enfin, même si la critique confond souvent l'homme et l'œuvre, peut-être était-il possible de faire un tri plus rigoureux dans les contributions examinées et de donner la priorité aux études qui ont fait date et sont consacrées principalement au texte, à l'écriture.

Il n'en reste pas moins qu'au-delà de l'histoire de la réception de Gogol en France, cet ouvrage retrace aussi à grands traits deux siècles de rapports franco-russes. Le livre apporte, en outre, une contribution significative à l'histoire de la traduction, de l'édition et de la presse comme du développement des études russes. Il fait revivre des acteurs oubliés et des épisodes mineurs de la vie intellectuelle française comme des échanges avec la Russie. A ce titre, il intéressera non seulement les comparatistes, mais aussi les slavistes et les spécialistes de relations internationales.

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**Nicholas Birns and Juan E. De Castro,  
eds. *Roberto Bolaño as World Literature*.  
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In his book on the *Modern Epic*, Franco Moretti wrote that Gabriel García Márquez' novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) marked a turning point in world literary history: for the first time in modern history "[...] the centre of gravity of formal creation" was no longer located in Europe "and a truly worldwide literary system – the *Weltliteratur* dreamed of by the aged Goethe – [replaced] the narrower European circuit" (Moretti 233).

Thus, in the eyes of Moretti, Latin American literature created the possibility of an (egalitarian) worldwide literary system. Since the 1990s, another Latin American writer, Chilean Roberto Bolaño, has expanded our conception of world literature. Bolaño has become a major figure on the global literary scene. As they explore many forms of worldliness, his works raise a number of critical questions about what world literature actually is. Does the concept of world literature make any sense at all, in view of the huge inequalities which characterize the worldwide literary system and set it at odds with Goethe's ideal of a universal *Weltliteratur*?

Although he had already been celebrated in the Hispanic sphere for a long time, Bolaño achieved international fame only 13 years ago when his novel *Los detectives salvajes* (1998) was translated in English in 2007 (it followed the 2002 German translation and 2006 French translation). Oswaldo Zavala's essay in this anthology shows how, from that moment on, Bolaño's oeuvre was considered to be world literature. It was thus the Anglophone (or rather North American) reception that

turned Bolaño into a world literature author. The English translations ensured a worldwide circulation of his works, within and beyond the Anglophone world. China, for instance, read Bolaño's oeuvre through the North American critical reception, as contributor Teng Wei demonstrates. As all this suggests, the discourse on world literature is dominated by North American critics. One may wonder if this might prove problematic, especially when dealing with a non-Anglophone writer. Indeed, Zavala notes that "Bolaño's works cannot be sufficiently studied through theoretical models concerned with 'world literature' since they are inevitably based on lacunae" (81). While Zavala might be right, this volume co-edited by Nicholas Birns and Juan E. De Castro, gathering the essays of authors from five different countries, definitely demonstrates that the discussion is worth the effort.

After a substantial introduction by Birns and De Castro, *Roberto Bolaño as World Literature* proceeds with eleven refreshing critical readings of Bolaño's works in light of the notion of world literature. While the volume is not unique in its endeavor, many of the engaged essays it contains offer innovative perspectives. Reading the articles together provides significant insights into both Bolaño's works and the very concept of world literature. One of the common strengths of the articles lies in their critical approach to some of the most well-known theories of world literature (e.g. those elaborated by Franco Moretti, Pascale Casanova and David Damrosch) and their simultaneous exploration of new understandings of world literature construed as a literary category and a creative or critical practice. Thus, this book follows a chiasmic pattern: it reads Bolaño through world literature and world literature through Bolaño.

The collected essays are organized around three main points of interest: i.e. "Bolaño and World History," "Bolaño's Literary Worlds," and "Bolaño's Global Readers." Yet, various topics recur in between the different parts, allowing for interesting cross-references. The discussions cover a vast array of Bolaño's works, ranging from his masterpieces, *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*, to *Amulet*, *Distant Star*, *By Night in Chile*, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, and lesser-known works such as *Woes of the True Policeman*, the lecture entitled "The Myths of Cthulhu" and the short story "Álvaro Rousselot's Journey." While a couple of essays offer close-reading analyses, most of the contributions deal with more general topics.



One of the most interesting subjects is Bolaño's relation to political and literary history. As Teng Wei argues, "Bolaño's writing" can be read as "an act of resistance against the forgetting of history" (178). In many ways, it is through an engagement with history that Bolaño engages the world. Contributors investigate how history reappears in his literary texts and what kind of historicity is at play in them. In this volume's first article, Federico Finchelstein convincingly argues that fascism – a recurring interest of Bolaño's – follows a cyclical pattern. This allows Bolaño to illuminate the connections between fascism, neofascism and postfascism. Moreover, Bolaño shows some of the reformulations that European fascism undergoes in Latin America (26). In her fascinating essay, Sharae Deckard discusses how Bolaño makes "experiments in reversing political and historical amnesias" (211). In *Woes of the True Policeman*, while the fascist past suddenly re-emerges in new forms in the border cities of Mexico, a painting of a village in Madagascar can suddenly make a planter's son, educated at Sorbonne, see for the first time the horrors of colonialism and the relation between the (historical) exploitation "abroad" and the (present) high culture at home (211–12). Deckard also underlines the anachronisms and circularity of history: indeed, different temporalities often intersect in Bolaño's works, for instance in *Woes of the True Policeman* and in *2666*, which enables transhistorical and transcultural critical reflection.

Closely related to the discussion of world literature are the notions of the "world" and "worldliness." In their introduction, Birns and De Castro note that Bolaño "covers the entire world" (8). Europe and Latin America play the most important roles, but Bolaño is also interested in Africa and Asia, which he describes in a realistic, anti-romantic manner. Bolaño satirizes sentimental visions of Third World solidarity and criticizes local Third World traditions he finds cruel, such as the traditional practice of castration in Indian temples.

However, Bolaño's worldliness does not derive only from the presence of multiple geographical locations, but also from his ability to create a border-crossing geopolitical space in his novels. José Enrique Navarro argues that this is achieved through the many transnational journeys depicted in his novels, while Benjamin Loy favors Bolaño's remapping of known territories in the light of "foreign" ones. Loy's brilliant contribution examines how the fictional character Álvaro Rousselot, an American ghost touring Europe, sees Paris as a medieval Russian city in the grip of cannibalism and obsession with money. In Bolaño's short story "El viaje

de Álvaro Rousselot” [“Álvaro Rousselot’s Journey”], the science fiction novel *La invención de Morel* [*The Invention of Morel*] by Argentinian writer Adolfo Bioy Casares is placed in conversation with *Last Year in Marienbad* [*L’année dernière à Marienbad*], a film by high modernist French filmmaker Alain Resnais. As Loy explains, Bolaño devises a sense of worldliness by means of a network of relations connecting different geopolitical and cultural locations (163). In Deckard’s words, his works are constructed through a “relational thinking” (216).

Another ongoing debate revolves around Bolaño’s political stance and how it is reflected in his literary works. The volume provides different possible answers to this question. De Castro contends that the Chilean author “is the prime Latin American example of how to write about politics in a post-political manner” (64): ethics takes on a more prominent role than politics, since important political movements and events seem to disappear in Bolaño’s writings (64–67). Will H. Corral also underlines the ethical dimension, claiming that the works of Bolaño privilege a “knowledge [...] beyond reason” (Hale 903, qtd. in Birns and De Castro 119). Other contributors react differently: Teng Wei regrets the depoliticized readings of Bolaño in China, Zavala decodes Bolaño’s works as subversive to western modernity (81), and Finchelstein and Deckard argue that Bolaño is deeply critical about the recurrent violence of capitalism and fascism. Moreover, the ideological underpinnings of Bolaño’s political commitment are not easily identifiable. For example, although he is loosely affiliated with the left, the author frequently criticizes it. Yet, what appears most clearly is his fierce criticism of neoliberal market mechanisms which he finds devastating for society at large as well as quality literature. In the essay “The Myths of Cthulhu” (2003), Bolaño criticized popular writers like Arturo Pérez-Reverte for writing for the market (140). In his article, Navarro skillfully analyzes these market mechanisms, highlighting how neoliberalism has turned publishing into a profit-oriented industry, dominated by multinational companies with monopolies and a utilitarian policy of rapid circulation and sell out of non-lucrative books (146–47).

Apart from these major issues, a number of essays comment on the recurring meta-topic of literature, literary criticism and literary form. Thomas O. Beebee discusses the status of literary classics in relation to Bolaño. He argues that in “By Night in Chile,” Bolaño must have been (negatively) inspired by Nietzsche when he wrote about the priest Urrutia, who opportunely worked as an instructor in Marxism for Pinochet and

his generals. During the Allende regime, the Greek classics served as a form of escapism for Urrutia (53 and 59). It is not quite clear how Beebee interprets Bolaño's general relation to literary classics, although it is certainly true that an interesting relationship between "a provincialized Chilean literary scene and cosmopolitan literary ambitions" can be detected in Bolaño's oeuvre (43). While Beebee suggests that there exists "a tension" between "the provincial" and "the cosmopolitan" circuits (43), one may wonder if that distinction is not precisely made obsolete by Bolaño's work.

In an interesting article, Patricia Espinosa compares works by Bolaño and the avant-garde writer Juan Luis Martínez. Her analysis of the inversion of temporal patterns and the construction of reality through formal framings is convincing. Unfortunately, the article fails to engage the larger discussion of Bolaño's relation with the avant-garde. Such a critical perspective would also have greatly contributed to debates about his status as a world literary writer. I would personally argue that Bolaño's inherent (post-) avant-gardism places him both inside and outside of world literature.

Finally, in a well-written article, Birns offers a kaleidoscopic reading of Bolaño through a North American lens, investigating possible similarities with literary works by Melville, Twain, McCarthy, Ellroy, and even Henry James. Birns makes the intriguing suggestion that Bolaño's novels could be decoded as a game of sorts, in the same vein as Cortázar's famous novel *Hopscotch*.

Significantly, reading Birns's and Teng Wei's pieces together offers much food for thought. While Teng Wei acknowledges the American influence on the Chinese reception of Bolaño, he also demonstrates that the Chilean writer's status is dependent upon Chinese developments of literary history and politics. Thus, we are reminded that world literature, despite its universal distribution, is locally contextualized.

The copy-editing work of this volume could have been more meticulous. It is especially problematic in Corral's essay, which sadly remains marred by many typographical and bibliographical mistakes. Nevertheless, such issues should not overshadow the overall quality of this volume as a brilliant critical intervention in ongoing discussions on how to understand Bolaño and world literature.

In another book, *Beyond Bolaño*, Héctor Hoyos wrote that critics of comparative literature and world literature are often shocked when

meeting their Latin Americanist colleagues who show a more pronounced political stance (Hoyos 10). Some of the best essays in this collection are “political,” not in an ideological way but in the sense that they investigate the system underlying world literature. In this way, they strive to understand how an oeuvre like Roberto Bolaño’s both is world literature and constitutes a radical challenge to it.

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This compact volume, edited by two Aarhus University professors, belongs to the Bloomsbury “Literatures as World Literature” series, which turns the spotlight on individual national literatures, themes, and genres, in order to illuminate specific examples of what world literature means. In ten chapters written by some of the most venerable and insightful scholars of Danish literature, the book offers an impressive array of case studies, organized chronologically, of prominent Danish authors whose lives and works were substantially transnational. This list ranges from the medieval ecclesiastic Saxo and anonymous balladeers to the early modern humanist Ludvig Holberg to the nineteenth-century prodigies Hans Christian Andersen and Søren Kierkegaard, from the fin-de-siècle pathbreakers Georg Brandes, Jens Peter Jacobsen, Herman Henrik Pontoppidan, Johannes V. Jensen, and Karen Blixen to several 1960s postmodernist poets and contemporary Nordic noir novels. While most of these authors are firmly situated within the Danish literary canon, this volume does an excellent job at demonstrating how transnationally oriented they were as well, pointing toward the myriad ways in which their works drew on and inspired non-Danish authors.

In their introduction to the volume, Ringgaard and Thomsen describe their goal of presenting Scandinavia as “one of these intermediate contexts that can help literatures to think beyond themselves” in terms of Milan Kundera’s warning against both “the provincialism of the large nations that do not see a need for a wider context for their literature” and that

of “smaller nations that cannot see how their literature can have a place among the large literatures of the world” (2). While the literatures of the Nordic countries may not be familiar to most outsiders, Danish writers have intersected with the literary landscapes of larger countries often and significantly enough over the past 1,200 years to have left visible traces that this volume recuperates. In this way, the volume aims to render visible the movement of Danish writers and texts, in terms of inspiration, reception, and translation, in a global context.

To provide historical scope, the first chapter starts at the beginning of Danish written history. Pernille Hermann offers an engaging profile of the medieval historian Saxo Grammaticus – or Saxo the Dane, as the nineteenth-century Danish cultural nationalist N. F. S. Grundtvig rebranded him –, from whose work Shakespeare took the story of Hamlet. She describes how he functioned within a transnational world, drawing on oral lore, medieval Christian scholarship and patronage, and classical literature to address an elite international audience while also creating a narrative monument to his own people. Hermann interprets Saxo’s *History of the Danes* as a literary and political project designed to illuminate both Denmark’s relationship to Christian Europe and the relationship between the king and the church inside Denmark. Echoing Ringgaard and Thomsen’s framing, Hermann focuses on how a literary work like Saxo’s becomes world literature in a foreign cultural situation by functioning as an “interactive space between different cultures,” showcasing “formal compromises between foreign and local forms” that are both “criteria for world literature status and decisive factors for the development or evolution of new genres” (13).

Jumping a thousand years ahead, the second chapter considers the networks along which Danish ballads were disseminated in Germany and Britain in the 1760s-1830s. For the former, Lis Møller traces how the German poet Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg’s epistolary introduction of Peder Syv’s *Danske Kæmpe-Viser* (1695) (which incorporates Anders Sørensen Vedel’s 1591 collection) led to the inclusion of Danish ballads in Herder’s *Völklieder* (1778–79), which in turn informed Goethe’s poem “Der Erlkönig” (1782), Wilhelm Carl Grimm’s 1811 collection of *Alddänische Heldenlieder*, and Heinrich Heine’s *Elementargeister* (first published in French in 1837). She then documents a parallel reception history in Britain, via the German sources, that centers on transmission of the ballads, in translations of varying fidelity and accuracy, from Herder to the young poet Matthew Lewis to Robert Jamieson to Walter Scott to

George Borrow. While the prominence of Danish ballads in this revival reflects both contemporary fascination with the North and the perceived authenticity of Danish ballads because of their long textual history, the disproportionate focus on supernatural rather than historical narratives lent Danish folklore a particularly haunting reputation.

In the third contribution, Svend Erik Larsen demonstrates how the Dano-Norwegian Holberg's prolific engagement with early articulations of Enlightenment values in many different genres should be read as part of a historical dialogue about the "mutual exchange between a local language and culture and the translocal world and its cultures and languages" (58). In Larsen's view, Holberg's use of the vernacular functioned as an educational project designed to situate Danish as a language in which "essential issues and concepts of a global range could be discussed on the same level as in any other vernacular or in Latin," so that Danes could both "contribute to the most advanced thinking of the day" and "benefit from and develop an independent reflection of the large cultural context" (58). Arguing that awareness of local anchoring was keener among writers from minor languages, Larsen employs the term "minor transnationalism" to explain the multidirectional encounters between cultures beyond the dominant hierarchies of world languages that Holberg's life and career exemplify.

Karin Sanders uses the fourth chapter to explore Hans Christian Andersen's wide-ranging physical and imaginative mobility. Sanders foregrounds not only Andersen's orientation toward both adult and child readers in local (Danish) and global contexts, but also the way his stories navigate linguistic, generic, cultural, and national borders. In this way, Andersen facilitates the reader's experience of double-temporality, in which the reader becomes conscious of both the tangibility of letters and words as physical entities, as well as their symbolic meaning. Sanders concludes, "For the adult, the two reading experiences overlap so that the written text becomes both a material and a mental property: a thing in itself and a magic door into the imaginary" (101). Using the fairy tale as a bridging genre, Andersen was able to successfully dislocate his stories from autobiography into fiction, from Denmark to Italy and Egypt and other countries, from the present to the past and future, from the real, human world into the world of fantasy, the animate inanimate, the supernatural.

Chapter 5, which ostensibly deals with Kierkegaard's influence on Kafka, feels a little out of place in the chronology, for although

Kierkegaard was born just eight years after Andersen, the chapter's focus is primarily on Franz Kafka's relationship to Kierkegaard's works a century later. Regardless of its placement, however, Isak Winkel Holm's skillful, probing analysis of what Kafka's two documented encounters with Kierkegaard's texts meant for Kafka's authorship is a pleasure to read. He acknowledges Kafka's initial sense of biographical kinship with Kierkegaard, but focuses on deciphering Kafka's comment to Max Brod that Kierkegaard's concept of the dialectical carried him "straight into the bliss of knowing, and even a wingstroke further" (115). Holm resists the temptation to simply list references to Kierkegaard's texts in Kafka's works or to analyze whether Kafka adopts or critiques Kierkegaard's concepts. Instead, rather than treating Kafka as a disciple of Kierkegaard, Holm employs the Schopenhauerian concept of "semantic preliminaries," defined as "a configuration of meaning that happens to trigger the literary production of meaning" (119), to illustrate how Kafka, as "a mature writer[,] [...] used the power of Kierkegaard's terminology for his own purposes" (127). Holm's primary example concerns Kafka's repurposing of narrative elements from Kierkegaard's reading of the Grimms brothers' tale "The Briar Rose" in *The Castle*.

Chapters six and seven both deal with the seminal Modern Breakthrough period. In the former, in the interest of situating the Modern Breakthrough within a transnational Scandinavian literary history, Annegret Heitmann deftly interrogates the diffusion, reception, and effects of Brandes', Jacobsen's, and Bang's works in other European countries, as well as considering the role of globality and global markets in their respective poetics. Heitmann approaches world literature via David Damrosch as a "phenomenon of reception, 'a mode of circulation and of reading'" (143) informed by economic considerations. In the latter, Jon Helt Haarder discusses Pontoppidan's and Jensen's genre-stretching novels from around 1900 – *Lucky Per* and *The Fall of the King* – which capitalized on the popularity of Scandinavian realist literature mediated by Brandes while developing their own distinctive poetics and ideological agendas. Both novels depict the journey of a provincial to the capital, preoccupied with seeking psychological and formal means of dealing with modernity, particularly with regard to questions of religion and sexuality.

In chapter eight, Lasse Hjerne Kjældgaard illuminates Blixen's fundamentally transnational authorship, from her pseudonyms, linguistic code-switching, and defamiliarizing outsider narrative position to her bricolage-style borrowing from an international smorgasbord of



texts. Blixen's personal and professional lives were shaped by the wave of nineteenth-century globalization that directed "streams of capital [...] across the continents in the age of empire" (195). Her turn toward writing fiction was at once prompted by the collapse of the global economy in the 1930s and made possible by the transnational networks and distanced perspective on Denmark that her time in Kenya had equipped her with. Kjældgaard leads off with the complicity in the Kenyan colonial project of which Blixen has been accused, but, disappointingly, does not engage with this question in the text, even at the end, when discussing the atypically pragmatic response of Blixen's Somali cook Farah to the resolution of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

In chapter nine, Anne-Marie Mai surveys 1960s postmodernist Danish poets, including Dan Túrell, Per Højholt, Inger Christensen, Klaus Høeck, and Peter Laugesen, in order to demonstrate their engagement with international poetic trends. Although relatively few of their works have been translated, Mai suggests that they have a great deal to offer international readers: "globalization may allow writing in Danish to command interest in a global literary context, partly because writers to an increasing extent share modern and postmodern life scenarios, events and canons with each other, and partly because globalization promotes an interest in the identities and histories of particular localities" (210). However, since "artistic quality is not a magic formula that at once opens all the doors of world literature" (234), she points out that making these poets' work available to non-Danish readers requires targeted efforts, such as festivals and prizes.

Finally, in chapter ten, Claire Thomson and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen dissect the popularity of Danish crime fiction in Britain, looking for answers in "the ways [...] texts are shaped by (and themselves shape) the material, technological and institutional forms in which they are instantiated; the forms that are the condition of possibility for their mobility" (238). They agree with Mai that such mobility does not happen by itself, noting that "[l]iterature does not travel solo and nor does it travel light; it is carried and accompanied by films, television series, translators, publishers, state subsidies, and all manner of lifestyle goods stamped with Brand Denmark. It travels by interlingual and intermedial translation, by plane, by cargo ship, by word of mouth and by digital download" (239). Through analysis of two popular Danish crime novels – Peter Høeg's *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (1992) and Jussi Adler-Olsen's *Kvinden i buret* (*Mercy / The Keeper of Lost Causes*) (2008/2011) –, they illustrate Stephen

Greenblatt's argument that "only when conditions directly related to literal movement are firmly grasped will it be possible fully to understand the metaphorical movements: between center and periphery; faith and skepticism; order and chaos; exteriority and interiority," each of which involves some kind of physical movement as well (238).

By framing Danish literature as an active participant in world literature currents over twelve centuries, this volume illuminates much more than just the movement of texts and bodies across Denmark's geographic and linguistic borders; it also reveals the preconditions for such movement, as well as illuminating the reception, transformation, and onward dissemination of the ideas such texts contain. Although the volume would have benefitted from a good copyeditor, the individual chapters succeed admirably at amplifying influential, articulate Danish voices in a centuries-long global conversation about life, literature, and the pursuit of meaning.

**Eduardo F. Coutinho, ed. *Brazilian Literature as World Literature*. London: Bloomsbury, 2018.  
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La collection déjà très riche coordonnée par Thomas O. Beebee, intitulée « Literatures as World Literature », nous offre ici un volume consacré à la littérature brésilienne. Cet ouvrage collectif rassemble les travaux de 13 différents contributeurs, tandis que l'éditeur, Eduardo Coutinho, se charge, en plus de sa propre contribution, de la rédaction du premier chapitre introductif. L'organisation choisie est clairement historique, optant pour une présentation des articles selon un ordre chronologique – incluant donc des voix luso-brésiliennes allant du XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle jusqu'au post-modernisme.

Les premier et dernier articles (l'introduction de Coutinho et la contribution d'Abdala Junior) encadrent les différents chapitres portant sur des questions d'ordre générique et conceptuel, toutefois directement significatives pour la littérature-monde (world literature). Les contributeurs sont des spécialistes en littérature brésilienne, littérature comparée, différentes littératures européennes, et tous jouissent d'une excellente réputation dans leur domaine, confirmée par les essais rédigés pour ce volume. La qualité globale du livre est donc assurée, ainsi que la diversité d'approches et d'objets – du sermon baroque au théâtre moderne, de l'indigénisme au roman-épique de Guimarães Rosa, du modernisme au post-modernisme, en passant par des écrivains dont l'œuvre est, en elle-même, un reflet de la littérature-monde (Machado, Rosa, Lispector, Amado).

Cette diversité ne nuit en rien à la cohérence du projet, au contraire : la littérature brésilienne est présentée comme une conjonction fertile de

points de départ et d'arrivée, de traditions, de conflits et de négociations. Mais finalement c'est surtout cet aspect non-uniforme qui permet à la littérature brésilienne d'approcher et de développer le statut même de littérature-monde. Aborder cette discipline présente certains écueils (que je préfère toujours appeler littérature-monde comparée, parce que c'est bien ce qu'elle est, à mon avis) : la non-historicisation, par exemple, ou la tentation d'uniformiser et de ne pas accepter les dissemblances. Comme le rappelle si bien Abdala Junior dans l'essai qui clôt ce volume, tout comme le font les diverses approches des différents auteurs, c'est bien « ce qui cloche » qui toutefois peut donner de l'ampleur et de la densité à la littérature-monde. Le Brésil en est un merveilleux exemple. Pas question, dès lors, de trouver (ou de construire) des uniformités qui se seraient constituées comme continuités. A vrai dire, c'est le dynamisme et la diversité de questions convergentes dans la littérature brésilienne qui font sa richesse en tant que littérature-monde.

Étant portugaise moi-même, je dois admettre que je serais peut-être plus attirée par un ouvrage qui tirerait profit du fait que la langue portugaise s'étend sur différents continents, l'Europe, l'Amérique et l'Afrique, et sous la forme de divers dialectes. Ce qu'on a l'habitude de nommer « la lusophonie » (désignation sur laquelle j'ai assez de réserves) serait aussi un champ extraordinaire pour y placer la littérature-monde, dépassant l'aire nationale initiale. Mais c'est peut-être la logique de la série de Beebe qui est ici en question et, de ce point de vue, l'ancrage du volume dirigé par Coutinho répond très précisément à ce défi. Toutefois, j'aurais aimé lire une réflexion explicite sur les rapports (concrets, même si divergents) entre littérature nationale et littérature-monde, parce que c'est là une question cruciale dans la discipline. Il s'agirait alors de quelque chose de plus étayé que ce que Coutinho décrit comme « the relationship between Brazilian and world literature » (2). En effet, cette formulation laisse la lectrice un peu sur sa soif, notamment quand on essaye de comprendre le cadre conceptuel où les diverses formes de relation (incluant convergences et divergences) entre nation et « monde » peuvent être encore particulièrement dynamiques. C'est le cas dans un pays qui, comme le Brésil, ne cesse de chercher à préciser son identité nationale (si toutefois il n'y en ait qu'une). Le cadre de la littérature-monde peut justement contribuer à ébaucher ce champ de réflexion. En effet, le concept de « nation », dans le cadre de la littérature-monde, ne peut qu'être considéré comme un défi. Il conviendrait alors d'en argumenter les possibilités mais aussi les limites.

Plusieurs textes me semblent justement aller dans le sens d'un possible développement de ce problème, et ne pas l'éliminer de la confrontation entre une littérature nationale et le cadre plus ample de la littérature-monde. Un exemple parfait est celui du chapitre élaboré par Roberto Acízelo sur la figuration de l'Indigène en général, mais aussi, et en particulier, de Norberto de Sousa Silva. Les propos d'Acízelo en ce qui concerne la naissance et le développement du mouvement indigène, et la reconnaissance de ses deux sources, l'europpéenne et l'autochtone, illustrent bien la manière dont la littérature-monde est impliquée dans les délimitations d'une soi-disant littérature nationale, brésilienne en l'occurrence. C'est d'ailleurs cette conscience qui permet de dépasser les contours d'une opposition ancrée dans une putative « essence pure » de toute littérature nationale.

Trois autres exemples peuvent eux aussi contribuer à éclaircir cette dimension, et on peut les trouver dans les essais de Jobim, sur Machado de Assis, de Rita Terezinha Schmidt, sur Clarice Lispector, et de Coutinho lui-même, sur Guimarães Rosa. J'ai signalé préalablement que l'on pourrait argumenter, pour chacun de ces écrivains, qu'ils constituent une version de la littérature-monde en eux-mêmes. En effet, les réserves exprimées par Machado sur « le sentiment de la nationalité », ainsi que sa pratique d'écrivain et aussi d'essayiste, développent l'idée d'une nationalité littéraire et culturelle hétérogène, où la confrontation entre des éléments disparates n'aboutit jamais nécessairement à un résultat uniforme. Ceci deviendra d'ailleurs plus clair dans l'essai de Lucia Helena sur le modernisme, et l'importance que ce mouvement aura, dans la littérature brésilienne, comme générateur de la conception maintenant devenue célèbre d'« anthropophagie », par laquelle l'importation d'éléments est amalgamée avec les conditions culturelles et littéraires d'origine autochtone, arrivant à un résultat pour ainsi dire « métisse », où monde et nation ne peuvent plus se séparer. Dans sa contribution sur Clarice Lispector, Rita Terezinha Schmidt cerne sa production littéraire comme un ensemble qui, de sa propre réception à l'étranger, et sa traduction dans des langues et des contextes culturels hétérogènes, constitue un cas singulier dans le cadre des études féministes. Ceci aurait peut-être dû être considéré dans un essai séparé, offrant une réflexion plus approfondie, autour de la notion de circulation (développée ces dernières années par Jobim, un des auteurs de ce collectif). En effet, les conditions de la traduction et de la réception, à la fois de Lispector mais aussi plus généralement des auteurs de portée mondiale comme Rosa et Machado,

pourraient faire l'objet de tout un chapitre sur la question décisive de la circulation de la littérature brésilienne comme littérature-monde. C'est aussi le cas de Guimarães Rosa, qui par son soi-disant régionalisme atteint le statut, qui pourrait sembler incompatible avec celui-ci, de l'innovation cosmopolite. Ceci s'effectue surtout par le biais de son langage créatif, où l'invention discursive devient le mouvement-même du dynamisme et de l'hétérogénéité de son plus grand roman.

Tous les contributeurs, du fait de leurs divers points de vue et objets de réflexion, confirment cette idée, qui me semble cruciale, d'une littérature nationale qui, dans sa formation et son développement mêmes, nous donne à voir le caractère composite des éléments qui l'ont constituée. De ce point de vue, le cas du Brésil est peut-être un cas surprenant, par sa proximité historique, pour l'interrogation de ce qu'est une littérature « vraiment » nationale. Paradoxalement, du moins à mon avis, la recherche de la littérature nationale, au Brésil, ne pourrait se faire qu'en acceptant et en accentuant les dissemblances qui l'ont, dès le début, forgée. En cela, ce volume offre un champ paradigmatique pour la prolongation d'un débat qui touche toutes les littératures nationales. Ce débat n'a pas encore réellement connu un véritable essor dans le cadre de la littérature-monde. La série dirigée par Beebee se place ainsi au centre d'une interrogation fondamentale dans le domaine de la littérature-monde.

**Jüri Talvet. *Critical Essays on World Literature, Comparative Literature and the “Other.”*  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars,  
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Jüri Talvet, Professeur à l'Université de Tartu, nous offre, dans son *Critical Essays on World Literature, Comparative Literature and the “Other”*, recueil de divers articles et conférences, une ample réflexion sur la littérature comparée, la « World Literature », les études littéraires comprises très largement. Cette réflexion est donnée pour elle-même ; elle est aussi prise dans un riche ensemble de références à des œuvres, à des contextes littéraires, de comparaisons – Moyen Age, Renaissance, grandes littératures européennes, littérature hispano-américaine, littérature chinoise, littérature estonienne, études de genre (le roman), d'époque (le romantisme), etc. Cette réflexion et ces références sont enfin indissociables de la propre histoire universitaire de Jüri Talvet qu'il rappelle, avec beaucoup de pertinence, dans la préface à son ouvrage et qui expose l'arrière-plan de sa défense de la littérature comparée.

Il y a, en effet, une nécessité et une utilité de la littérature comparée dans le contexte d'un petit pays, à la langue et à la culture incontestables et cependant ignorées ou négligées, longtemps pour des raisons politiques et géopolitiques au sein de l'empire soviétique, et, aujourd'hui, à cause de la « minorité » de l'Estonie – pays d'un peu plus d'un million d'habitants, dont la langue, qui appartient à la famille finno-ougrienne, est elle-même une singularité au regard des langues de grande diffusion. Dans cette histoire personnelle et universitaire, la littérature comparée apparaît attachée moins à des questions, diverses, d'identité qu'à une entreprise de mise en relations entre œuvres, littératures, et au fait qu'elle permet

de dessiner le « sol » le plus riche possible pour quiconque reconnaît son propre intérêt pour la littérature, les humanités, l'humanisme. Certains pourront dire que c'est là retourner à des approches ou des pratiques conventionnelles ou datées de la littérature comparée. Ce serait là une erreur de lecture. En même temps qu'elle permet de préserver une fidélité aux grandes traditions littéraires occidentales, qui pesaient d'un poids presque secret dans l'Estonie soumise à l'empire soviétique, la littérature comparée, telle que la voit Jüri Talvet, en une vision rigoureusement actuelle, ne se limite pas seulement à des perspectives historiques, philologiques, culturelles, internationales. Derrière ces adjectifs, Jüri Talvet invite à identifier bien des champs de cette discipline et, plus spécifiquement, les études culturelles, comprises très largement, qu'il n'approuve pas, la déconstruction qu'il critique parce qu'il y voit un exercice de dissolution des humanités, le sociologisme qu'il tient pour insupportable à quiconque a été soumis aux conventions du marxisme, et toute théorie livrée à sa théorisation et à l'infini de ses discours, comme hors sol et dans un lien trop peu fréquent aux œuvres littéraires mêmes.

À l'encontre de ces voies aujourd'hui dominantes, l'actualité de la littérature comparée se dit simplement : selon la réponse qu'elle permet d'apporter à la notation fréquente de la crise des humanités. Cette crise est une crise des méthodes qui privent les humanités de tout sol, parce qu'on oublie que s'agissant de la littérature, des littératures et des recherches qu'elles appellent, rien ne peut être créé, ni pensé, ni étudié, si on abandonne les références au sujet, aux leçons de Jüri Lotman sur la sémiosphère, au rapport au monde et à tout autre – tout autre être humain, toute autre culture –, à l'évidence de la créativité, que Jüri Talvet note en empruntant la notion d'explosion à Jüri Lotman, et, plus essentiellement, si on ignore ce qui fait le pouvoir de l'œuvre littéraire : son caractère esthétique, c'est-à-dire sensible, par quoi elle peut être du sol même et de tout autre, et reçue en tout lieu, par quiconque ; son discours propre, à la fois allégorique, ainsi capable d'allier idée et image et d'assurer une lisibilité, et métaphorique, ainsi apte, par le jeu de la métaphore, à s'ouvrir en lui-même à tout autre. La littérature comparée est le recueil de ces références et des approches de la littérature qu'elles suscitent. Elle est, en elle-même, la reconnaissance d'une poétique fondamentale, qu'on devrait identifier dans toutes les œuvres importantes : cette poétique allie création et anthropologie et permet des créations littéraires corrélées à travers le temps et à travers les cultures ; elle autorise les lectures comparatistes, transnationales, transculturelles, et les comparaisons littéraires, qui sont



des actualisations de corpus d'œuvres sans que l'histoire soit ignorée. On pourrait commenter longuement ces propositions de Jüri Talvet. Disons qu'elles définissent la littérature comparée comme une discipline qui ne sépare pas les œuvres de contextes spécifiques et qui cependant reconnaît leur aptitude à être diffusées, reprises, lues en bien des lieux et des temps, sans qu'on ait à en venir à des lois des sciences humaines qui imposeraient des études externes de la littérature, sans qu'on ait à s'enfermer dans une poétique de l'autonomie, ni, enfin, sans qu'on ait à être asservi à des séries historiques. Par quoi, la littérature comparée, en un jeu de liberté, ne cesse de faire varier son « edaphos », son sol, pour répéter un terme qu'utilise Jüri Lotman.

Cette approche de la littérature comparée n'exclut pas de reconnaître des champs voisins, « World Literature », études de traduction, panoramas historiques, études littéraires nationales. Sans qu'on puisse entrer ici dans trop de détails, dégageons la perspective pluraliste de Jüri Talvet. Il a une conviction claire et constante : si on entend reconnaître un droit de cité à l'autre, on ne peut pas développer une pratique critique monologique ; elle doit être souple et faire droit à des antithèses ou à des oppositions. *Ainsi à propos de la « World Literature »* : celle-ci ne peut seulement s'attacher à des canons littéraires, fussent-ils mondiaux ; ils portent une part d'univocité. Or, dès lors qu'on reconnaît des œuvres canoniques – Jüri Talvet en cite un grand nombre –, on reconnaît une propriété d'altérité. *Ainsi à propos des études de traduction* : Jüri Talvet rappelle leur partage entre une dominante littéraliste et une dominante adaptative ; chacune est, à sa manière, univoque ; il vaut mieux voir le traducteur et sa traduction dans un rapport symbiotique avec l'œuvre, selon une manière d'échange dans lequel le traducteur ne cesse de se situer et de renouveler la possibilité de la symbiose. *Ainsi à propos de l'histoire littéraire* : aucune histoire ne peut être nomologique ; toute histoire est une histoire de variation et d'ouverture. Aussi, Jüri Talvet voit-il les études d'intertextualité, sortes de longues histoires de la continuité des textes, comme des dessins trop contraignants des rapports d'œuvre à œuvre – on mettrait l'œuvre seconde comme sous l'autorité de l'œuvre première, antécédente. Il préfère considérer les liens manifestes d'œuvre à œuvre, ou plus simplement, leurs ressemblances, comme des exemples de « transgeniality ». On retrouve, avec ce terme, la notation de l'altérité et on vient à l'idée d'accueil dont elle est inséparable. Hors de la seule histoire littéraire, altérité et accueil peuvent être en eux-mêmes des thématiques critiques qui permettent de construire des comparaisons littéraires, aux

données parfois fort distantes ou fort hétérogènes – le poète estonien contemporain, Juhan Liiv, et le poète chinois, Jidi Majia, de la minorité Yi. *Ainsi à propos des littératures nationales* : chacun s'accordera avec Jüri Talvet – traiter d'une littérature selon ses seuls aspects nationaux conduit à des conclusions restreintes. Il est plus remarquable que l'auteur considère la littérature nationale d'un petit pays, l'Estonie, de la même manière. Il faut comprendre : des échanges littéraires, si on fait droit à l'altérité, sont des échanges égaux. Ajoutons : sans cette hypothèse ou cette condition d'une égalité de droit, tout échange risquerait d'être une domination. Les littératures étrangères présentes, traduites en Estonie ou assimilées par la littérature locale, ne laissent déceler aucun exercice de domination. C'est pourquoi, selon Jüri Talvet, tout comparatiste devrait avoir une connaissance et une pratique d'une littérature mineure ; il y trouverait l'illustration d'une égalité ou de l'attente d'une égalité.

Il est rare aujourd'hui de trouver dans un ouvrage de littérature comparée des références explicites et développées à l'éthique et à la morale. Les chapitres 5, 6, 7 et 8 de ce recueil d'essais portent sur l'éthique, la morale, l'axiologie. Il ne faut pas entendre que la littérature est présentée comme le moyen de défendre tel type d'éthique, de morale, telles valeurs. Une œuvre n'est pas nécessairement « engagée » éthiquement. Elle est éthique par son statut même d'œuvre, par sa propriété d'altérité, par son attention à l'altérité, par le fait que l'écrivain et le lecteur sont inévitablement pris dans cette propriété et cette attention. On comprend que c'est là la conséquence directe de la poétique, déjà précisée, constitutive de toute œuvre. On comprend que se trouve, par-là, définie une orientation possible de la critique littéraire sans que soit proposée une règle morale quelconque. Il suffit de citer le titre du chapitre 7, dont il faut dire que l'expression est particulièrement forte : « The Challenge of Axiological (Re)orientation of Literary Canons : Can Ethical Literary Criticism Provide Salvation ? » Il y a une autre manière de dire cette perspective éthique : lire dans l'œuvre l'« infra-other », un terme de Jüri Talvet, et refuser une « self-conscience », qui se voudrait achevée.

On vient à un paradoxe. Jüri Talvet développe une vision caractérisée de la littérature comparée ; il ne s'attache pas cependant à donner une liste de paradigmes et de méthodes. Ce paradoxe a sa solution. Cette vision se définit dans les termes qui viennent d'être dits. Ces termes sont eux-mêmes attachés à la lecture directe d'une époque littéraire, de grandes œuvres, qui sont illustratrices en elles-mêmes de cette poétique et de son souci de l'autre – ainsi de la plupart des œuvres que cite Jüri Talvet et qui

lui permettent de placer côte à côte Montaigne et le poète estonien Liiv, ce même écrivain et Unamuno –, de ces perspectives éthiques – ainsi de l'humanisme de la Renaissance. De longues chaînes se dessinent. Elles portent parfois, sans exclure les perspectives qui viennent d'être notées, sur des topos, sur des comparaisons qui relèvent de la titrologie (roman européen et roman sud-américain), sur des continuités littéraires à partir de Dante. Certains craindront la disparate ou une part d'arbitraire. Il y a une limite assurée à cette crainte. La disparate ou l'arbitraire ne sont pas possibles, d'une part, parce que toute lecture est ici littérale, d'autre part, parce que, pour Jüri Talvet toute lecture est située – en un sens contextuel et un sens existentiel. *Contexte* : les œuvres font contexte par leurs rapprochements ; ce contexte n'est pas impropre car il relève des jeux de l'altérité. *Sens existentiel* : tout lecteur est lui-même situé et inscrit dans une position par les œuvres qu'il lit, et se trouve ainsi pris dans une expérience d'existence, celle du moi et de l'autre. C'est là une dualité qui revient souvent dans cet ouvrage. Notons que ce n'est pas là une banalité. Certes, l'autre est certain, inévitable. Mais, pour Jüri Talvet, tout se joue dans la négociation avec l'autre, avec la distance de la différence. La littérature comparée est l'exercice d'une telle négociation, ainsi que les grandes œuvres le sont. Ces remarques peuvent se formuler d'une manière plus nette ou plus brutale : puisque la présence de l'autre est assurée, il est vain d'imiter toute une part de la critique contemporaine, qui ne cesse de célébrer l'autre, une manière d'autre absolu ; il vaut mieux considérer l'autre selon sa distance et sa différence, autrement dit, selon un éloignement qui appelle un calcul de proximité.

Jüri Talvet n'évite pas un débat devenu fort conventionnel, celui de la littérature comparée et de la « World Literature ». De fait, il ne s'engage pas dans les détails habituels de ce débat, car il ne voit pas d'opposition stricte entre l'une et l'autre discipline ; il les place sous le signe d'une symbiose. Ce n'est là ni une position de facilité, ni la recherche d'une conciliation sans conséquence. Dès lors qu'on a à l'esprit les principales perspectives de la pensée critique de Jüri Talvet, l'opposition et le débat ne valent pas véritablement. On ne peut concevoir la diffusion la plus grande d'œuvres littéraires sans considérer leur reconnaissance propre de l'altérité, même si cette reconnaissance reste indirecte, même si elle appartient au seul jeu des images et des figures littéraires et poétiques.

Nous avons ici proposé un strict compte rendu de cet ouvrage, *Critical Essays on World Literature, Comparative Literature and the "Other"*. Nous entendons cependant donner un plein droit de cité à l'originalité et

l'éthique de la pensée critique de Jüri Talvet. On aurait pu poursuivre plus longuement : lire ces essais critiques selon une lecture comparée avec les principaux « traités » contemporains de littérature comparée, de « World Literature », selon une lecture accompagnée du rappel des principales thèses de la déconstruction, du postcolonial, du postmoderne, de la vaste « French theory » – toutes choses auxquelles Jüri Talvet faire référence. Supposons que nous ayons pratiqué une telle lecture. Cette lecture nous enseignerait : Jüri Talvet est, de fait, en dialogue implicite avec toutes les thèses que portent les travaux attachés à ces orientations critiques. Mais il ne cherche pas à faire de la théorie sur la théorie, à ajouter des arguments pour défaire d'autres arguments. Sa théorie de la littérature comparée, car il a bien une théorie de cette discipline, naît de ce que font les œuvres mêmes : ne cesser de négocier la distance de la différence. Jüri Talvet reste ainsi fidèle au lycéen, à l'étudiant qu'il fut à l'époque de l'empire communiste. Cet étudiant a appris à reconnaître et à négocier la distance qui le séparait de ce qui lui était un autre radical : les grandes œuvres de l'Occident. C'est cette leçon de la résistance à un empire, à tout empire, que Jüri Talvet reprend dans sa défense de la littérature comparée. Cette leçon, qui fait la pleine actualité de la littérature comparée, porte deux conséquences : il ne faut pas craindre d'affronter le relativisme – culturel, cognitif, éthique –, inévitable lorsqu'on décide de refuser l'empire et de reconnaître qu'on appartient à une « petite » culture ; il faut savoir, à l'occasion de cet affrontement, reconnaître l'autre. Par quoi, on entre dans un jeu d'universel sans règle d'universalité. Ce sont là des conséquences que ne peut refuser la « World Literature » : dire la « World Literature », ce n'est que dire la littérature universelle sans règle d'universalité, parce qu'elle est la littérature de tout autre – ce tout autre que Dante et Montaigne, pour citer deux écrivains auxquels Jüri Talvet fait souvent référence, nous invitaient, tôt dans la l'histoire occidentale de la littérature, à reconnaître. L'actualité retrouve la grande tradition qui est, de fait, dans les lectures que nous propose *Critical Essays on World Literature, Comparative Literature and the "Other"*, une tradition de libération.

Il y a bien, dans cet ouvrage, une réponse à la crise des humanités. C'est une réponse importante, formulée d'une manière sobre et hors de vaines polémiques, une réponse qui mériterait d'être comparée à d'autres thèses critiques, qui se veulent libératrices mais qui restent fortement monologiques, ne serait-ce que par leurs arrière-plans épistémologiques ou idéologiques. On pourrait ainsi mener des comparaisons avec bien

des penseurs cités par Jüri Talvet, Foucault, Bourdieu ; permettons-nous d'ajouter une autre possibilité de comparaison, celle qui nous conduirait à Gayatri Spivak, largement attachée à la défense de l'autre et avocate de la littérature comparée.



**Nicholas Meihuizen. *Yeats, Otherness and the Orient. Aesthetic and Spiritual Bearings.*  
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The critical and scholarly literature treating the poet, dramatist, and essayist William Butler Yeats is vast. Citing an enormous range of commentators, Meihuizen elects to discuss Yeats' work and thought at a high level against the plethora of views already elaborated over the course of a century. At times he tries to offer analogies between Yeatsian concepts and those of recent French critics like Foucault and Derrida, not accepting how retarded such latter-day theorizers are in literary history with respect to figures like Yeats and well beyond the moment of Mallarmé, because they reflect a French culture only belatedly influenced on a deeper level by European Romanticism. The frequent references to Levinas (to whom essentially chapter five is devoted) ring as more apposite. In presenting *both* Yeats' realization of the need for a national literature Irish in spirit while English in language, *and* Yeats' reaching out to the world at large, Meihuizen forgoes drawing on such obvious comparisons as, for example, American late Romantics like Hawthorne and Melville who in English express their home culture, felt as different from Britain's, while exploring other cultures on a broader, even a global plane. Meihuizen traces a general sequence of ultimately overlapping Yeatsian interests – notably his larger Orientalism, an intensely felt “dialogue” with the earlier Leo Africanus, a productive relationship with the notable Bengal contemporary Tagore and with India at large, with Japanese Noh drama, with Byzantium as a poetic realm, and more.

What is special about Meihuizen's account is how, without losing the main thread, he effortlessly spins in references to the range of spiritualist tendencies connected with Yeats which coexisted with rival phenomena of the dazzling, diverse Modernist era. If one calls to mind such moments as Hans Castorp's experience at a séance in Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* or the experiences of Calder-Marshall in his biography *The Magic of My Youth*, these phenomena could on their own merit larger comparativistic treatment. Also very refreshing is how Meihuizen manages to make fine distinctions as regards the degrees of Yeats' commitment to any particular belief system over varying durations and within a larger evolving complex of ideas. He does not carp when the poet moves into a new phase, because it is clear that Yeats is a committed seeker who exhibits a kind of psychological split, on the one hand ready to embrace diverse spiritual pathways, yet on the other hand naturally wary and loath to be led astray in his searching. Accordingly, we are reminded usefully, on one level, of statements in which Yeats sounds like a brilliant cultural historian of his own times, an age replete with such savants; and, on another level, of Yeats the lyrical voice achieving virtually magical syntheses of his search, as in his late, great poem "Sailing to Byzantium." Meihuizen skillfully examines Yeats' situation, as it evolves and as seen by Yeats himself, in the midst of contending voices which elaborate the Victorian world view and soon morph into the polyphony of the Modernist chorus. Thus Meihuizen's effort to use recent "theory" of the later 1960s onward as a screen of discourse against which to highlight Yeats is somewhat regrettable, because this diversion is more likely to act as an encumbrance and mislead rather than guide curious newcomers.

Nonetheless, experienced fans will find Meihuizen's high-level discourse rewarding, because he does not harp on matching up Yeatsian "belief" statements of any particular moment in his development in order to score them for longer-term consistency, nor does he fault the poet for shifting his ground and interests. Rather, he accepts that Yeats is ever searching, ever pondering the psychic phenomena which underlie the many ways the human mind may interact with its world and participate eventually on a world scale. Over and over again, Meihuizen shows just how fertile Yeats is as a commentator on poets old and new and able to recognize different kinds of voice. The flow of Yeats' critical and cultural exploration in his essays and the interplay between his need to create his own system and his penchant for "dialogism" ultimately freed of time-bondage are nicely sketched, as in chapter four's study titled "The Daimon



and Leo Africanus.” Chapter five contrasts Yeats to his contemporaries Freud and Jung, by showing how, rather, he shares poetically with many Romantic and Modernist writers, for example through the use of the symbolic figure of Hermes / Mercury, the symbol of the tower, the concern over Faustian temptation inherent in the craving for magic, and more in the European repertory. We have no right to complain about things unmentioned in such a profusion of useful linkages as those Meihuizen notes in this fine chapter, virtually a monograph in miniature. But inevitably some readers will feel it would be appropriate also to cite a broad analogy between Yeats’ and Joyce’s (as closely contemporary Anglophone Irish) and other Modernist authors’ evocations and uses of “the minds of the living and the dead” (189). Similarly, it is hard to suppress the yearning to hear acknowledged out loud the underlying drive toward a Modernist encyclopedic awareness *both* in poetry (e.g., Pound, Yeats *et al.*) and in prose (e.g., Proust, Mann, Joyce, Dos Passos *et al.*). But the reviewer applauds how masterfully a confident Meihuizen takes for granted that the essayist-poet Yeats is one high-ranking model of the Modernist author as a savant-poet. Meihuizen traces how Yeats, gradually, from his historically ordained perch in Ireland, expands his exploration into the world at large. Naturally, some readers may well hanker for brief mention of how, in contrast, the prose master Joyce expands via the medium of the totalizing ironic-encyclopedic novel.

Directly and indirectly, many Modernist authors – like the poet Pound in the *Cantos* – act as universalizing cultural historians. Meihuizen is performing a basic service in concentrating on how Yeats, like so many authors in the Modernist era, stakes out his global points of reference. In some instances, the connection is lively but relatively limited, as in his exchanges with his Indian contemporary, Nobel Prize winner Tagore. In other cases, as when his creative fascination for Japanese Noh dramas awakens, Yeats becomes expansive, a cross-cultural Modernist participant. The ways in which the Irish author shares with fellow writers and traditions across the world, as well as his efforts to absorb and revalidate older Irish culture through the medium of English, eventually offer their own patterns. As Meihuizen’s book moves toward its finale, we are treated to an assertion of “final” values on his as well as the poet’s part. Many strata of commentators over several centuries worked to establish the pre-eminence of Venice as a complex representative of European accomplishment in the arts, the decaying city itself constituting an artefact shared internationally. This special attention to

Venice in the condition of time was a congenial subset of a more general celebration of Italy as a virtual outdoor museum of Europe over many eras – a many-splendored heritage relevant eventually also to humanity at large, and certainly for the New World, as Hawthorne demonstrated in the great romance *The Marble Faun* (1860). Yeats made a different choice for the ultimate symbolic realm. He did not personally visit the fallen eastern capital of Christianity, but as Meihuizen reminds us, that fabled city became indissolubly associated with Yeats' aesthetic vision in the late poem "Sailing to Byzantium." It is nugatory to argue against Meihuizen's conviction that "Sailing to Byzantium" is a perfect poem, Yeats' consummate achievement. Likewise, it seems unnecessary to correlate it (although we can) to any of the poet's spiritualist obsessions, any more than we should dwell (for example) on why the Boehmean pansophic chiliast Blake's words are "inappropriate" to constitute, as they do today, a favorite hymn in the Anglican church. Yeats' golden bird now sings forever in the golden haze of his poem, long after the poet's spiritualist quest has receded as a topic that seems imperative, even though that background must be observed as part of the many-faceted cultural history of Modernism. After having reminded us of many stages in Yeats' intellectual development, Meihuizen has garnered the soundest credentials for allowing himself to venture a "final" judgment which rests on poetic richness.

**Cyril Vettorato. *Poésie moderne et oralité dans les Amériques noires. « Diaspora de voix ».*  
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Dans cet ouvrage issu de la thèse en Littérature comparée qu'il a soutenue en 2011, Cyril Vettorato propose de « lire ensemble un certain nombre de poètes brésiliens, caribéens et états-uniens du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle à partir de leur inscription dans une même diaspora » (7). C. Vettorato souligne d'emblée que la « diaspora » dont il est question dans son essai relève d'une cartographie complexe, faisant par-là écho aux travaux du sociologue Stéphane Dufoix (dont on peut lire une synthèse dans *La Dispersion. Une histoire des usages du mot « diaspora »*). S'il s'agit d'aborder l'œuvre d'écrivain·e·s d'ascendance africaine, leur origine ethnique – quand sa caractérisation ne pose pas problème en tant que telle – n'est pas un critère suffisant pour circonscrire les voix et voies poétiques étudiées (15–17). Cette approche souple de la notion de diaspora conditionne la division de l'essai en trois parties, proposant une approche historique (I), poétique (II) et socio-discursive (III) d'une « diaspora de voix », selon une formule empruntée au poète et dramaturge nigérian Niyi Osundare.

L'essai frappe d'abord par sa densité et son érudition, nourrie par de nombreux développements notionnels l'inscrivant dans une interrogation méthodologique qui déborde la stricte analyse du corpus d'étude. Or, celui-ci est déjà très vaste, en raison de la double focalisation qui caractérise la démarche mise en œuvre. D'une part, C. Vettorato analyse l'œuvre poétique de sept auteurs du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui correspondent à trois aires linguistiques (anglophone, lusophone, hispanophone) : les poètes nord-américains Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka et Paul Beatty,

qui appartiennent à trois générations différentes et sont, pour les deux premiers, emblématiques de la « *Harlem Renaissance* » et du « *Black Arts Movement* » ; les poètes brésiliens Solano Trindade et Abdias do Nascimento, qui permettent d'éclairer le passage d'« un moment populiste de la veine afro-brésilienne » à certaines « métamorphoses idéologiques de la poésie afro-brésilienne au contact des traditions d'autres pays » (66) ; et, pour la Caraïbe, Nicolás Guillén, père du *negrismo* cubain, ainsi que le Barbadien Kamau Brathwaite, dont le recueil *The Arrivants* « incarne mieux que nul autre les enjeux des écritures qui étaient celles de la Caraïbe anglophone à l'époque du "*Caribbean Artists Movement*" » (66–67). À cette sélection s'ajoute un corpus complémentaire, qui comporte cette fois quelques voix féminines – telles que celles de Gwendolyn Brooks, Sonia Sanchez, Esmeralda Ribeiro ou Marise Tietra (67). Nous n'aborderons donc ici que quelques grandes lignes de force de cette étude.

Dynamique essentielle du début à la fin de l'ouvrage, la volonté de cerner un « espace-problème » est au cœur de la démarche de C. Vettorato. L'expression « Amériques noires » empruntée à Roger Bastide permet de cerner un corpus « traversé [...] par l'affirmation d'une identité » autant que « par la mise en scène de l'aspect mouvant et problématique de cette dernière » (36). Comme le souligne C. Vettorato,

[l]'expression d'« Amériques noires » se distingue par sa qualité de métaphore spatiale ; mais sa spatialité est éclatée, discontinue, et se déploie aux États-Unis, au Brésil, à Cuba, en Équateur, en Guyane, en Jamaïque, et ailleurs encore – on pourrait même aller jusqu'à évoquer Paris et Londres, où plusieurs écrivains emblématiques de cet espace ont élaboré leurs pensées et leurs œuvres. (43)

Si les études transatlantiques ne sont pas le champ de recherches auquel l'étude se réfère en premier lieu, la notion d'« Amériques noires » entre évidemment en dialogue avec celle d'« Atlantique noir » (voir entre autres Paul Gilroy *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, 1993, que convoque C. Vettorato à quelques reprises). En tout cas, l'idée est bien de désigner « cet espace abstrait, cet angle d'attaque que l'on peut adopter pour comprendre les legs culturels africains dans ce que certains nomment "l'Amérique des Plantations" voire "plantationnaire" ou "post-plantationnaire" – et qui s'étendent du Nord au Sud du continent, sans oublier les îles de la Caraïbes » (43). De fait, un tel « espace discontinu » ne peut « se conceptualiser que dans un rapport problématique avec des concepts tels que la nation, la culture ou l'identité sociale », note

C. Vettorato, avant de souligner que « les “Amériques noires” sont d’emblée un continent sans contours, un espace-problème traversé de questions – ou plutôt, structuré par elles » (43). Son ambition est dès lors de questionner « la façon dont ces problèmes deviennent des problèmes spécifiquement littéraires » (51).

Cette démarche sociocritique articule une dimension spatiale à une approche historique, qui se déploie surtout dans la première partie de l’essai. À ce titre, il s’agit pour C. Vettorato de penser dans une optique transculturelle les « Amériques noires » selon « un regard attentif [...] à l’histoire des discours et des représentations, et ce sur un temps long qui permet d’articuler les discours raciaux contemporains avec ceux qui ont accompagné l’expérience américaine post-colombienne et la modernité occidentale » (48). Dans ce contexte, la « renaissance littéraire noire » associée au Harlem des années 1920 est par exemple analysée comme « un événement global, cosmopolite » (180–187) – manifestant un cosmopolitisme associé à « l’idée selon laquelle les identités seraient imbriquées à la manière des cercles concentriques, et chaque homme pourrait à la fois assumer certaines particularités culturelles et se revendiquer au-delà de ces particularités » (63). À l’heure de certaines crispations hexagonales, qui se traduisent par des accusations de communautarisme et / ou par un rejet « du » culturalisme nord-américain à tout va, l’essai de Cyril Vettorato rappelle ainsi que « [l’]histoire des poésies afrodescendantes, volontiers décriée comme étant porteuse d’un projet identitaire essentialiste et excluant, traduit en réalité un profond cosmopolitisme » (*ibid.*).

Deuxième grand fil rouge de l’essai, la relation entre littérature et oralité est également éclairée à l’aune de ses enjeux politiques. Si, pour les auteurs étudiés, « la culture orale devient l’indice et le cachet d’une négritude des textes » (22), C. Vettorato montre que leur appropriation spécifique de pratiques orales joue un rôle essentiel dans l’émergence d’une communauté transnationale de discours poétique. Le passage de l’une à l’autre est ainsi marqué par l’articulation de la deuxième et de la troisième partie de l’essai. Comme l’observe C. Vettorato,

[p]our ces écrivains s’étant explicitement inscrits dans une perspective afrodescendante, la question de la dimension transnationale de cette perspective s’est posée de façon si vivace que l’adoption d’un angle d’approche transhistorique s’impose au niveau macro, celui de l’histoire littéraire, comme au niveau micro, celui du style. Non seulement leurs propositions poétiques

prennent sens dans un mouvement historique commun, mais elles se sont souvent répondues les unes aux autres [...]. (60)

À cet égard, il s'avère non seulement que « le point nodal de ces écritures poétiques centrées sur l'expérience afrodescendante » est « le caractère fluctuant [...] de la définition de l'identité et de l'altérité » (36) qu'elles mettent en scène et en jeu, mais aussi, et du même coup, que la communauté qu'elles constituent n'est pas à « penser sous le signe de la cohérence et du “déjà-là” » (59). Reprenant une formule d'Homi Bhabha dans *Les Lieux de la culture*, C. Vettorato propose bien plus d'envisager cette communauté poétique comme « l'espace discursif au sein duquel et par lequel des auteurs s'identifiant avec l'expérience noire des Amériques créent ‘un agent [*agency*] à travers des positions incommensurables (et non pas simplement multiples)’ » (59). Mise en perspective avec l'ensemble du corpus, l'analyse de l'œuvre de Kamau Brathwaite permet entre autres de montrer que « la poétique de l'oralité qui caractérise [son] corpus se double d'un usage constant de la polyphonie, qui fait mentir un Bakhtine lorsqu'il affirme que la poésie est essentiellement monologique » (533). Tout en développant de fines analyses de détail, C. Vettorato parvient ainsi à « pratiquer la lecture poétique sans sacrifier à l'idéal du “génie individuel” l'extraordinaire énergie politique collective » émanant du corpus d'étude (67)

Troisième élément saillant dans l'essai, une interrogation de la notion européenne de modernité se déploie à partir du corpus concerné. La poésie que C. Vettorato nous donne à lire renvoie à un phénomène que l'on peut qualifier de moderne, les voix afrodescendantes qu'elle fait entendre représentant une nouveauté dans les champs littéraires respectivement concernés. Comme pour les avant-gardes occidentales, la modernité littéraire de ses auteurs se déploie « en position de liminarité avec d'autres domaines (politique, musique) » (52), qui justifie en partie le qualificatif de « renaissant » qui lui a été attribué (131–139). Il n'empêche que dans le corpus concerné, « l'alchimie rimbaldienne du “je est un autre” », qui a pu par exemple inspirer les surréalistes européens, « ne sort pas indemne de l'opération poétique *par laquelle le poète se fait la “voix” des siens, au terme d'un long travail d'identification* » (478 ; nous soulignons). De ce point de vue, la valorisation de la rupture (au moins formelle) comme indice de modernité n'est plus de mise. Les auteurs étudiés font ainsi émerger une modernité *autre*, qui ne se limite pas à la formulation polémique de « contre-récits poétiques » (559).

Pour faire écho à cette réflexion, on peut noter qu'il en va de même de la dynamique d'engagement dans laquelle s'inscrivent la plupart des auteurs abordés. « Dans le dessein d'éviter [l]e risque d'enfermement dans une sorte de statut documentaire, les théoriciens de la littérature noire se sont tournés vers des critères formels, soit pour les substituer au critère précédent, soit pour les y associer » (19), constate C. Vettorato, rappelant *mutatis mutandis* ce qu'observent Odile Cazenave et Patricia Célérier dans leur ouvrage *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment* (voir en particulier le chap. I, « Enduring Commitments », 15–50). Plutôt que de définir l'œuvre engagée comme « associée étroitement à la politique, aux débats qu'elle génère et aux combats qu'elle implique », selon une formule que C. Vettorato emprunte à Benoît Denis, il aurait été intéressant de procéder à une extension de la notion d'« engagement », à l'instar du mouvement dans lequel l'essai entraîne celle de « modernité ». En montrant que tous les exemples qu'il convoque visent à « établir un rapport particulier entre un passé relu et des séries de futurs possibles, potentiels, contenus dans l'acte poétique » (559), C. Vettorato renvoie en effet à l'un des grands pôles rhétorico-poétiques de l'engagement littéraire conçu comme une aspiration transhistorique et transculturelle : sa force de proposition. Plutôt que de distinguer le corpus d'une « poésie engagée réduite à sa dimension de propagande » (569), l'essai nous invite, en somme, à repenser la notion d'engagement à la lumière de ce corpus. Ce n'est là que l'un des prolongements fructueux auxquels nous invite cet ouvrage important pour le champ des études comparatistes.

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**Jean-Claude Laborie, Jean-Marc Moura et  
Sylvie Parizet, dir. *Vers une histoire littéraire  
transatlantique*. Paris : Classiques Garnier,  
2018. Pp. 344. ISBN : 9782406077459.**

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Cet ouvrage collectif composé par un groupe de recherche à Paris Nanterre, rassemble un nombre impressionnant de travaux qui ambitionnent de redéfinir l'histoire littéraire selon une double démarche : d'une part, il s'agit de ne plus restreindre l'histoire littéraire à des ensembles nationaux ; d'autre part, d'ériger un certain nombre de nouvelles capitales de la littérature mondiale (et non plus se limiter à Paris, Londres ou New York). L'ouvrage privilégie de nouveaux axes de recherche (le Brésil, le Québec, l'Afrique lusophone) et de cartographie, offrant ainsi une histoire de la littérature moins eurocentrée. Clairement inspiré par les nombreux essais publiés par J. M. Moura et Y. Clavaron (qui avaient organisé un colloque à Saint-Etienne, dont les actes ont été publiés sous le titre *Les Empires de l'Atlantique*), le volume se structure en trois parties et suit un ordre chronologique.

Dans la première section, le propos est de remonter aux origines de l'élargissement d'un cadre européen en se penchant sur des chroniqueurs du Nouveau Monde et plus particulièrement des Amériques Noires. J.C. Laborie revient sur la notion d'« acculturation » de Roger Bastide et de son disciple Antonio Candido. Les découvertes de l'Amérique et du Brésil ont ouvert une première voie vers l'observation et la description de la littérature transatlantique essentiellement française et lusophone. Ce qui sous-tend l'ensemble des travaux de ce volume est le concept de décolonial, terme absent mais qui s'impose toutefois à travers les références à Walter Mignolo. Ce chercheur latino-américain est cité par

Pierre Suter et Natascha Ueckmann. Ce terme est également suggéré dans les contributions de critiques brésiliens comme Silvia Contarini (Gyssels 2017). La décolonialité en effet vise à abattre les nombreuses frontières entre les différentes régions anciennement colonisées, et à stimuler l'indépendance des centres épistémologiques en favorisant les échanges sud-sud. C'est ce que le Kényan Ngugi Wa'Thiongo entendait par « *decolonizing the mind* », dès les années 70 du siècle dernier. Il suggérait de la sorte de briser la domination du « premier monde » et de l'hégémonie culturelle européenne et américaine. L'œuvre de Wa'Thiongo est étudiée ici par Pierre Boizete (133–46). A ces premiers constats, s'ajoutent d'autres apports : celui des féminismes. A cet égard, Chloé Chaudet remarque à juste titre la position quelque peu négligée de Hélène Cixous (voir Gyssels et Stevens) sous la plume de Judith Butler, celui ensuite des études du genre avec l'introduction tardive, en France, de l'intersectionnalité (voir Couti et Gyssels). Ces observations témoignent de l'importance de la géocritique (Bertrand Westphal aurait pu être cité dans ce contexte) et de la transversalité (N. Ueckmann).

Ce triple axe se reflète dans des analyses de textes de fiction d'auteur.e.s emblématiques : Maryse Condé y a toute sa place (Fournier-Kiss, 223–36), flanquée de Glissant dont l'aspiration à la transatlantinité semble résonner avec la « *tropologie* » (Frank Ankersmit) et l'écriture fictionnelle de l'Histoire (Sabine Gröning).

L'ouvrage inclut des études d'auteurs moins connus, comme Louis-Philippe Dalembert (les contributions de Suter et d'Odile Gannier). De même, Yves Clavaron nous fait découvrir Chief Olayodé et Taiye Selasi, pendant que Laborie aiguise notre désir d'en apprendre plus au sujet de Cruz et Souza (31). L'espace lusophone (Fernanda Vilar et Eugène Tavares) jouit ici d'une exposition remarquable.

Parmi les contributions très originales, notons encore la démonstration de la « circulation » transatlantique de la French Theory et du Nouveau Roman (Lison Noël, 121–32), de la Bible comme premier intertexte pour les littératures transatlantiques (Sylvie Parizet), ainsi que l'étude de l'espace québécois comme lieu de traverses et d'accueil pour des Méditerranéens (Stefania Cubedou-Proux) et des Haïtiens (B. Osiepa, qui orthographe mal le nom de Schwarz-Bart 217). Ces contributions décentrent l'histoire littéraire restée en effet trop longtemps euro- et ethnocentrée.

La richesse d'un genre très italo-français, le sonnet, s'illustre ici dans les poétiques des Amériques et de la littérature africaine américaine. D. Rumeau cite entre autres l'exemple de Claude McKay (qui est afro-américain). Cette partie de l'ouvrage offre également une ouverture sur la mise en regard de l'Amérique latine (J. Cortazar) et de l'Amérique du Nord (R.L. Stevenson) par Raphaël Luis (263–76). Isolde Lecostey rappelle pour sa part combien le surréaliste Breton est affecté par son expérience mexicaine, teintée de contradictions.

Toutefois, il faut bien avouer que la lisibilité du volume pourrait être améliorée. D'abord, on ne peut que regretter l'usage abusif de l'italique dans le corps du texte (par exemple page 142), ainsi que dans les notes en bas de page. La combinaison avec les guillemets, tant pour les concepts introduits (dont certains sont cependant loin d'être en vigueur, et d'autres étrangement désuets) est superflue. Quant aux concepts, on n'appelle plus « écrivains de l'Atlantique noir » des « Afropéens » comme Kwahulé (étudié dans une excellente monographie de Virginie Soubrier, qui est absente dans la bibliographie d'Aurélia Mouzet). De plus, les citations dans les textes et les références en anglais qui figurent en bas de page sont en italique. Enfin, une convention rédactionnelle qu'il faudrait sans doute revoir est le flottement de la majuscule pour les mouvements ou courants, tels que la négritude et la poétique de la Relation glissantienne. Enfin, nous remarquons que le titre original de la première édition d'ouvrages parus en néerlandais (par exemple d'Ankersmit) fait défaut dans la bibliographie.

Dans l'ensemble, cette publication est inspirée par le comparatisme radical tel qu'on devrait davantage le prôner et l'enseigner. Elle reste forcément incomplète, d'autres régions et d'autres voix illustratives de cette mouvance restant hors champ. Il s'agit toutefois d'un ouvrage exemplaire qui, tout en traitant d'auteurs et critiques canoniques (Carpentier, Glissant et Mbembé), constitue un pas décisif vers une histoire littéraire résolument transatlantique.

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**Yves Clavaron. *Francophonie, postcolonialisme et mondialisation*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018. Pp. 258. ISBN: 9782406069751.**

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As the title indicates, Yves Clavaron's monograph revolves around the concepts of "francophonie," postcolonialism and globalization, three concepts that the author proposes to bring into play. Clavaron undertakes "to examine the place of French-speaking literatures in the context of globalization while widening the reflection to phenomena not specifically French-speaking, in order to link the cultures of decolonization" (13).<sup>1</sup> He proposes to "build new transnational literary spaces, where the French language renews political models" (13). The author also considers that "la francophonie" and its literature provide an "opportunity to humanize globalization" (12). This work is organized in five sections, which advance the following thesis statement: "the decline of the nation-state nourishes cultural and literary practices which seek to become both transcultural and anti-imperialistic" (13). This paradigm shift suggests a post-francophonie on a global scale as inspired by a world literature which transcends cultural, national and linguistic borders. The concept of "world literature in French" subsequently appears to be a catalyst for the development of such new dynamics.

In the first section, "The World in French," Clavaron's theorization of a "post-francophonie" avoids a franco-centric view and brings together postcolonial studies and the English-speaking world in general. This dialogical move is seen as a counterweight to western imperialism. Indeed, the scholar shows that epistemological and theoretical rivalries

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<sup>1</sup> All English translations of Clavaron's original text are mine.

reveal French-language literatures as a field of confrontation for western imperialism; but they are above all, because of their diversity, “a remedy to the pitfall of standardization” (29). This serves to counterbalance globalization and its attempt to homogenize the world according to the western model. As Clavaron elaborates, “[c]ontrary to colonial binarism and vertical antagonisms, a certain vision of the world today tends to favor an entropic mixture of cultures, a euphoric reconciliation of opposites while postcolonial spaces, whether French- or English-speaking, are striving to create spaces of solidarity and reconciliation through a practice of hybridity” (32–33). Because it was born out of the rejection of a franco-centrism which jeopardizes diversity in the French-speaking sphere, “world literature in French” paves the way to a post-French-speaking world which rids “French language literature of nationalist shackles and allows us to envisage an architecture of literatures written in French in a more inclusive manner” (30).

According to the author, “world literature refers to a literary corpus which would ignore the borders of nations and would recognize the transnational nature of the francophonie, which would cease to focus on the former metropolis to favor a dialog between different French-speaking regions, rethinking the relationships between center and periphery through the phenomena of migration, exile and diaspora” (30). Therefore, world literature in French kills three birds with one stone: it dissipates the colonial heritage associated with the concept of the French-speaking world, while at the same time neutralizing French hegemonic tendencies as well as the risk of westernization of the French-speaking world globalization. By means of world literature in the French language, the francophonie resolutely enters into a new era in which the issues of colonization and decolonization as well as their conflictual implications give way to a globalization devoid of western imperialism, i.e. a post-francophonie.

The second section of this work, entitled “Globalized Spaces,” underlines a desacralization of the nation-state in favor of “transnational strategies,” namely transculturality and hybridity, intended to build globalized spaces, such as the Latin American and Caribbean spaces. Clavaron clarifies that “[u]ntil then, the nation-state had been a stable referent: within it, the dimension of the local took on great importance, giving members of society their privileged anchor” (54). However, migrations on the one hand, and media flows on the other, have upset the established order: “Globalization is a process of blurring national borders

and subversion of existing benchmarks” (54). The author notes that space is “desensitized” through “flows” and “diasporas,” now characterized by “transgression” – a sense of crossing a territory and overcoming a static standard (53). Hybridization, therefore, becomes a logical and inescapable outcome of “space sharing.” For the critic, “globalization tends to question binary and antagonistic models of functioning” (61). Proceeding from that premise, he resorts to Homi K. Bhabha and defends a “sublimation of bipolarity” in order to trace “how the phenomena of cultural contact and encounter interfere with identity and cultural issues in a postcolonial context” (70). Clavaron then reviews the theories by which Latin American and Caribbean thinkers and artists account for the phenomena of transculturality. He concludes that Caribbean theories aim to move beyond the exoticism of cultural diversity in favor of the recognition of a truly effective hybridization, within which cultural difference can flourish, not without sometimes conforming to a form of mythology (notably that of the “mixed race” notion). This constitutes one possible way to challenge colonial and western binarism, “to go beyond the rectified oppositions between center and periphery, identity and otherness as did postcolonial theories, which privilege the negotiation of cultural differences and consider hybridity as migration” (82).

Entitled “Ocean Crossings,” the third section demonstrates how European imperialism is today undermined through the same channels by which it was once built. Considering that it is largely through travel accounts that Europe established its hegemony over the rest of the world, Clavaron analyzes the different forms by which the postcolonial travelogue questions the centrality of Europe. Two tendencies in contemporary western travel accounts can be observed: “the rewriting of a travel account of the colonial era, on the one hand, and the postcolonial re-visitation of imperial geographies, on the other hand, both accepting or even claiming a loss of authority over the space visited” (90). These travelogues adopt the narrative forms of postmodernity. In the face of colonial travel accounts, we are witnessing “counter-travel accounts, journeys upside down” to use the expression of Romuald Fonkoua (117), whose authors are non-Europeans. Written in either French or English, these counter-narratives use strategies such as irony and revisionism. Clavaron borrows from Steven Clark’s formula and concludes that the travel literature of the 20th and 21st centuries has ceased to be a one-way traffic (100).

Christopher Columbus' journey is the European "founding act of imperialism" (106). The history of the slave trade that it generated created a transcontinental "space of mobility and fluidity" (127). Moreover, Clavaron adds, the "European imperialism which was built on the Atlantic feeds new cultural and literary dynamics, migrant and transcultural writings which attack the very principles of the imperial powers" (119). Clavaron then advances the existence of a transatlantic literary space derived from this historical current, which should prompt us to re-read the literary phenomena taking place on the continents bordered by the Atlantic. Indeed, western imperialism has nurtured new literary dynamics that strongly challenge it by weaving in transnational relationships no longer operating by verticality but by horizontality.

Dealing with "Historic Crossings," the fourth section envisions subalternity studies as a challenge to Euro-chronology and "western historiography" and shows the role of these concepts in English-speaking and French-speaking novel writing. After providing useful theoretical clarifications on subalternity studies, Clavaron discusses how novels by Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy deconstruct the story of colonial history by including characters who appear as absolute subordinates. Just as historiographical practice aims to challenge the monolithic tales of colonial and national history, literary writing multiplies the narrative and disarticulates its structure according to the relativistic aesthetic of postmodernism. Clavaron's long analytical journey in this section leads him to the conclusion that "postcolonial literature now affirms the existence of an autonomous domain of political action in the universe of subordinates who are destined not to remain so" (189).

The fifth and final section entitled "Of the World as an Ecosphere" establishes affinities between the postcolonial and ecocritical issues in order to advocate a postcolonial ecocriticism which would question the world in its social and natural globality. This is accomplished by calling into question the notions of anthropocentrism, eurocentrism, logocentrism and western humanism. Clavaron further elaborates by stating that western thought is based on a binary logic which induces a relationship of domination between the West and its otherness. Racism, sexism and colonialism are thus symptomatic of what Val Plumwood calls "hegemonic centrism" (Plumwood 4), i.e. a set of attitudes which reinforce one another to exploit nature and exclude anything and anybody that is considered as non-human (198).



In different ways, the author finally notes, ecocriticism and postcolonialism constitute a resistance paradigm. Postcolonial literature in varying degrees criticizes the endangerment of nature and the destruction of ecological balance by neocolonial practices or forms of internal colonialism. This new, “post-European humanism rethinks human relationships with nature by deconstructing anthropocentric and hierarchical prejudices, a ‘pan humanism’ conceived as a heterogeneous flow and network of solidarities and interactions between humans and non-humans” (209).

All in all, *Francophonie, postcolonialisme et mondialisation* is a dense, linear work that encapsulates several interrelated themes. While reading this work, I felt at times overwhelmed by the sheer amount of detailed information contained in its pages. However, as my reading progressed, I reveled in Clavaron’s multiple unveilings of new vistas and literary approaches that added immensely to both my historical and literary knowledge base. The scholar’s valuable contribution is a must read for comparative literature scholars, French literature scholars, and world literature scholars.

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**Elleke Boehmer. *Postcolonial Poetics.*  
21st-century Critical Readings. Cham: Springer  
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Postcolonialism has been one of the most successful approaches to literature over the past four decades or so, but now it is in trouble, and Elleke Boehmer's *Postcolonial Poetics. 21st-Century Critical Readings* is a clear manifestation of the field's fear of slowly running out of steam. Boehmer, who is also a successful novelist and short story writer, made her mark in the field of postcolonial studies with her monographs *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (1995, 2nd ed. 2005), *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial, 1890–1920: Resistance in Interaction* (2002), *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (2005), and *Indian Arrivals, 1870–1915: Networks of British Empire* (2015), and with her edited anthology *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870–1918* (1998) and her annotated edition of Baden Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (2004, 2nd ed. 2018). Boehmer was born to Dutch parents in South Africa, where she was also raised, and where she earned her first academic degree. Her continued relationship to her country of birth shines forth in *Nelson Mandela: A Very Short Introduction* (2008) and in a volume she co-edited with Robert Eaglestone and Katy Iddiols, *J.M. Coetzee in Theory and Context* (2009). With Stephen Morton she edited *Terror and the Postcolonial* (2010), and with Sarah De Mul *The Postcolonial Low Countries: Literature, Colonialism, and Multiculturalism* (2012).

With Dominic Davies Boehmer edited *Planned Violence: Post / Colonial Urban Infrastructure, Literature and Culture* (2018). This volume dates

from the same year as the volume here under review and I think represents a similar turning away from, in the sense also of a broadening out, into other areas than those traditionally associated with postcolonial literary studies. *Planned Violence* is the result of an international collaborative network of scholars working on colonial and postcolonial urban spaces, and while still to large extent focusing on works of literature, it does so from the perspective that, as Boehmer and Davies put it, “[t]he literary is here invested with a capacity to respond to and potentially rewrite urban infrastructures and the planned violence inscribed within their contours, generating alternative ways of viewing, understanding and inhabiting those cityscapes” (Boehmer and Davies 398–99). The latter article was published in 2015 and already signals, I think, Boehmer’s slowly distancing herself from the more traditional approach to postcolonialism she had until then been known for.

By the mid-2010s such distancing was going on in various quarters, in most instances inspired by the felt need to counter what was by then perceived as the rise of a new literary studies paradigm threatening to supplant postcolonial studies: world literature. Not infrequently this takes the form of advocating some kind of hostile take-over of the notion of world literature, as for instance in Pheng Cheah’s 2016 tellingly titled *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature?* Cheah ascribes to postcolonial literature as world literature the “power or efficacy to change the world according to a normative ethicopolitical horizon” (Cheah 6). How such a horizon should emerge from postcolonial literature as world literature I summarized in a survey article published in a previous issue of this journal:

Using Michelle Cliff’s *Clare Savage* novels, set in Jamaica, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, set in Bangladesh, and Nuruddin Farah’s *Gifts*, set in Somalia, as examples, Cheah argues that postcolonial literature resists the West’s worlding of the rest of the world by refusing to go along with the uni-temporality of globalization as Western imposition. Specifically, Cheah argues, “these novels are examples of literature that seeks to have a worldly causality in contemporary globalization ... the source of literature’s worldly force is the heterotemporality of precolonial oral traditions that have survived the violence of slavery, folk practices, subaltern rituals and practices of survival, religious ethics, and even the geological time of the landscape” ([Cheah] 13). The postcolonial novels he discusses, Cheah maintains, “employ formal means to revive non-Western temporalities in the present that can aid in worlding the world otherwise.” Put differently, “they generate alternative cartographies that enable a postcolonial people or a collective group to foster

relations of solidarity and build a shared world in which self-determination is achieved" (17). (D'haen 14–15)

Cheah is using the term "world literature" somewhat differently from that associated with the work of Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti and David Damrosch, the three scholars credited with having revived, after Sarah Lawall in the 1990s, interest in the study of world literature. He is rather using it in the sense Edward Said uses it in *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (1983), after Martin Heidegger in "On the Origin of the Work of Art" ([1935] 2008), that is to say that of "worlding," of how a "world" arises from each actualization of a text in the act of reading it. For Said it is the critic that in his interpretation of a text guides the reader to "world" the text in a particular way, and thus to see the world also in a particular way.

In *Postcolonial Poetics* Boehmer discusses Cheah's book, and at various instances she refers to almost all paragons of postcolonial studies: next to the inevitable Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Barbara Harlow, Benita Parry, Neil Lazarus, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, Robert Young, James Graham, Michael Niblett and Sharae Deckard, and many others. However, the most ubiquitous presence throughout her volume is David Damrosch with his *What is World Literature?* (2003). In fact, *Postcolonial Poetics* reads very much as one more defense of postcolonial studies in the face of world literature's onslaught in Anglo-American academe, shifting the center of critical-theoretical activity from Departments of English, where postcolonial studies are typically located, to Departments of Comparative Literature. To achieve her goal she opts for a risky gambit. On the very first page of her book she claims that: "until quite recently, postcolonial literary studies has tended to overlook or side-step questions of poetics as the 'real world' issues it has sought to confront have appeared by contrast so urgent." *Postcolonial Poetics*, she then posits, "seeks to address this oversight and to suggest that considerations of the creative shape, formal structures and patterns of postcolonial writing might in fact sharpen rather than obscure our attention to those pressing themes" (1–2). This approach, she argues, "asks how writing *as writing*, and as *received* by readers, gives insight into aspects of our postcolonial world," and this "is something of a radical departure for a field in which the literary has often been read in terms of other orders of reality: social, political, or ethical. However," she maintains, "for *Postcolonial Poetics*, centrally, postcolonial writing is as concerned as other kinds of literary writing with questions of aesthetics – that is, with

questions of form, structure, perception, and reception – and can offer insights of its own into how these elements work and come together” (2). Thus, “*Postcolonial Poetics* sets out to reflect on what it is that postcolonial writing can *do*, rather than consider only what it shows” (3). At the end of her introductory chapter “Postcolonial Poetics – A Score for Reading” she summarizes her book as follows:

Overall, the eight chapters that make up *Postcolonial Poetics* direct our attention to the communicative and interpretative “how” rather than the themed “what” of postcolonial writing, to the process of readerly engagement rather than the political objects or content represented in the text. Turning from the conventional postcolonial preoccupations with representation, the discussion rather considers how the reader might interact with those representations, how they feel drawn in or not by how the language and other structures of the text work, including its invitation to re-reading. It explores what might be postcolonial about this process of moving together with a text to understand something of other worlds, elsewhere, yet from within. Postcolonial writing, the book submits, always insists on its own modes of attention from readers as literature, yet at the same time always refers to the world beyond the word. (10–11)

The process just sketched much resembles that which Damrosch in *What is World Literature?* outlines as constitutive of his world literature approach. The question for Boehmer then becomes what, in terms of poetics, sets postcolonial literature apart from world literature *tout court*, or, to put it differently, what makes for the specificity, again in terms of poetics, of postcolonial literature within world literature. As Boehmer herself puts it: “are there certain purposive, symbolic, and communicative features of postcolonial writing that we might call *definitively* postcolonial?” (11). In pinpointing these features Boehmer turns to some of the same elements also singled out by Cheah, but also draws extensively on her own close reading of novels, stories and poems by a multitude of writers habitually categorized as postcolonial: Ben Okri, Chinua Achebe, Fred D’Aguiar, NourbeSe Philip, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Nadifa Mohamed, and a selection of South African authors. The features she distinguishes as contributing to a postcolonial poetics are “juxtaposition as a way of shaping new creative and cognitive possibilities in both texts and readers” (11), writing that can, “almost impossibly and yet powerfully, evoke both [terror’s] moments of violent rupture *and also* the experience of endurance and recovery that can, for those who survive, lie beyond” (12), a “reiterative poetics of trauma” (12), and a “genealogical

poetics” concentrating on “how Chinua Achebe’s writing, in particular *Things Fall Apart*, staked out a new field of creative and literary possibility for a younger generation of African and especially Nigerian writers” (13). In chapter 7, “Concepts of Exchange – Poetics in Postcolonial, World, and World-System Literatures,” Boehmer addresses the question of the relation between postcolonial literary studies and world literary studies head-on. Specifically, she asks “whether and how the rise of comparative and world literature study, and, as a further development, the emergence of world-systems or world-literature studies, might have challenged or alternatively developed and honed postcolonial tools of reception and critique” (13). Perhaps rather predictably given Boehmer’s own scholarly antecedents, she suggests that “no approach has been as effective as a heterogeneously constituted postcolonial criticism in resonating with the local yet global perspectives of postcolonial texts” (13–14). This, it seems to me, is a rather self-evident case of falling into the well-known trap of the hermeneutic circle. In her last chapter, “The Transformative Force of the Postcolonial Line,” she explicitly rounds on world literature as propounded by Damrosch when she says that “postcolonial writing can have the effect of encouraging readers to engage with different postcolonial situations from within, as they follow the inferential patterns that the writing lays down,” and that “against world literature’s assumptions of a general interchangeability across cultural divides, this approach rather suggests that a transformative postcolonial reading practice may lie in soliciting the reader’s attention in specific ways, and in their consequent internationalization of the text’s communicative shapes and structures” (14). This polemical stance reminds me of the early 1990s when postcolonial literary studies profiled itself over against the then still – though barely – hanging-on postmodern studies approach with Stephen Slemon remarking that Linda Hutcheon’s poststructuralist and loosely Lyotardian analysis of intertextual parody as a constitutive principle of postmodernism, in her 1988 *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, resembles the postcolonial practice of “rewriting the canonical ‘master texts’ of Europe,” but with the difference that “whereas a post-modernist criticism would want to argue that literary practices such as these expose the constructedness of all textuality, [...] an interested postcolonial critical practice would want to allow for the positive production of oppositional truth-claims in these texts” (Slemon 5). Boehmer also explicitly opposes an interested postcolonial reading to a supposedly disinterested world literature reading, and a committed reader transformed by his postcolonial

reading practice to a non-committal world literature reader. In this context it is also completely understandable that she concludes her introductory chapter with “the book fiercely holds that questions of aesthetics have for too long been considered supernumerary to the field’s interests, and that, as an approach to reading, the field has thus insidiously allowed itself to be marginalized in critical terms” and “that this would account for the subsequent rise of world literature as a systematic project to retrieve some of the formal determination of this writing” (14). *Postcolonial Poetics*, in other words, is an attempt to wrest the initiative from world literary studies in submitting that “we as readers discover ways of activating the political energies of postcolonial texts to resist, concatenate, and reshape worlds, and, where necessary, begin anew” (15).

Earlier I drew attention to Boehmer having co-edited, in the same year as *Postcolonial Poetics*, *Planned Violence*, and I intimated that this might signal her moving away from traditional postcolonial literary concerns such as she herself criticizes in *Postcolonial Poetics*. My feeling in this respect is also generated by the fact that all the chapters in *Postcolonial Poetics* are revised versions of journal articles and book chapters published earlier, the earliest going back to 2005, and the most recent being the text co-written with Davies I had occasion to cite. In a sense this book, while certainly interesting especially in its close readings, reads like a final rounding off if not a last stand on behalf of a field and an approach that may have run its course.

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**Danielle Perrot-Corpet et Anne Tomiche, dir.**  
***Storytelling et contre-narration en littérature***  
***au prisme du genre et du fait colonial (XXe-XXIe***  
***siècle).*** Bruxelles : Peter Lang, 2018. Pp. 217.  
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L'ouvrage dirigé par Danielle Perrot-Corpet et Anne Tomiche vient prolonger une série de travaux conduits autour du projet « Fiction littéraire contre storytelling : un nouveau critère de définition et de valorisation de la littérature ? », au sein du CRLC, unité de recherche de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, et dans le cadre du Laboratoire d'Excellence, « OBVIL ».

Le terme de « storytelling », dont l'acception est ici restreinte à celle de « communication narrative », a été francisé par Christian Salmon en 2007 dans son ouvrage *Storytelling. La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits*, où il propose une analyse des mises en récit jugées prédominantes dans la fabrique du lien social des sociétés contemporaines soumises à une hypertrophie médiatique. Le storytelling est devenu la technique de communication des États et des centres de pouvoir économique du capitalisme : ce qui constituait une pratique de marketing s'est diffusé aux instances de pouvoir et du politique. Dans un monde où les « grands récits » sont déclarés morts, des petites narrations assimilables à un « mentir-vrai » constituent une forme de pouvoir qui participe de la marchandisation de la politique et du conditionnement des citoyens, outils de propagande du « nouvel ordre narratif » décrit par Christian Salmon. Il est vrai que tout récit est en puissance mystificateur et, au-delà du caractère polémique de la pensée de Salmon, le concept de storytelling interroge la politique de la littérature et permet d'envisager

cette dernière comme activité de « contre-narration » ou anti-storytelling. Dans l'ouvrage qu'elles dirigent, Danielle Perrot-Corpet et Anne Tomiche s'intéressent plus précisément aux contre-narrations concernant les problématiques liées au genre (*gender*) et au fait colonial. Les assignations genrées et identitaires inscrites dans le récit colonial et souvent associées dans une intersectionnalité des oppressions de race, de classe et de genre, participent à la manipulation des esprits et appellent une contre-écriture et une contre-littérature. Le discours littéraire se construit en puissance anti-hégémonique selon d'autres codes que le discours militant, ce qui génère trois grandes pistes de réflexion par rapport aux concepts d'intersectionnalité et de colonialité : l'épistémologie, la poétique et la politique.

Le volume est organisé en trois chapitres, comportant onze articles en tout, rédigés par des spécialistes d'études (post)coloniales ou de genre de différents espaces linguistiques. Le premier chapitre, « Du (contre)-récit colonial à la parole décoloniale », est centré sur la question coloniale et envisage les différents récits qui permettent d'exprimer une parole décoloniale. Jean-Marc Moura, à partir d'une étude du régime de l'exotisme littéraire, montre que le storytelling – les usages stratégiques du récit – et la fiction littéraire fonctionnent en fait de manière similaire. De même, le discours touristique correspond à une fictionnalisation du monde, selon un storytelling qui muséalise l'ailleurs touristique ou l'institue en merveille exotique paradisiaque, même si certains écrivains, sensibles au caractère irréductible de la singularité de chaque culture, vont à contre-courant de ce mouvement. Ninon (Nina dans l'introduction) Chavoz reste dans le contexte colonial pour évoquer le roman *Doguicimi* de Paul Hazoumé – image de l'intégration réussie et *success story* impériale – dans lequel le storytelling dépend moins de la posture de son auteur et des lourds textes préfaciels signés d'autorités coloniales que de la figure complexe du personnage éponyme que l'on peut interpréter comme une figure subalterne de l'intersectionnalité. Mais, dans ce cas, la subalterne peut parler et elle fait entendre une parole critique et parfois contestataire. Sophie Coudray s'intéresse à un des fondateurs de la pensée postcoloniale, Frantz Fanon, par le biais de son théâtre, nettement moins connu que son œuvre théorique et politique, notamment les pièces *L'Œil se noie* et *Les Mains parallèles* (1949). Intéressant en soi car il permet de faire la genèse de la pensée décoloniale de Fanon en faisant la somme des diverses influences reçues par le psychiatre et théoricien martiniquais, l'article ne se situe jamais explicitement par rapport à la notion de « storytelling »

car, sans doute, le genre dramatique relève d'autres problématiques que le narratif. Pour clore le chapitre (post)colonial et décolonial, Xavier Garnier reprend son auteur de prédilection, Sony Labou Tansi, pour montrer que les outils de l'hégémonie culturelle à laquelle le storytelling peut être intégré sont finalement superflus dans un contexte politique où le régime assure sa domination par la violence plus que par le discours et cela même si un discours de propagande existe. Xavier Garnier situe le potentiel de résistance du récit dans le passage d'une poétique de la peur à une poétique de la violence, celle-ci pouvant devenir intersectionnelle en favorisant les coalitions.

Le deuxième chapitre, « Fictions de l'intersectionnalité », permet d'associer les questions de race liées à la colonialité à celle de genre. Yolaine Parisot évoque des fictions de *passing* concernant des personnages féminins, paradigmes du dédoublement imposé aux Africains Américains par l'existence d'un système légal discriminatoire. La transgression de la frontière de la couleur par des métis à la peau claire se faisant passer pour des Blancs apparaît comme représentative du pouvoir subversif de la fiction et finalement facteur d'*empowerment*. Elle montre notamment comment la fiction est mise en procès dans le roman *Americanah* de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, dont l'héroïne produit un blog, une littérature numérique où les storytellings s'affrontent, avant d'incarner une *success story*. Flavia Bujor prend pour exemple le roman *Ladivine* de Marie NDiaye qu'elle lit comme une fiction du *passing* tout en montrant ce que la littérature peut apporter d'un point de vue théorique à la pensée de l'intersectionnalité. Si elle constate que le *passing* est un récit qui permet d'associer intersectionnalité et performativité, elle tend à passer sous silence la spécificité du storytelling. Flavia Bujor offre en tout cas une analyse stimulante du roman de Marie Ndiaye. Dans un article efficacement construit, Chloé Chaudet propose également une étude de l'intersectionnalité en tant que stratégie du « contre » dans l'œuvre de Toni Morrison, essentiellement la trilogie africaine-américaine (*Beloved*, *Jazz*, *Paradise*) et *Mercy*, où l'entrelacement des oppressions donne lieu à une poétique de l'entrecroisement. L'écriture de Morrison permet de reconfigurer l'engagement littéraire par une narration polyphonique qui rompt avec le modèle d'une rhétorique militante et d'une instance auctoriale polémique et offensive. S'intéressant elle aussi à Toni Morrison, Marion Labourey centre son analyse sur l'esthétique magico-réaliste qui permet de problématiser les origines de l'état de colonialité et fait de *Beloved*, réécriture du récit d'esclave, un contre-récit, remettant en

cause les représentations dominantes de l'identité collective américaine. Comme Chloé Chaudet, Marion Labourey insiste sur l'indirection du contre-récit de Toni Morrison qui n'attaque pas frontalement l'identité culturelle américaine telle qu'elle s'est élaborée dans l'histoire, mais en déconstruit les représentations en jouant notamment sur la réception par le lecteur.

Le troisième et dernier chapitre « (Contre)-récits de la nation et de la mondialité » comporte trois articles scrutant des contre-narrations de la nation pour parler comme Homi Bhabha, dans des œuvres remettant en cause les récits dominants de la nation et de la mondialité. Cyril Vettorato travaille sur un corpus extensif de quatorze romans parus aux États-Unis entre 2000 et 2015 pour montrer l'ambivalence que ces auteurs entretiennent avec le champ appelé « l'industrie de la culture noire » par Ellis Cashmore. Dans un univers antihéroïque, les héros de ces romans afro-américains sont souvent issus de milieux aisés, « trop riches pour être noirs », et représentent la génération « MTV », profondément imprégnée de la culture de masse. Dès lors, la stratégie du contre-récit est peu visible dans des textes qui se veulent parfois « un kit de survie en milieu médiatique », même si l'idée d'une identité noire demeure à l'horizon politique. À partir d'œuvres africaines, francophone et anglophone (Léonora Miano et NoViolet Bulawayo), Florian Alix montre comment la migration et la diaspora sont configurées par des processus discursifs assimilables à du storytelling. Le storytelling est par exemple celui du discours national de la France et de la République une et indivisible, tandis que la littérature oppose une série de contre-discours de la pluralité. Les récits de soi des auteures étudiées par Alix Florian se situent ainsi à l'intersection des différents discours, le storytelling de la migration et de la diaspora et les contre-récits concurrents. Le dernier article du volume est consacré au roman *Sartorius* de Glissant. Cécile Chapon Rodríguez présente les concepts « narrés » de « Relation » et de « Divers » comme des contre-récits opposés à la mondialisation néolibérale, l'envers négatif de la mondialité appelée par Glissant. *Sartorius*, récit de digénèse – définie comme une origine historique et non mythique – apparaît ainsi comme une tentative de décentrement et de décolonisation du récit de la modernité mondialisée.

Le recueil proposé par Danielle Perrot-Corpet et Anne Tomiche, initié par une remarquable introduction et équipé d'une solide bibliographie et d'un index fort utile, frappe par sa densité et sa cohérence, même si certains auteurs ont passé sous silence la problématique particulière du

storytelling servant de fondement au volume. Le lecteur peut sans doute aussi regretter que certains articles cultivent une forme passablement absconse tandis que d'autres réussissent à concilier clarté et complexité. Considérée au prisme du genre et du fait colonial, la notion de storytelling s'inscrit /s'inclut dans doute dans la catégorie du « *counter-discourse* » des études postcoloniales, certes plus vaste, mais particulièrement concernée par les questions soulevées ici. Les contre-narrations participent du « *writing back* » tout en proposant des récits alternatifs qui pallient les manques des représentations majoritaires en faisant l'éloge du mineur et permettent de redéfinir l'engagement, éthique et politique, dans et par la littérature. Au-delà du manichéisme justement moqué dans un autre cadre par Raphaëlle Guidée entre « le gentil récit littéraire » et « le grand méchant storytelling », la fonction de contre-récit et le caractère subversif de la fiction sont intrinsèquement liés au « statut d'exception » de la littérature énoncé par Jean Bessière et rappelé dans le volume par Yolaine Parisot.





**Charlotte Baker and Hannah Grayson, eds.**  
***Fictions of African Dictatorship. Cultural  
Representations of Postcolonial Power.***  
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Many postcolonial states, including in Africa, metamorphosed into dictatorial regimes, which diminished their benefits from the end of colonialism. Instead of delivering economic prosperity, social transformation, and liberation, as people anticipated, independence gave rise, in many cases, to disillusionment, defeat, and cynicism in different parts of the African continent. From Morocco to Zimbabwe and from Ghana to Sudan, the termination of direct imperialistic rule did not mean the end of surveillance, policing, arbitrary detention, discrimination, and repression. In fact, authority might have changed hands, but authoritarianism survived and drew on colonial practices to prolong its existence. This state of affairs has pushed scholars from a variety of disciplines, ranging from political science to anthropology, to propose theories as well as formulate answers as to why authoritarianism seems to find a fertile ground in independent African nation-states. The most recent example is the rise of autocratic regimes in the post-uprising Egypt, Libya, and Sudan. In addition to social sciences, the ubiquity of authoritarianism has had African cultural producers' finger on the pulse about dictatorship for decades. African cultural producers, by which I mean creative writers, filmmakers, poets, painters, and musicians, have established a multidecade tradition of reflection on dictatorship's multifaceted effects on their countries. Produced in both indigenous and formerly colonial languages, African literatures have not, however, adopted

a uniform stance to or a one-size-fits-all approach in their treatment of the structural challenges dictatorship has posed to their communities and societies. In fact, African cultural producers have fictionalized, theatricalized, filmed (made films about), and even poeticized dictatorial rule in as many ways as there have been dictatorships on the African continent.

Charlotte Baker and Hannah Grayson's edited book *Fictions of African Dictatorship. Cultural Representations of Postcolonial Power* does justice to this African cultural production's sustained grappling with dictators. This collection of twelve incisive chapters puts an end to the lag the editors argue exists in the study of both "the African dictator novel" and "[f]ictional representations of dictatorship beyond the dictator novel," (3) and fills the gap in scholarship about cultural production's examination of dictators and the polities they put in place to ensure the durability of their power. Indeed, the twelve chapters draw on different media, including film, novel and short story, to offer trenchant analyses of the figure of the African dictator. The contributions clearly demonstrate that the dictator is a transcontinental phenomenon that transcends geographical, linguistic, tribal, and ethnic groups. Moreover, the book shows that both pro-US and pro-Soviet Union regimes transformed into dictatorships, thus making moot any argument that might attribute authoritarianism solely to either ideology. Additionally, the reader will notice that regardless of whether power was acquired through elections, legitimacy attained through struggle for independence or a coup d'état, several African regimes metamorphosed into autocratic states in which the president embodies the people, the state, and its institutions. As a result, *Fictions of African Dictatorship* is a crucial work that, while it dissects African cultural production's depictions of the multidimensional ramifications of dictatorship in Africa, also gives a holistic view of the rise and fall of dictators on the continent.

The twelve chapters are organized into four sections. The first section entitled "Portrait of a Dictator" features three articles on the photography of Sékou Touré, the limits of "literary strategies in resisting authoritarianism" (38), effectuating political transformation in Bensalem Himmich's *Le calife de l'épouvante*, and the satirical televising of Paul Biya's dictatorship in Cameroon. The combined examination of photography and memory, novel and language, and finally film and subversion in this section allows us to understand the extent to which dictators make themselves pivotal to their societies' sociopolitical and

cultural existence. The three chapters in the second section, which is entitled “Performances and Mythmaking,” continue the reflections put forward in the first section. One chapter examines satire and the carnivalesque’s undermining of dictatorship in Alain Mabanckou and in Koli Jean Bofane’s novels focusing on dictators’ bodies and sex; a second chapter probes the democratic potential in Ngūgĩ wa Thiong’o’s uses of ritual and myth, and a final chapter investigates Ahmadou Kourouma’s novelization of dictators and their characteristics through animal myths. The dialog between section one and two is very deep. For instance, in order to understand the power of subversion and satire that are examined in the second section, one has to have read and grasped the centrality of the dictator’s figure in his people’s life and his domination of the public arena analyzed in the first section. Titled “Compromised Freedoms,” the third section offers three chapters that furnish insightful discussions of the connections between authorship, authority, editing, manipulation, and ultimately treason in dictator literature. The chapter on Gamal al-Ghitani’s *al-Zayni Barakat*, the one on “Sagila Semnikati,” a short story from Swaziland, and the contribution on *The Hangman’s Game* focus on the reader’s participation in authority and his navigation of the manipulative aspects of writing about dictatorship. Finally, the fourth section, entitled “Forms of Resistance,” furnishes, as its title explicitly states, three articles that tackle fictions of resistance to dictatorship in the Horn of Africa and Malawi. This section is dedicated to gendered responses to dictatorship’s discourses on women in Malawi and Somalia. The last article in this section is particularly interesting because of its investigation of the intergenerational narratives about dictatorship among Somali immigrants in Italy, albeit through the lens of the very problematic concept of minor literature.

A dialogical reading of the different articles included in the volume demonstrates the depth and the breadth of African cultural production’s investigation of dictatorship, which the editors rightly suggest has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. The book shows that African writers, filmmakers, thespians, and photographers have been sensitized to the abnormalcy of the exercise of power in several African countries and have directed their creative energies to both document and critique it. The editors’ commendable effort to solicit contributions that cover the entire continent, both North and sub-Saharan Africa as well as East and West Africa, has all the more confirmed that dictatorship and its representations are a generalized phenomenon that preoccupies

cultural producers all over the continent. The inclusion of two chapters about Morocco and Egypt is also a choice that transcends the usual colonial divisions of the continent into compartmentalized parts by separating North Africa from the rest of the continent. In addition to emphasizing the fact that African cultural producers, independently of their locations on the continent, are concerned with dictatorship, this holistic approach to representations of autocracy, which weaves North African literary depictions of political repression and authority in the larger African context, reincorporates North Africa into its African space and consolidates the book's premise that dictatorship literature requires a wider approach to probe its complexity.

An important takeaway from the book is the interpenetration of power, performance and cultural production. Dictatorship uses cultural production to entrench itself. Dictators understand that power has to be performed, and cultural production is a crucial locus for this performance through cultural memory. Hence, the attention that dictators pay to rewriting history, overcrowding their people's collective memory with their achievements, and establishing commemoration practices that place them at the center of history draw heavily on culture. However, the dictator's need for a cultural base to sustain his rule is a double-edged sword, since the detractors of dictatorship also invest cultural production in order to subvert the dictator's cultural and political authority. Therefore, on the one hand, dictators use cultural production nomenclatures to consolidate their power, but, on the other hand, cultural production is a hotbed for resistance to authority and its manipulative practices. This turns fiction and film into a dialectic space in which play out the designs of the dictator and the will of creative producers. In the absence of other avenues in which freedom of speech could be exercised, literature and film offer the possibility to critique without bearing the backlash that might ensue from criticism. This is also probably why some of the contributors raised questions about the efficiency of cultural production in making change or whether it could substitute political action on the ground.

*Fictions of African Dictatorship* also makes crucial interventions in terms of the connection between the local and the global in representations of authoritarian rule in different countries. Instead of looking for a foreign savior, who would have mostly exacerbated the situation at hand, the editors of the book and the contributors focus on local African literatures without losing sight of the multiple layers of Africanness that exist in the world. In drawing from works by younger generations of African writers

in the Caribbean, Europe and United States, the book points to the fact that African cultural producers carry the African burdens regardless of the geographic location they inhabit in the diaspora.

In addition to paying attention to the intricacies of literary representation, the book draws on four important theoretical works: Roberto González Echevarría's *The Voice of the Masters: Writing and Authority in Modern Latin American Literature* on the Latin American dictator novel, several of Michel Foucault's works, Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception* as well as Achille Mbembe's now classic *On the Postcolony*. These theoretical works illustrate how power works, is perverted, but also resisted and subverted. While Echevarría's, Agamben's, and Mbembe's works could be said to be the theoretical backbone of the book, other theoretical frameworks are drawn from to enrich the authors' compelling analyses of power and its subversion in African literatures. In fact, the space occupied by Mbembe's theory in *Fictions of African Dictatorship*. *Cultural Representations of Postcolonial Power* is also a successful example of how theory can be Africanized without overlooking South-South or South-North theoretical dialogues. This said, Mbembe's seminal work is not, however, challenged or critically engaged by the contributors. It is mainly used as a hermeneutical tool, which limits its productive potential in this context.

The success at presenting a wide range of analyses of African fictions of dictatorship does not, however, mean that this study is flawless. The book displays three limitations: First, the non-inclusion of fictionalizations of testimonial works that recount their author's direct experiences of dictatorship. Moreover, imprisonment experiences are foundational to any theorization of dictatorship and its literary depiction. Yet, they are not included. For instance, Jack Mapan's work could have been a most welcome addition to the volume. Second, an adumbration to the cultural and economic cost of dictatorship in the texts under study would have broadened the chapters' analysis of the effects authoritarianism has on these societies' cultural and economic potential. Third, although the book is an important addition to our understanding of cultural production's rendering of dictatorship, contributors rarely attempt to explain why dictatorships have taken root in these specific places under study. As a result, African local histories of struggle are elided and rarely foregrounded in the analyses.

Nonetheless, Baker and Grayson have made available an important volume that many scholars and lay readers will find both engaging

and informative. Reading against the grain of essentialist and cliché explanations of African dictatorship, *Fictions of African Dictatorship* is a testament to the fact that Africans are neither oblivious nor acclimatized to autocratic rule. In a sense, Baker, Grayson and their contributors are also rehabilitating African people's agency in the face of both volatile rulers and reductive readings of African literature. Therefore, this book is a must-read and a crucial companion to critical studies on African literatures.

**Wiebke Sievers and Sandra Vlasta, eds.**  
***Immigrant and Ethnic-Minority Writers since***  
***1945: Fourteen National Contexts in Europe and***  
***Beyond.*** Leiden: Brill / Rodopi, 2018. Pp. 542.  
**ISBN: 9789004363236.**

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Based on an international joint project, this ambitious volume consists of 14 case studies by international contributors, and aims to provide an overview of the development of writing by immigrants and, in many instances, by ethnic minorities. These writers are examined within a variety of national contexts – which often turn out to be transnational – including European countries (Austria, Belgium [with reference to writing in Flemish], France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), as well as five significant non-European countries, namely Australia, Canada, Brazil, Japan, and the United States. The task is not an easy one, as these nations are marked by different histories of immigration and local characteristics; some of these countries have long histories of immigration, while this phenomenon is more recent in others. Furthermore, the heterogeneous national, and often transnational, contexts of the literatures examined are often politically contested and pose challenges not only to the definition and development of these literary traditions, but also to their critical study. The geographical selection is reasonably well justified, although including the perspectives of the Nordic countries (especially Sweden) and Russia in Europe as well as those of South Africa and Israel would have been useful in view of their interesting immigration histories. Editors Wiebke Sievers and Sandra Vlasta do mention that it was not possible to find contributors working in the domains of Russia, the United Arab Emirates,

and Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, the volume at hand remains a useful and highly informative tool for scholars in the field, thanks to its emphasis on explicating the analysis of research trends and the academic treatment of immigrant literatures.

Indeed, as the editors clarify in their introduction, this collection focuses on the ways in which diverse literatures by immigrants and ethnic minorities “have fought for recognition, have challenged the understanding of national literatures and have markedly changed these in some contexts” (3). In so doing, they have transformed what was considered by some commentators as a less significant type of minority writing into parts of national canons, as for instance works by such writers as Michael Ondaatje in Canada or Salman Rushdie in Britain. Yet, this is a long and still ongoing process because of the slow response to revise established national and cultural identities in many countries. This is clearly shown in several cases in which national contexts, ideologies, and institutions may oppose such challenges and promote strategies of containment, such as equating national and cultural identity with language. In these situations, as in France, for instance, this kind of strategy may undervalue the significance of multilingualism and multiculturalism and favor fixed national canons and rigid conceptions thereof. Importantly, rather than providing new readings of individual texts and authors, or developing new theoretical concepts, the collection addresses the development of writing by immigrants in a systematic manner that allows for comparative reading across the chapters. This structure leads to the development of a provisional model in the conclusion, which surveys the accelerating change of these literatures during the recent decades of increasing global mobility.

Presented in the editors’ introduction, this systematic approach is based, first of all, on a shared definition of “the immigrant”: it derives from the United Nation’s understanding of “a long-term immigrant” as an individual to whom a move abroad for more than a year provides a new country of residence. While a definition of this kind can be challenged, and such immigrants have been referred to through other terms – the editors mention “hybrid,” “transnational,” “cosmopolitan,” and “nomadic” –, this shared definition avoids the problems related to the various ways in which different national contexts and legislations define immigration and the immigrant. For example, ethnic Germans from Russia are not officially regarded as immigrants in Russia, whereas the UN definition grants them this status. In the same vein, the editors



remark on the negative connotation of the term “immigrant” in some contexts as well as in literary studies. Nevertheless, they argue for its relevance because the literatures examined are rooted in immigration as a social process and because the UN definition conveys a sense of neutrality. Also, addressing the 14 cases selected through the terms “hybrid” or “cosmopolitan” would have proved highly problematic, generalizing and misleading, as the editors point out (4–5). The critique of established and often problematic terms recurs several times in the volume. Finally, this shared definition aims to distinguish immigrants from Indigenous peoples (e.g. in Australia, Canada, the United States) and autochthonous minorities in several European countries. Yet the editors acknowledge that the division is not always clear, as the existing scholarship often brings these different groups together.

The aim at comparability is also built into the structure of the individual chapters which follows the same organizational principles, albeit with some inevitable variation. Thus, each chapter opens with a general introduction outlining the national context and its particularities (e.g. national ideologies, legislation, language policy, the relationship of the country’s literary field to that of other countries) that may promote or contain the development of immigrant writing. Follows a section addressing the history of immigrant literature and its study with particular reference to significant anthologies, literary prizes, and possible new institutions and conferences. A third part discusses systematic data collection in the field (e.g. archives), before a fourth one analyzes the major research trends in the study of texts written by immigrants and the following generation. In this process, this section takes into account the various approaches and conceptual frameworks employed, as well as their change over time. Finally, each essay provides an evaluation of the impact of immigrant literature and its study on the development of the literary and / or political field in the relevant country. This very methodical approach serves as the backbone of the remarks presented in Sievers’s conclusion, as I shall show below.

Although it is impossible to review here all 14 enlightening and sometimes meticulously researched case studies, some of them deserve detailed commentary. I found particularly interesting those chapters that not only highlight the differences between the European smaller nations (e.g. Austria, Switzerland, Greece) and the larger ones (e.g. France, Germany, Italy), but also examine how the latter often influence smaller countries sharing the same language.

The case of Austria, investigated by Sievers and Vlasta in a collaborative article, in a number of ways provides a fitting example of the response to immigrant writing in a small nation, which shows strong linguistic and academic links with Germany. Because the literary phenomenon has attracted attention only since the 1990s, research in Austria was mostly determined by Germany's debates around immigrant writing which tended to regard such writing as a "small or minor literature" (51). At the same time, the influence of British cultural studies, often exemplified in the work of Homi Bhabha, has also motivated many scholars to problematize the fixedness of identities and their dissolution as a result of cultural encounters. However, in contrast to Germany, the number of immigrant writers remains limited in Austria, although labor immigration had brought at least 300,000 Turkish and Yugoslavian workers to the region by the 1970s. Since the late 1990s, the situation has changed, partially for the worst due to the emergence of racist and xenophobic discourses in the country, partially for the best, as testified by the creation of the significant literary prize "*schreiben zwischen den kulturen* (writing between cultures)" (511) for any non-Native German-speaking writer living in Austria and writing about intercultural issues. While the prize increased the visibility of immigrant writing and the number of literary publications, the study of its impact properly emerged in the 2000s only. As Sievers and Vlasta report, a number of recent studies focus on writers associated with the above-mentioned prize and on eastern European writers relocated to Austria. They also strive to uncover earlier immigrant writers. In practice, research has often addressed the ways in which immigrant writing deals with issues of social exclusion and discrimination, as in the work of Bulgarian-born Dimitré Dinev, for instance. The prominence of such thematic issues, in Austria and many other countries as well, especially Germany, has promoted a tendency to examine immigrant writing as a primarily sociological, rather than aesthetic, phenomenon. This conception suggests that writers from the "developing" world are often viewed as speaking for their cultures and tend to be read through the prism of the realistic genre. In this chapter, Sievers and Vlasta refer to this ongoing development and suggest that the reconstruction of "Austrianness," which critics such as Hannes Schweiger trace in contemporary immigrant writing in the country, is linked with globalization on one hand and the need to address the nation's problematic past on the other. Bicultural and transnational understandings of immigrant writing, as well as of the trauma of migration, are also seen

as ways of promoting the inclusion of these works in the literary and academic fields. In recent years, immigrant writing has gained in visibility and its study has grown in quantity and quality thanks to the critical use of postcolonial theory and the problematization of “Austrian” literature and “Austrianness.” Nevertheless, as Sievers and Vlasta point out, the lack of bibliographies on the subject and the limited attention to writing in languages other than German reveal that several gaps remain.

While the histories of immigration vary from one nation to another, other small nations face many similar issues as in Austria. In her essay, Sarah De Mul alludes to the short history of immigrant writing before focusing on Flemish writing in Belgium and the prominent role of second-generation Moroccan writers in the country. In the Greek context, Maria Oikonomou explains that immigrant literature primarily deals with post-1989 works by Albanian writers, which were anthologized and published mainly in the 2000s. In the case of Italy, as Marie Orton’s analysis shows, the limited number of texts by immigrants available in the 1990s has developed into a significant body of work by more than 600 writers, often published by non-commercial *associazioni* and small publishers. In Italy, this literature is well-documented and archived and much of it can also be accessed online. In the United Kingdom, Sandra Vlasta and Dave Gunning suggest that immigrant writing appears to have had the most significant impact, as it is not necessarily seen as minority writing: it is rather “understood as part of the mainstream of contemporary British writing” (456).

The study of immigrant literatures has proved to be institutionally different in many conservative academic cultures. While in Germany it has been tackled since the 1970s, the initiative did not come from “*Germanistik*” but from the new discipline referred to as “German as a Foreign Language” (222), which foregrounded intercultural issues to a greater extent. Similarly, although immigrant writing has a long and important tradition in France following the emergence of “*beur* writing” in the 1980s, its critical examination has remained limited and has been mainly performed in non-French universities, as Laura Reeck points out. This is due to the French academe’s conservative emphasis on French rather than postcolonial literature. The situation is similar in Italian institutions, although Maria Orton notes that the earlier rejection of migration literature is morphing into “conflicted and sporadic acceptance” (300). With regard to Switzerland, Daniel Rothenbühler, Bettina Spoerri, and Martina Kamm state that only very little research on

immigrant writing, regardless of its language, is carried out by university departments, a phenomenon they attribute to institutional hiring policies and the low prestige associated with this activity in the Swiss academia.

In contrast to this process of gradual recognition in Europe, the essays devoted to non-European countries offer stimulating alternative narratives influenced by these nations' more extensive histories of immigration. Indeed, Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida and Maria Zilda Ferreira Cury argue that immigrant writers in Brazil are part of the national literature and enjoy "a fundamental presence" (77). In Canada, Christl Verduyn shows that immigrant and ethnic-minority writers are involved in the definition of Canadian identity, so that they are no longer relegated to the margins. Concentrating on the United States and its long history of immigrant (or ethnic) writing, Cathy J. Schlund-Vials pays attention to the major role which mid-twentieth-century social movements such as the Civil Rights Movement played in raising awareness about ethnicity and in creating an ethnic literary canon. Promoted today by the *MELUS* society (Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States) and key critics' work (e.g. Werner Sollors, Lisa Lowe), the research on different ethnic American literatures is thriving and makes use of various theoretical and transnational models. At the same time, it may appear as somewhat dispersed, as scholars specialize in particular literary traditions with their specific foci, such as the theme of the difficulty of assimilation characterizing Asian American literature. Moreover, the influence of immigrant writing in higher education remains constrained, since literature degrees still prioritize more traditional forms of Anglophone literature. Similarly, the American literary canon seems divided into "American literature" and "ethnic American literature" categories which do not necessarily involve the same authors. The lack of a large-scale recognition of ethnic literary traditions can also be detected in the fact that the nationally most significant literary prizes rarely reward an ethnic author, as Schlund-Vials contends. Finally, Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt's intriguing chapter unveils the markedly different context of Japan. Because there are only few immigrant authors writing in Japanese, critical debates have centred upon Korean writing in Japan. The history of this literature is tightly connected with colonialism and class politics, which impact its criticism and terminology: one of the issues researchers struggle with regards the question whether to define this literature as "Korean" or "Japanese."

The concluding chapter penned by Wiebke Sievers addresses the multiple concerns of the whole volume in a comparative manner so

as to present an interesting interpretation of immigrant writing as an international phenomenon. The 14 case studies, Sievers summarizes, reveal that these literatures are progressively shifting from the margins of their home nations to the forefront of cultural change. This development has occurred in waves, starting in the Anglophone countries and gradually reaching European literatures. At the core of this gradual recognition, the scholar suggests, is a reinforced discourse of equality and human rights, especially in the period following the Second World War. This is an important argument in the face of current nationalistic discourses in Europe that seem to negate any promotion of equality. Sievers also identifies nationalism and its role in literary and academic institutions as contributing to marginalize immigrants as well as their writing; the scholar submits that in many cases this marginalization was based on aesthetic arguments, as immigrant writings were often read as if they were ethnographic studies. In my view, this reveals that inclusion-based multicultural policies facilitate integration in the literary field as well, by conceiving immigrant writing not as a separate category but as a part of reconstituted national literatures. In time, we are likely to see more diverse and renewed national canons, an exciting prospect of which the insightful contributions to this volume offer a glimpse. The national surveys presented in this volume are essential reading for all scholars in the field of ethnic and minority literatures.



**Aleksandar Stević and Philip Tsang, eds.**  
***The Limits of Cosmopolitanism. Globalization***  
***and its Discontents in Contemporary***  
***Literature.* London: Routledge, 2019. Pp. 198.**  
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In his earliest responses to the work of Martin Heidegger and the status of the Other therein, Emmanuel Levinas in *Time and the Other* ascribes to the Other a future temporality. He does so as a means to further problematize the notion of the *Dasein* in the philosophy of Heidegger, who was responding to Hegel's phenomenology of *Being*. If *Being* was presence, for Heidegger such a presence was further qualified by existing in the world, and therefore for him the *Dasein* was being in time – the relationality that allows for an entity to claim existence: the entity that can assert “I am.” Certainly, such an entity that can claim existence through inhabiting the world in a present time, could also experience relationality with other entities or beings similarly capable of claiming existence in the world. However, what concerns Levinas is the basis of such a relationality. Can such a claim to existence in the world be the basis for claiming relationality with existing beings from different cultures? In other words, can one claim to have a relationship with another, should such a claim be based solely in a knowledge of one's own existence in the world? For Levinas the answer would be a rather complex “no.” If the Self is qualified by an attribute of presence, by which one means existing in a present time, the Other for Levinas assumes the metaphor of futurity. The relationship one can have with the Other is somewhat analogous to the relationship with a future Self. Such a knowledge is fathomable but not wholly knowable. What interests me

specifically about Levinas' engagement with such notions of presence and futurity in relation to this present collection of essays addressing "The Limits of Cosmopolitanism," is this notion of the presence of the Self and the futurity of the Other. It is within such a context that I frame my reading of the essays collected in this volume. Should one consider the spatial and temporal coordinates of cosmopolitanism? Does the cosmopolis as Vladimir Zurić indicates in the first essay of the collection, constitute a site for encounters with alterity? More importantly, do such renewed contemplations of our shared globalities, herald an approach towards temporalities of alterity? Are we fast moving towards inhabiting the futurity that Levinas attributes to the Other?

As the brief blurb of the book suggests, we now inhabit a world in which engagements with strangers are "no longer optional." Therefore, as Alexander Stević and Philip Tsang suggest in their introduction, could one attribute the resurgence of isolationist nationalisms across the United States and the European Union to the discomfort of inhabiting such a world – of inhabiting the Other's temporality (1)? True, "[o]ne no longer has to overcome the limitations of the local to engage with the far-off stranger: the stranger is already here" (3). However, what does such a proximity imply for the encountering Self? The Self that being "at home" with / in itself, as Levinas would later argue in *Totality and Infinity*, is disturbed and unsettled by the appearance of the stranger (Levinas 38). In such a sense the idea of the cosmopolis as a site of siege as explained by Zurić holds value. The editors have organized the volume around three thematic clusters – "Cosmopolitan Hegemons," "Subjects of Displacement," and "Circulated Objects." In the next paragraphs, I will attempt to briefly present the core arguments and contextualizations provided by the authors included under each cluster.

The first cluster of essays, "Cosmopolitan Hegemons," begins, as mentioned before, with Vladimir Zurić's piece – "Cosmopolitanism Besieged: The Exilic Reunion of Bogdan Bogdanović and Milo Dor." In focusing on the lives of the two Serbian intellectuals who take up residence in Vienna at different points in the twentieth century, Zurić returns to the various implications the German concept of "*Weltoffenheit*" could have in European discourses of cosmopolitanism. Bogdanović's and Dor's travels across European metropolises, for example, become representative of the many physical and intellectual relocations that were necessitated by political and economic circumstances following the Second World War. The setting up of such a frame allows Zurić to better elaborate on how



notions of besiegement came to be particularly associated with European urban cosmopolitanisms toward the beginning of the twentieth century. In the final analysis, as the author emphasizes, cosmopolitanism is etymologically tied to the “polis,” an entity, which has always been most vulnerable to sieges (30). In such a sense, the modern metropolis, which emerges as the imaginary site of the cosmopolis, comes to be framed by the forces of global conflict. Mukti Lakhi Mangharam’s piece, “Building Bridges: Constructing a Comparative Sufi Cosmopolitanism in *Rock and Roll Jihad*,” reflects on two senses in which the word “cosmopolitan” can be used. The first sense, as in Zurić’s essay, echoes the word’s roots in ancient Greek philosophy. Citing Tim Brennan’s work, Mangharam argues that the second and more contemporary context within which the word gains currency, is the “hegemonic cultural and ideological project accompanying economic globalization” (33). Such contemporary cultural and political project, the author suggests, often coopts pre-existing discourses and expressions of a cosmopolitan sensibility in pernicious ways. Mangharam offers a close reading of the inaugural speech by present Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the World Sufi Forum of 2016. As she indicates, there seems nothing “objectionable” about Prime Minister Modi’s speech. However, a closer examination reveals how he foregrounds India’s innate love for spirituality and plurality as the cause of the flourishing of Sufi movements in the Subcontinent’s medieval history. Thereby, he furthers a nationalist agenda through references to Sufi saints. Mangharam contrasts such cooptations of Sufi values of inclusivity and generosity with the positive and generative impacts the works of Sufi poets have had on artists such as Salman Ahmad, a Pakistani American musician whose autobiography she focuses on in the last section of her essay. In the next essay, “Sunjeev Sahota’s Fictions of Failed Cosmopolitan Conviviality,” Ana Cristina Mendes examines postcolonial fictions that foreground the failures of cosmopolitanism and a “crisis in conviviality” (55). Mendes focuses on the status of diasporic communities in the wake of the reemergence of nationalist discourses espousing varying degrees of exclusionism and exceptionalism – ranging from the election of Donald Trump to the American presidency to the complexity of Brexit narratives. The author explores the plot and themes of Sunjeev Sahota’s debut novel *Ours are the Streets*, the story of a British Pakistani youth who becomes a suicide bomber. The novel draws heavily on the aftermath of the post-9/11 paranoia around Muslim immigrants in Europe and America. Mendes, by discussing other similarly themed novels, explores how such

fictions reveal fundamental failures and lacunae within international and national assumptions of cosmopolitan conviviality. Suha Kudsieh's essay, "Stuck Between England and Egypt: Sudanese Cosmopolitanism in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* and Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley*," further examines postcolonial cosmopolitanism. Kudsieh's comparative study of two Sudanese novels shows how the centrality of Europe in the postcoloniality of North African cultures seems inescapable, while also contrasting postcolonial eurocentrism with early influences of European cosmopolitanisms under colonial rule. However, both Tayeb Salih and Leila Aboulela envision the possibility for subsequent generations to reimagine cosmopolitanisms through cultural frames closer to home (83).

The second cluster of essays, entitled, "Subjects of Displacement," further expands on some of the issues outlined in Mendes' essay. In "Unbelonging: Caryl Phillips and the Ethics of Disaffiliation," Aleksandar Stević explores the ethical implications of Phillips' comparisons between the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Holocaust. Through such an uncomfortable cohabitation of disparate histories of human trauma, as Stević points out, Phillips' narratives have often garnered harsh reviews (87–88). However, the author also suggests that such conflation of different histories of trauma point towards another sense in which the cosmopolitan could be understood, i.e. through systemic and structural universalities inherent within processes of deracination. The subsequent essay, Philip Tsang's "Why is the Patient 'English'? Disidentification in Michael Ondaatje's Fiction," focuses on expressions of displaced subjectivities in Ondaatje's works. Tsang frames such a reading within the theoretical positions put forth by Francis Fukuyama and Kwame Anthony Appiah. He replaces the themes and narrative strategies of Ondaatje's writings in the context of colonial encounters with otherness that shaped the works of authors such as Rudyard Kipling. In conclusion, if Ondaatje's work explores the implausibility of disidentification, Tsang emphasizes, it equally problematizes the assumed fixities of contemporary identitarian frames (120). The last essay in this cluster, Mary Anne Lewis Cusato's "*Alien-Nation* and the Algerian Harraga: The Limits of Nation-Building and Cosmopolitanism as Interpretive Models for the Clandestine Immigrant," explores the cultural significance that the word *Harraga* comes to assume in the postcolonial Maghrebi context in relation to the figure of the "clandestine immigrant." The word derives its meaning from the Arabic root *brig* which means "burning." It also designates immigrant peoples who are defined by their "burning desire"

for a new life, sometimes burning their documents upon arrival to make their repatriation more difficult (123). Cusato analyses such cultural significances and dynamics in the contexts of Boualem Sansal's novel *Harraga* (2007) and Merzak Allouache's 2009 film *Harragas*. The figure of the *Harraga*, Cusato concludes, evokes the limits of both the ethos of cosmopolitanism and that of nation building. Indeed, the precarity of these limits challenge the secure positionalities of the processes from which both the nation and the cosmopolis emerge as ideational and functional categories.

The concluding cluster of essays focuses on the mechanisms of global capitalism. It shows how discourses of cosmopolitanism are often implicated not only in hegemonic intercultural transactions, but also in the transformation of material ecologies on a global scale. In moving towards such realizations, Katherine Hallemeier's essay, "Cosmopolitanism and Orality in Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.*," examines the close ties between a culture of cosmopolitanism and the workings of global capital. The circulation of cultural artefacts, especially from cultures deemed as "exotic" within dominant Euro-American contexts, is facilitated by global capitalism. She contends these artefacts are often celebrated by the cosmopolitan ethos as a vindication of a "human connection across difference" (143). Hallemeier also claims that such affirmations of human universalities through cosmopolitan mind-sets often, through implicit and inadvertent appropriations or exoticizations, undermine not only a cultural context for otherness but also contribute towards the processes of its commodification. It is through such lenses that the author reads the work of contemporary Nigerian writer Okey Ndibe. Jungha Kim's essay "Animated Plastic and Material Eco-Cosmopolitanism in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forests*," extends such a discussion in its analysis of the themes of deterritorialization in Karen Tie Yamashita's 1990 novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*. Yamashita's work highlights the powerful transformative force exerted on the eco-geographies of spaces other than Europe and America by both economic global capitalism and accompanying discourses of cosmopolitanism. Kim argues that reflecting on such "costs and contradictions of globalization," as Susan Koshy suggests, global conversations on cosmopolitanism start to shift away from their discursive centralities in a "European genealogy" (160). Furthermore, Kim suggests, Yamashita's foregrounding of nonhuman memories through narrative devices facilitates the contemplation of a much-needed eco-cosmopolitan hermeneutics in reading the world. The

last essay in this cluster, Paul Tenngart's "Paying attention to a World in Crisis: Cosmopolitanism in Climate Fiction," links cosmopolitanism with concerns of a planetary nature. Using the rising popularity of climate fiction starting in the early 2000s, Tenngart explores the significance such fictions have in acknowledging human responsibility towards the natural world. Alluding to a vast cross-section of works within such an emerging genre, he shows how dealing with ongoing climate crises on a global scale has called for reengagements with the traditional discourses of cosmopolitanism. In foregrounding the ecological costs of globalization, Tenngart envisions "Climate Cosmopolitanism," which he defines as an approach challenging not only a Eurocentric, but also an anthropocentric view of the cosmopolitan.

The greatest strength of the volume is, I would argue, its exploration of cosmopolitanism through robust engagements with literary and cultural textualities. Each essay in the volume develops methodologies of a comparative hermeneutics at once specific to local cultures while also contributing to a more global ethics and aesthetics of intercultural understanding. This volume usefully foregrounds questions relating to engagements with alterities in our own works and research as comparatists. In concluding with questions grounded in a planetary ethos extending beyond the anthropocentric boundaries of our scholarship, *The Limits of Cosmopolitanism: Globalization and its Discontents in Contemporary Literature*, opens up interesting and new avenues for discourses on global humanist and humanitarian ethics.

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**Iva Polak. *Futuristic Worlds in Australian Aboriginal Fiction*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017. Pp. xx + 274. ISBN: 9781787072008.**

**Lynda Ng, ed. *Indigenous Transnationalism: Alexis Wright's Carpentaria*. Artarmon: Giramondo, 2018. Pp. 248. ISBN: 9781925336429.**

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At first sight, it may seem odd to pair Iva Polak's and Lynda Ng's rich volumes in a book review, as they approach Indigenous Australian literature through different subject matters. Polak concentrates on "Australian Aboriginal" science fiction (SF) – a segment so far neglected in the wider genre of SF –, whose various iterations she explores in Eric Willmott's *Below the Line*, Ellen van Neerven's novella entitled "Water," Archie Weller's *Land of the Golden Clouds*, Sam Watson's *The Kadaitcha Sung*, and Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*. By contrast, the contributors to Ng's volume take as their starting point a single novel, Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, in order to discuss its possible transnational dialogues with other texts, cultures, and authors. In this process, they do not favour any particular genre or mode.

However, either explicitly or implicitly, the discussions in these volumes similarly revolve around two overarching notions, i.e. demarcating categories and dynamic flexibility. These concepts have played and continue to play a crucial role in race relations both in past and present Australia, as well as in the politics of identity representation and cultural self- definition of the various Indigenous Australian communities. For

many Indigenous cultures in former settler colonies, the term “category” often retains the negative connotation of a compartmentalisation process reminiscent of European / western racial agendas which stabilised difference (the Other) into rigid, makeshift “boxes.” In the arts, much work has been done to find strategies to regain and affirm the individual’s previously silenced difference in such a way that accommodates transcultural dialogues and influences. Indeed, in her introduction, “Looking Beyond the Local: Indigenous Literature as a World Literature,” Lynda Ng rightly warns that “[...] there is also a point where the lines drawn to establish and defend cultural territory can become a form of limitation in themselves” (Ng 5). Thus, this tension between fixed and fluid boundaries shapes our conceptions of the global, the local, and their tricky interplay. Ng’s edited volume is a response to “the tendency to view [*Carpentaria*] [solely] in terms of an inherited colonial structure of race politics and whiteness,” which “risks inadvertently confining it to a framework imposed by the existing Australian context, [...] by the expectations generated within the category of Australian literature” (5). Focusing on genre literature, Polak’s monograph extensively examines the impact of such restrictive framework on the “niche” of Australian Aboriginal fiction.

Indeed, the incentive for Polak’s work stems from the “invisibility of Aboriginal SF” in academic and public debates (Polak xii). Before embarking on her close reading analyses, the scholar goes to great pains to investigate the multiple facets of this delicate question, whose origins transcend the issue of Indigenous Australian literature to call into question the novelistic medium as well as the reception of non-realist modes and genres in Australia. From her position as a double outsider – being neither of Australian or British descent, nor an English native speaker –, Polak reports how strikingly “Australian criticism tends to be so acerbic when the influence of the fantastic genres is detected in Aboriginal fiction that some works fall into oblivion” (28). This is the case of the “first Australian Aboriginal SF novel,” Eric Willmott’s *Below the Line* (95). In fact, the association between these non-mimetic genres with Indigenous Australian fiction appears problematic only if one continues to subscribe to Eurocentric and neo-colonial literary discourses (e.g. Colin Johnson’s “white form, Aboriginal content”; Polak 20–21). By contrast, Polak’s study is premised on the plasticity of the novel and fantastic genres, instead of viewing them as fixed European products. Polak’s first chapter, “The Fantastic as a terminological Trickster,”

patiently unravels the thorny enmeshment between magic(al) realism, the fantastic / Fantastic, the marvellous, fantasy / Fantasy, and science fiction, to name but a few genres / modes. A second chapter examines “The Postcolonial Turn and the Fantastic,” opening with an outline of the pairing between magic realism and postcolonialism. While the latter rapidly became a “global phenomenon” (76), the notion of a postcolonial science fiction and F / fantasy has initially been considered paradoxical, as “genre fiction [...] is allegedly acultural and discursively predictable” (78). Additionally, some have argued that the “early history” of science fiction “often revives the ideology behind European colonisation” (78). Yet, others, for example John Rieder, have stressed the consistencies of topics between SF and postcolonialism, including “‘enslavement, plague, genocide, environmental devastation, and species extinction’” (Rieder 373, qtd. in Polak 79). To put it briefly, Polak suggests “that indigenous appropriation of SF and Fantasy is an addendum to the empire-writes-back and the-mad-woman-in-the-attic tropes: this time, it is *the mad alien in the attic that writes back*” (79, emphasis in original).

These first two chapters are somewhat lengthy in places, precisely because of Polak’s thorough exploration of the scholarship and state of the art devoted to science fiction and contiguous fantastic genres. Nevertheless, one must applaud her indefatigable tenacity at unpacking the terminology and usage of genres or aesthetic modes in order to avoid confusion, which sadly some critics – usually not well-versed in genre literature – too often perpetuate. An example of this can actually be found in Nicholas Birns’s contribution to Ng’s volume, when he refers to magic realism, and briefly the fantastic and fantasy, in his comparison of *Carpentaria* with novels from other postcolonial regions. Investigating these genres and modes is arguably not the primary focus of his essay; nevertheless, Birns regretfully fails to provide definitions and / or references for his use of magic realism, the fantastic and fantasy. The scholar thus assumes that everyone shares a universal, unequivocal and exhaustive understanding of the origin(s) and mode(s) of operation of these concepts. In the case of magic realism, Birns defines it only within the framework of Latin American fiction, as “a mixture of verisimilitude and fantasy [...] employed as a mode of postcolonial resistance and, with less importance, as a kind of polymorphous digest of a remote region for the pleasure of the metropolitan reader” (53). This last remark (on which

sadly Birns does not elaborate<sup>1</sup>) highlights not only Australian critics' recurrent castigation of magic realism, but also the fact this reaction is based upon one very specific conception of this mode. Moreover, as in a circular reasoning, "fantasy" is used both to briefly describe how magic realism works – in definitions so concise that they do not explain anything (53, 57) – and to provide a synonym for "the fantastic." The resulting amalgamation borders the nonsensical and obscures matters more than it enlightens them: "[Arguedas's] *The Fox From Up Above and the Fox From Down Below* [...] is local / *fantastic* rather than magic realist in organization. Arguedas uses *fantasy* and folktale elements to situate his characters in a local context, not to collapse the distinction between *fantasy* and reality, or invigorate reality through ostentatious fiction" (57, my emphasis).

Birns's lack of terminological rigour is indeed unfortunate in view of the fact that his reflections on locality, Indigeneity and autochthony do open up intriguing avenues of inquiry at epistemological and interpretative levels (see especially pages 59 and 62); it is unclear why it was necessary to broach the subject of magic realism in the first place. As I gather from his reflections on this mode scattered throughout his chapter, he seems to oppose it to "locality" and thus to view it as symptomatic of "the homogenising tendencies of 'postcolonial studies,'" or the "liberationist ecstasies of postcolonial rhetoric" (58). It is worthwhile to contrast Birns's take on magic realism with Anne Heith's essay in Ng's book. Heith responds to Alison Ravenscroft's dismissal of this mode and of transcultural comparisons by white readers between *Carpentaria* and other texts. As Heith summarises, Ravenscroft assumes that "such a proximity [with other magic realist narratives] diminishes the literary value and importance of Wright's novel, making it less original" (101). In a much welcome move, Heith highlights the reductiveness of this position, which "operates as a form of white anxiety" (Ng 102) and favours homogenised conceptions of the novelistic genre and the (white or Indigenous) reader response (101–103). Like Polak, Heith rightly calls

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of non-referenced definitions returns later, even more problematically so, when Birns states that "many magic-realist efforts tend to [...] see imaginative experience [...] as commoditized and exchangeable" (58). Such a broad statement does not enable me to clearly understand to what critical or fictional texts Birns refers here.



for a recognition of the formal flexibility and cultural porosity of the novel (103).

This digression on magic realism is not meant to deflect attention away from Polak's excellent examination of Aboriginal SF and the fantastic. Birns's and Ravenscroft's views on magic realism serve to illustrate a "case of the biter bit": these scholars criticise the allegedly essentialising tendency of an aesthetic mode or genre, while ironically their arguments proceed from a homogenising understanding of the latter. This reticence towards magic realism also resonates with science fiction and other fantastic genres, which some critics still do not expect to find in Indigenous Australian texts, as Polak's book examines in detail.<sup>2</sup> Her monograph is a truly audacious enterprise, as she does not merely stop with "Aboriginal SF": in order to best render the multi-faceted experimentations of the prose works under scrutiny, she even makes use of neighbouring genres, such as speculative fiction, weird fiction, the Gothic, horror fiction, (native) slipstream (which signals code-switching between all the aforementioned genres), fantastika, and transrealism. Polak's close-readings are ordered in terms of increasing complexity, with Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* as the final novel analysed. The latter may also be interpreted as an example of transrealist fiction, "a term that encapsulates the amalgams of non-mimetic genres and contemporary narratological techniques, challenging the very notion of reality" (Polak 229). Another innovative contribution is Polak's identification of "Water," van Neerven's novella, as the "first example of Aboriginal queer SF fiction" (xiv). Inspired by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's theory, Polak shows how her selected corpus maps "future histories": "[t]he dynamic future, which develops dialectically and is voiced from the past, represents a specific 'concealed past'" (94). Such futuristic worlds derive from "an imaginary *longue durée*, calamitous in nature," for it "evokes the colonisation and destruction of Aboriginal lands and cultures" (95). In doing so, Willmot, van Neerven, Weller, Watson, and Wright engage with and reconfigure typical SF elements, i.e. the novum, the monster, the city, the wasteland, and western science.

Admittedly, the reader may at times feel bewildered at the profusion of these multiple SF neighbouring genres, especially when they intersect

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<sup>2</sup> Polak appears to somewhat downplay the similarity of critical responses to magic realism and science fiction, as she rather focuses on the different trajectories of these two genres / modes as global postcolonial phenomena (xiii).

in Polak's analyses. However, this terminological profusion reflects less a desire to "put a firm name" on the defamiliarising nature of these fictional worlds, than an endeavour to let "fiction [...] discipline theory": "these literary texts demand bending the existent critical apparatus to accommodate writing that appears outside the usual *crèche* of literary theory" (xix).

Furthermore, the numerous perspectives gathered in Ng's volume similarly reflect this need for theoretical and critical flexibility. This book indeed constitutes a "constellation" of interpreting possibilities (Ng 16), which takes its cue from Alexis Wright's emphasis on flux: the author "depicts Aboriginal culture as living and *alive*, marked by its adaptability and as such eminently suited for the transnational flows of the twenty-first century" (5, emphasis in original). Contributors Jensen and Heith offer most stimulating transindigenous juxtapositions between *Carpentaria* and, respectively, the Indigenous Greenlandic peoples' experience of Danish colonialism, and Sámi people's cultural marginalisation in Norway. Another refreshing dialogue is offered by Castro-Koshi, who explores *Carpentaria* in relation to the Francophone general public and critical theory. Kosugi's essay discusses Japanese and Indigenous Australians' shared concerns about nuclear politics and pollution, a move which usefully recasts Wright's novel against the context of the wider Pacific Rim. Contrasting comparisons again provide food for thought when Ng and Minter approach the topic of waste from different, but complementing ecocritical angles: the former opts for a socio-cultural and metaphorical lens, the latter for a materialistic and poetic perspective. Important to note is that such openness to the transnational does not operate at the cost of the local: as Jeanine Leane argues, "it is this locale that transits the voice of *Carpentaria* across national borders. It is this locale that refuses to be aggregated into the broader discourse of 'the nation'" (212).

*Futuristic Worlds in Australian Aboriginal Fiction* and *Indigenous Transnationalism* both succeed in their ambitious projects to showcase the relevance of selected Indigenous prose fiction for transnational and transgeneric literary debates, yet without reducing their local singularity. When examined together, these volumes provide exciting complementary insights both into celebrated and lesser known, or unjustly dismissed, works of fiction. The fertility arising from these initially unusual juxtapositions suggests how comparative literature should take stock of a dialectic futurity or planetary circulation always in motion.

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**Lisa Warrington and David O'Donnell. *Floating Islanders. Pasifika Theatre in Aotearoa.*  
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As you read this, somewhere in Aotearoa New Zealand a Pasifika theatre maker will be crafting a performance that reflects the unique experiences borne of the artist who navigates new domain. In doing so, this act of creation illuminates the possibilities of theatre as a site for change, adaptation, reframed identity, and an enlarged sense of belonging in new locations. For any first, second, or third generation migrant culture this means necessary and direct encounters with issues of liminality, resettlement, and the evolving connections to land, family, faith, the elements, spatiality, and even life force itself within a new broader culture. Arguably, with the pace of change we encounter in 2020 and beyond, these features must be faced head-on to bring theatre to contemporary audiences anyway, but they are particularly stark for cultures with an immigrant backdrop wedded to their story. There are rich biographies to unfold by spotlighting performing artists whose roots hark from across Oceania; Fiji, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Niue, and the Cook Islands, and of course Aotearoa. Pasifika theatre in New Zealand is an active, complex, and dynamic domain that has steadily built a legacy of storytelling to become a prosperous site of evocation and diverse theatrical production in the past few decades. David O'Donnell and Lisa Warrington's timely book *Floating Islanders: Pasifika Theatre in Aotearoa* celebrates this complex array of voices and approaches as their text charts a course through Pasifika theatre styles and forms that constitute what can be seen as a fairly recent, thirty-year account of theatre making from

1984 to 2016. The authors define Pasifika Theatre as “live performance work created in Aotearoa / New Zealand by artists of Pacific Island ancestry” (9), and within this endeavour to unearth a unique array of subjective “islands” lies the clue to the book’s success.

Voices of Pacific theatre makers are rightly at the centre of the text, since the authors have chosen to interview over thirty-four theatre practitioners in order to assimilate, elevate, and liberate key features of this relatively recent, postcolonial phenomena (from comedy, to visual theatre, to poetry, amongst others). Pasifika Theatre is now a constellation of diverse shimmering jewels anchored firmly in the mainstream South Pacific nexus of Aotearoa, “Land of the Long White Cloud.” O’Donnell and Warrington’s undertaking to let practitioners speak for themselves and subsequently find connections in organic ways that emerge from the conversations is a wise choice, particularly because the text is declared to be written by two non-Pasifika or Palagi authors (like myself).<sup>1</sup> It is created with care, and the generous artists at the centre of this discourse share insights with deep respect for the craft of live performance in all its forms, as well as trust in the authors.

In this sense, the book is guided by a framework “in the spirit of talanoa” (11), a Tongan / Fijian / Samoan concept of verbal storytelling that centralises the importance of devoting space and time to discussion and the ensuing exchange of ideas. I think it is important to see this book as the reflection of a longer talanoa between members of Pasifika communities of practice, between their non-Pasifika counterparts, and with a wider international audience. The book is a welcome addition to both Pasifika arts knowledge-building and a more global understanding of how the specific reverberates the universal. More broadly, it is also a significant invitation towards further conference of the Pasifika and Aotearoa performing arts canons.

At its heart, this is a story of passionate individuals like Albert Wendt, Justine and Paul Simeu-Barton, John Kneubuhl, Eteuati Eti, and Nathaniel Lees who carved out a vision for Pasifika Theatre to be strong and diverse. It is a story of determination, celebration, and reclamation that speaks to the fervent power of the creative spirit, and of a maturing terrain that has seized upon brilliance in theatre forms. Of course, the specific individuals and companies germane to the evolving journey of Pasifika

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<sup>1</sup> The proper Samoan term for Palagi is “Papalagi,” “The Sky Bursters.”

Theatre in Aotearoa are variegated, unique, and complex, and should not be referred to as a uniform group. But in a sense Pasifika Theatre makers hold parallels with other first and second-generation migrant cultures who universally navigate the multifaceted interstitial spaces of “home” and “new home,” of local and international style and form, and of the challenges that expand and reassess our assumed definitions of mind, spirit, body, and community. This interstitial quality, or “in-betweenness,” is often concerned with familiar and brutal tropes that contrast the hopes and dreams of a better life with the reality of what it actually means to be seen as a newcomer in the dominant discourse of the new domain. Reframing expectations of the self and one’s culture, and the shifting of associated, underlying, but sometimes assumed, extant identities are themes of this book, as is the impact of reality in Aotearoa. O’Donnell and Warrington navigate this terrain with sensitivity.

An implicit pledge that simultaneously underlines and navigates *Floating Islanders* is one of carving out new terrain. The discussions and the authors’ insights are underpinned by a deep awareness of the importance of creating a forward-facing, often disruptive discourse that is anchored in what people indigenous to New Zealand (tangata whenua or Māori) might refer to as whakapapa (lineage), both personal and professional. Theatre is, after all, distinctively aware of crystallising the triptych forces that combine from history towards aspiration to create transitory experience in a medium that employs present time. Amongst other things, this requires entering into the exciting realm of the numinous, or that which invokes spirit and connects to the soul. It draws on memory to provide present-time connection to “realise the dreams of our ancestors while honouring our own contemporary will” (181), as Pasifika artist Courtney Sina Meredith says in *Floating Islanders*. The practitioner voices in this book add to the enactment of the vision of Pasifika art that Samoan poet and writer Albert Wendt imagined in 1976:

Our quest should not be for a revival of our past cultures but for the creation of new cultures which are free of the taint of colonisation and based firmly in our own pasts. The quest for should be for a new Oceania. (Wendt 52)

In facing forward towards a “new Oceania,” *Floating Islanders* takes its titular cue from Samoan / Aotearoa director Makerita Urale, who underlines the fluid and migrant state of Pasifika practitioners when she says, “We float – we’re not based in one place: we’re floating Islanders” (10). O’Donnell and Warrington firmly point out that this concept is

used to emphasise “the flexibility, fluidity, openness and interdisciplinarity of Pasifika theatre practitioners and companies” (11). This interstitial, threshold status of migrant artists has been noticed as a phenomenon by thinkers worldwide, and resonates with Italian director Eugenio Barba’s sense of isolation that theatre companies can face as “floating islands.” Although Barba’s isolated framework is not necessarily a state to aspire to, it is deemed as a reality of voyaging in the urban and theatrical cultures where independence is a given. Here I think of Deleuze and Guattari, whose musings on the phenomenology of art-making proposed that itineracy and its associated “nomadic tendency” is an artistic ideal, since questions of dislocation and identity are unencumbered by allegiances to a predominant orthodoxy. Thus, there is triple resonance in the hopeful cadence of being a Pasifika floating islander in Aotearoa who is relatively free to create anew, and open to connect with others to carve out a truly creative line of flight as they seek connection to wider domains, unfettered by the weight of assumed form and style. There is a unique ontological freedom that can be construed from the distinctive modes of experience of first, second, and third generation Pasifika theatre artists in Aotearoa.

Another key idea in this book is the deconstruction of assumed identities and the construction of new ones in commune with others, and these are inevitably tethered to relational states of being. In Samoan language there’s a concept called the *Vā*, which denotes *relationship* in a myriad of ways. It is the gap between one person and another, or an individual and the land, or the universe. The *Vā* relates to the emic relationship between an artist and their craft, an individual and their teachers, the physical or genealogical space an artist works in, or in fact between a community and more external, emic relationships such as nature, God, and faith. And the saying is, “Ia teu le vā,” meaning: “Take care of that relationship; nurture it.” This extends to *Vā* Tapuia (sacred space) and *Vā* Feloloa’i (relationship), both of which theatre encompasses. *Floating Islanders* speaks directly to this notion of respect, trust, and honour that has been passed down and now exists in present time in theatre. Le vā is referred to throughout the book as a benchmark idea; furthermore, it positions O’Donnell and Warrington’s text as an important relational site per se to advance the awareness and understanding of Pasifika Theatre as a platform for redemptive, regenerative, and *dynamic* theatre practice.

*Floating Islanders* chronicles the interface between theatre styles and social systems with ease. The book is beautifully produced; supported throughout by a wealth of images and a selected timeline of Pasifika



productions in the Appendix – both designed to bring the conversation to life –, it has already become a key text in secondary and tertiary educational settings. Of interest is that it studies Pasifika theatre as a kind of social history, as each chapter reveals a new layer to extend the talanoa.

The profile of Pasifika identities is complex, so O'Donnell and Warrington wisely choose to capture the range of different styles in chronological order with a chapter dedicated to each major shift in the domain. It is significant to reflect on progress through playwriting and production of work throughout the last three decades, notably marked by John Kneubuhl's *Think of a Garden*, a play which "highlights the disturbing impact of colonisation on Samoan identity" (37). The play is based on real events of a peaceful protest that took place in 1929 in which 15 Samoan people were killed and many more injured by Police. I saw the 1995 Depot Theatre production in Wellington directed by Nathaniel Lees, and was struck by the force of this work and its reception. It was a jolt to see Samoan / Aotearoa history dramatised, to hear Samoan language spoken on a Wellington stage, and to see a new kind of talanoa developing. It felt momentous at the time. As Lees says, the impact made by the Auckland and Wellington productions – and the ensuing confidence that was created – were huge: "People were moved to tears. All the Samoan people [...] got up at the end, sang for us and talked to us [...]. The joy of it was hearing our language, or my language, spoken on stage" (39). The importance of taking a professional community approach to make the work – including that of Depot (later Taki Rua) Theatre and other artists – cannot be underestimated. From here, *Floating Islanders* traverses through the development of playwriting and adaptation in companies, anchored by Fale'aitu (traditional Samoan clowning), a familiar form in which satire is used to lampoon perceived order through comedy. Pacific Theatre Inc. in Auckland and Pacific Underground in Christchurch both reframed the Fale'aitu trope in relation to explorations of migrant history with their benchmark productions such as *Romeo and Tusi* (a version of *Romeo and Juliet* set in the 1869 land war in Samoa), *Tusitala and the Witch Woman of the Mountain*, *Fresh off the Boat*, and *Dawn Raids*, Oscar Kightley's particularly seminal production centred around the violent mid-1970's Police raids of suspected Pasifika overstayer families in Auckland. Pasifika playwriting is noted as going through a major phase of activity into the 2000's, with Kightley, David Fane, Victor Rodger, Makerita Urale, Toa Fraser, Dianna Fuemana, David Mamea, Dave Armstrong, and others creating a sophisticated canon of work, or what

the authors describe as a “rich whakapapa of Polynesian playwriting [...] characterised by a sense of community and connection” (107).

From here, the text enters the evocative domain of image-based theatre that “originates from the body rather than the text”; theatre “where the body and striking visual images take precedence over spoken language” (138). This is the realm of theatre for social change. Samoan director Lemi Ponifasio’s work in MAU theatre company has been noted internationally for its arresting combination of intersectional qualities. Ponifasio employs Japanese *butoh*, light, space, and Māori and Pasifika mythologies in works like *Birds with Skymirrors*, *Tempest: Without a Body*, or *Requiem*, which was commissioned for the 250th anniversary of Mozart in Vienna (2006) and draws on Pacific rites of farewelling the dead, of remembrance, and of greeting the ancestors. The virtuosity of Wellington-based company The Conch is explored as “an intercultural vision” that creates theatre out of “physical theatre, mime, illusion, dance, music and lighting” (141), and this work has also received recognition on the world stage. Wellington-born Nina Nawalowalo and her English-born husband Tom McCrory are also visionary artists who continue to explore the rich domain of socially activated theatre that is brave, refined, and immediate. Nawalowalo’s Fijian father and English mother provide the backdrop for the company’s aesthetic that draws directly on both her and McCrory’s knowledge of European theatre forms, gained from their time in Europe and cultivated in the past few decades. Their work is anchored in real stories and the redemptive power of storytelling. Works like *Vula*, *Masi*, and more recently *The White Guitar* and *A Boy Called Piano* bring new meaning to theatre as a place for evocation of the real, the physical, or what matters most in the search for complete personal, social, and political identities. This is vital, refined work, and a minor gripe is that a chapter does not seem sufficient to capture the complexity of both MAU and The Conch. There are much larger stories to be told here around process, genealogy, and impact.

Comedy is a predominant theme throughout the book, so a focus on such groups as The Brownies, The Naked Samoans, and the Laughing Samoans is important. Each company overtly references the aforementioned Fale’aitu, yet also has “a distinctive comedy philosophy and practice” (153) that over time has developed unique offshoots into television and film. If you have not seen it, seek out the hilarious animated TV series *bro’Town* for a taste of Pasifika humour in an Aotearoa setting. In Auckland, Vela Manusaute and Anapela Polataivao and the

Kila Kokonut Krew are noted as “creative catalysts and mentors to a new generation of Pasifika artists” (179), and this is a true reflection of their ability to use comedy to highlight questions of contemporary identity in multiple theatre forms.

Next, the book devotes a chapter to the proliferation of works by Pasifika women writers (2002–15). Tusiata Avia, Courtney Sina Meredith, Grace Taylor, Louise Tu’u, Michelle Johansson, Leilani Unasa, and Miria George are key writers and performers who have expanded the canon of performance poetry and theatre as a political platform. The text surveys this tranche of Pasifika Theatre with an earnest eye on diverse discourse, and theatre’s ability to bring to the fore contemporary concerns that propel a complex range of voices, approaches, styles, and forms. It is worth noting here the multiple roles that theatre practitioners inevitably play in Aotearoa; for example, it is common for one person to be an actor, producer, writer, director, and editor, especially in a constrained funding environment. Thus, there is a dynamic sense of interplay between individuals and companies across the sector that is driven by multiplicity and results in highly-networked practitioners with manifold skillsets.

*Floating Islanders* concludes that the evolution of Pasifika Theatre in all its forms over three particular decades means it is now a thriving community of practitioners who have “achieved prominence as writers, directors, choreographers, actors, producers and film-makers” and who “demonstrate the ability to adapt, to be flexible, entrepreneurial, multi-skilled and interdisciplinary” (209). Most of all, Pasifika Theatre in Aotearoa is testament to “community, collaboration, and strong family relationships that extend across generations” (209). The book is an important publication that invites further discourse, and as a talanoa, it builds on previous scholarship to expand a platform for others to widen the discussion around Pasifika Theatre and performance. Like Pasifika Theatre itself, this text is a map that is navigated by the many distinctive voices, spirits, ancestors, and connections to the elements in all their guises. Aotearoa is a bicultural nation that is rich in talent, anchored by shifting postcolonial cultures and communities of practice. It is my dual hope that *Floating Islanders* will expand the prosperous, dynamic domain of Pasifika Theatre in Aotearoa so that Pasifika artists and academics can further empower their own fields of practice, and will enable a wider international audience to understand more about the deep well of authentic work that exists in the new Oceania.

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**Robert T. Tally, Jr. *Topophrenia. Place,  
Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination.*  
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Among scholars interested in spatial literary studies, Robert T. Tally Jr. is well known as the author of *Spatiality* (2013), as the editor of the book series “Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies” (Palgrave) and as the editor of several essay collections and handbooks on spatial literary criticism. He is also known as the translator of Bertrand Westphal’s *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2011 [*La Géocritique: Réel. Fiction. Espace*]), a book that provides the name for the particular brand of spatial literary studies Tally is primarily associated with: geocriticism.

Tally’s most recent monograph and the book under review here, *Topophrenia: Place, Narrative, and the Spatial Imagination*, deals with the theory and critical practice of geocriticism. Yet, it also touches on many other issues. Bringing together several of Tally’s scholarly interests, *Topophrenia* provides an overview of the field of spatial literary studies and discusses spaces in and the spaces of literature and critical theory. It is also a (re-)reading of thinkers such as Fredric Jameson and Georg Lukács in light of the spatial turn, a defense of utopian and fantastic literature against charges of political ineffectiveness, and a call for the kind of planetary criticism that scholars of comparative literature in particular have been advocating for in recent years. As Tally himself puts it, his study proposes “a fantastic, postnational criticism [that] may enable a new way of seeing and mapping this planetary space that now provides the ultimate ground or horizon of thought in the age of globalization” (168).

Tally tries to do a lot in *Topophrenia*. Maybe he is trying to do a little too much. Yet, as Tally himself indicates, his purpose is not to be exhaustive but to “map a terrain” of overlapping fields of inquiry – an activity which necessarily requires omissions. Most of these omissions pose no problem for his study, not only because they are unavoidable, but also because they too will lead to further discussion about spatial literary studies, broadly defined. Rather than staking claims about what the analysis of the spaces of and in literature should look like, his book promises to encourage further work on what he calls “*literary cartography*” (4) and beyond.

In his acknowledgements, Tally notes that most of the chapters included in the book are based on previously published material. The original plan for the book – it was first conceived as a collection of loosely connected essays – still shows insofar as certain issues and arguments are repeated in several chapters. While this may be off-putting to some readers who intend to read the book in its entirety, it will be an advantage to those who only plan to read individual chapters and will find that most if not all the chapters also work as stand-alone pieces.

Beside an introduction and a short conclusion, Tally’s study consists of nine chapters divided into three thematic sections. The section titles clearly indicate the overall structure of the book, which moves from an overview of “Place in Geocritical Theory and Practice” to a discussion of “Spatial Representation in Narrative” and on to reflections on “Fantasy and the Spatial Imagination.” In his introduction, Tally first discusses the map as a “simple tool and a powerful conceptual figure” (1) and then explains what he calls “the cartographic imperative,” that is, the human need to map the world around us as well as the worlds of our imagination. The condition that motivates this need to map real-and-imagined spaces, he suggests, is “a constant and uneasy ‘placemindedness’” (1). It is this “constant and uneasy ‘placemindedness’” that Tally refers to as *topophrenia*.

Chapter 1 draws from Yi Fu Tuan, Tim Cresswell, Dylan Trigg, and many other theorists of space to reflect on places as the material of (literary) mapping projects and as their product. Building on theories of affective geography, Tally’s “topophrenia” refers to a placemindedness that also encompasses “painful or unpleasant emotional responses to places and spaces” (22) and thus brings to the table what Tally views as the (existential) “dis-ease” of modernity. Literature engages with and counters this dis-ease, Tally suggests. Commenting on representations of

topophilia in select modernist novels as well as the “real-and-imagined” places of literature more generally, Tally concludes his first chapter by arguing that narratives are powerful “mapping-machines” (32).

Chapter 2 provides a short introduction to geocriticism. After locating the theory and practice of geocriticism within the larger field of the spatial humanities, Tally compares Bertrand Westphal’s *géocritique* with his own conceptualization of geocriticism. Westphal, Tally notes, favors a multifocal and polysensuous geo-centered approach, in which multiple perspectives on and representations of a chosen place are assembled to explore its multiple meanings (39). Tally’s geocriticism, by contrast, prioritizes the analysis of individual texts. Because an exhaustive representation of places is impossible, it is with “humility” that “geocritics must approach the subject of geocritical inquiry” (47), Tally writes. This subject of inquiry, he contends, is what Westphal calls “the plausible world” (47) and what Tally himself refers to as “the worldly world,” that is, an idea of the world that “embraces the entirety of spatial and social relations” (47).

In Chapter 3, Tally reminds us of the historicity of all mapping projects and the limited perspective this situatedness imposes. From the vantage point of the “inescapably middling situation” (54) of the here and now, liminality and liminal spaces emerge as primary interests of geocritical inquiry. Drawing from Siegfried Kracauer and Louis Marin, Tally views liminal spaces as sites of potentiality and transgressivity (55) and thus as “Utopia[s] of the in-between” (57). Building on Fredric Jameson’s idea that theorizing requires a critical awareness of the relations of things in time and space, Tally explores the “peripety” (58), i.e. the dialectical reversal of the current post-theoretical moment: “Situated always in the middle of things as it were, geocritical theory maps the territories while projecting alternative visions where new spaces are possible, even necessary” (61). Geocritical theory can do this work of mapping and projecting best, Tally implies, when it combines forces with the methodologies of comparative literature, with which it shares a commitment to “alterity and otherness” (62). Invested in alterity and comparative analysis, he convincingly argues, geocriticism becomes an effective “mode of thinking for the future” (67).

Chapter 4 of *Topophilia* turns to the problem of representation that plagues every mapping project. While no map can represent a place fully, it cannot avoid representing them. According to Peter Turchi, place representations work through a combination of “*exploration*” and

“presentation” (76), as Tally illustrates by reading Homer’s *Odyssey*, Dante’s *Inferno*, and Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Where Odysseus engages in iterative (or might one say “itinerative”?) world-building through narration, Dante’s narrator is confronted with hell as an abstract “architectonic system” (77) that represents the logic of divine order as much as a “moral geography” (84). In *Moby Dick* the belief in such a divine order and universal moral geography has vanished. Captain Ahab is accordingly depicted in the process of drawing the very map he uses during his search for the white whale (87 ff.). Melville’s literary cartography and the world it maps neither emerge along with the narrator’s itinerary (as in the *Odyssey*), nor is their well-ordered organization imposed by a higher power (as in *The Inferno*); rather they emerge from an ongoing, highly subjective mapping project that relies on “reflexive, open-ended meditation” (10).

Chapter 5 discusses the novel as “a form of literary cartography” (95). Referring to a variety of novels, Tally addresses the importance of setting and other “spatial arrangements, such as architecture, interior design, urban planning, or types of spatial organization” (97). He urges geocritics to analyze the physical spaces and places as well as characters’ ideas about space and place (97), even if a novel’s mapping project can only ever be “incomplete, provisional, and tentative” (101). In the last section of the chapter, Tally discusses Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope. He then goes on to suggest that the novel is particularly well suited to the mapping of “a world no longer whole” (104), because the literary cartography it offers to the reader becomes “the means by which the fragmented sphere can be imagined, if only provisionally, as totality” (104). The question Tally only raises implicitly here is whether the (modernist and postmodernist) novel’s failure, i.e. its inability or perhaps rather its refusal to imagine the world in its totality, may be one of the main reasons of its success in times suspicious of totalizing visions. Due to my own scholarly research, I feel compelled to stress that poems of place that avoid universalisms seem to me also very well suited to such a project. The fact that Tally occasionally references non-epic poetry (25–26) suggests so too, even if poetry is not the book’s main focus.

Chapter 6 frames literary cartography as an epistemological project. Drawing from Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel*, Tally discusses maps in and outside literature as a powerful means to imagine alternative world systems. Maps and novels, he claims, perform “a sort of cognitive mapping by which writers and readers achieve a sense of place and hence make meaning in their lives” (109). These figurative maps can serve



as maps for the world outside because they project a “spatiotemporal novelistic discourse that serves as a form of knowledge” (110). It is thus no coincidence, Tally suggests, that the novel emerged alongside the discipline of cartography during “the age of exploration” (112). Just like the first modern world maps, he asserts, the novel is “an orientating or sense-making form” (116) that may “restore a sense of transcendental homeliness [to the postmodern subject] (assuming that were even desirable at this stage in historical development)” (122). The implicit question in the brackets interests me. After all, while “the age of exploration” may have left the modern (white) western subject with a sense of “transcendental homelessness,” it also, more importantly, led to the mass-displacement and mass-death of non-western people of color. The same quality that makes (world) maps and novels such effective tools against what Tally calls like Derek Gregory, the “cartographic anxiety” of modernity (116), also seems to be precisely what can make them such effective tools of imperialism and settler colonialism. If there is a utopian project at the heart of literary cartography, as Tally argues in the conclusion of this chapter, it is important to examine what kinds of futures these utopian projects envision and at what cost.

Chapter 7 continues to examine the utopian project of literary cartography by discussing narratives of adventure. It proposes that (classic) adventure stories such as Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1937) are both inherently spatial and inherently “exploratory, representational, and projective” (127). In drawing from Jameson, Tally argues that figurative maps allowing the individual to “make sense of the social totality” are “the necessary-if-impossible prerequisite for any meaningful utopian political or artistic program today” (136). Such a statement stands in tension with the book’s earlier comments on the novel as an anti-totalizing (and perhaps anti-totalitarian?) form of expression, a tension only heightened by the charges of totalizing and totalitarian tendencies frequently brought against utopianism and utopian fiction. Tally acknowledges that maps of any kind “can be wielded by powerful interests against the powerless” (137) and that “geography—like other science or arts—has undoubtedly been complicit in various regimes of domination” (137). Yet, in the end, he is primarily interested in the fact that such maps remain “useful to the persons on the ground” (138) and that “adventures in literary cartography—adventures *as* literary cartography—make possible new ways of imagining the world” (139). Implicit here is the hope, then, that

the world(s) that literary cartography encourages us to imagine are not only “better,” but also more inclusive and more just.

Chapter 8 urges spatial literary studies to pay more attention to the genres of utopia and fantasy. Introducing Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) as “a fantastic vision of how a society can reorganize itself, spatially and socially, as a thoroughly modern state” (142), Tally challenges the idea that “utopia is the progressive, future-oriented, and modern genre [...], while fantasy appears as backward-looking, nostalgic, and anti-modern” (143). He notes that the orderly spatial organization prevalent in utopian literature was highly influential for the project of Enlightenment and thus for modernity at large, but also suggests that fantasy might be an ideal mode for the contemporary moment. Here he misses an opportunity to engage with the fact that both the ideal social organization in More’s *Utopia* and the social organization of the “modern state” as it emerged during the Enlightenment was made possible by war, conquest, the practice of slavery, and other kinds of direct, structural, and cultural or symbolic violence. Of course, this omission does not invalidate Tally’s overarching argument, which is that both utopian and fantastic texts are of immediate practical value because they enable readers to make sense of the world and encourage them to imagine alternatives to the status quo (147). However, while it may be true that “[t]he value of fantasy lies less in its politics, [...] than in its imaginative encounter with alterity” (150), as Tally notes in drawing from science fiction and fantasy author China Miéville, geocritical theorizations must engage with these politics, especially when they are disturbing and familiar (as with fantastic visions of totalitarian regimes), rather than wondrously strange.

Like the other two chapters of part three of *Topophobia*, chapter 9 stresses the worldly importance of fantastic perspectives. Tally first proposes that the historical moment that brought to the fore “the intertwined matters of spatiality, fantasy, and postnationality” (156) is also the one that has led to the “planetary turn” in literary and cultural studies. If this postnational moment calls for “cognitive mapping on a global scale” (156), as Tally asserts in following Jameson, such mapping must be “speculative, figurative, and, in a broad sense, *fantastic*” (156). Imagining the planet in an age of globalization requires a “meditation on the impossible” (161), which is, he posits, “part of the cartographic efforts of fantasy itself” (161). For Tally, the geocritic who engages with the “spatial and cultural anxieties of a postnational world” (165) speaks from the uncomfortable, yet insightful position of the “exile” (166).

While I personally find this (spatial) metaphor problematic because it obscures more about the historical condition of exile than it reveals about the contemporary condition of criticism, I appreciate Tally's defense of fantastic literature as a vision of "radical alterity" (168). I also appreciate his call for a "fantastic, postnational criticism" (168) based in the methodologies of comparative literature and spatial literary studies. If such criticism engages in a thorough critique of the universalism and Eurocentrism that planetary visions have often implied, it may indeed be able to provide a "radically otherworldly perspective" (168) on the worlds we imagine and the world in which we live.



**David Farrier. *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.  
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Repetitious conundrums are perhaps too pervasive and problematic in today's academic writings. Extensive summaries of other authors' works; proof of how well certain creative source texts can demonstrate the accuracy of a theoretical line of thought, or the reverse; or nerve-racking displays of apocalyptic problems without any hints at their solutions can often prove burdensome. In a stark contrast to that trend, Farrier's *Anthropocene Poetics* offers a collection of curious findings from poets and artists with a particularly keen concern for the environment. In parallel with contemporary theoretical discourse regarding the somehow unexpected (and perhaps unfortunate) advent of the Anthropocene, a geological age that emphasizes the active and critical role of humans in engaging with and shaping the natural and material environment, Farrier proposes a set of methods endowed with acute poetic sensitivity to help us better understand and live in accordance with the emergence of an Anthropocenic consciousness. In his work, we also discern an implicit transvaluation of the function of poetry and literary criticism as an active and concrete force that operates amidst the relation between the human and the earth, a gesture emanating from the spirit of comparative literature that establishes an intimacy between self and other.

The brilliance of *Anthropocene Poetics* lies in its double effort to practice a theoretical model of both entanglement and diffraction – a central theme of the Anthropocene the book sets out to explicate. Claiming that the crisis of the environment happens concurrently with “a crisis of

meaning” (4), the author expounds the unique ecological and geological visions conceived by selected artists and poets and fosters an awareness of what both an entangled and a diffracted Anthropocenic cartography of the world would look like. By the end of the book – after having introduced a series of three poetic sensibilities: intimacy, entanglement, and swerve – the author completes both a theoretical inquiry and a practice of that inquiry by enacting such sensibilities. Two types of hybridity run parallel in these texts: one pertains to the intertwined relationship between human beings and the material ecology with which we maintain a degree of intimacy; the other operates in an analogous fashion between poetic observations and critical reflections, which mutually reinforce and challenge one another. This book, therefore, stands out foremost as a work that encompasses both theory and practice, attending to the nebulous future of the Anthropocene. This task is achieved without any of the superficial romanticism commonly found in the work of certain contemporary theorists. These scholars too often endorse a kind of egalitarian democracy that extends unrealistic sympathy to inorganic matter by treating it as living beings. Farrier articulates a charmingly mild humanism towards the Anthropocene; a fatalistic but optimistic mode of thought that aims for refinement and recovery while acknowledging the unavoidable presence of homocentrism in this newly defined age.

“So when everything ceases to be true, ‘anthropomorphism’ would be truth’s ultimate echo,” Blanchot postulates in *Infinite Conversation*. “We should, therefore, complete Pascal’s thought and say that man, crushed by the universe, must know that in the last instance it is not the universe but man alone who kills him” (Blanchot 131). This intricate vision of the human-universe relationship, in turn, demands a new perspective on the part of the human to initiate amelioration, and it is precisely this self-critical tone that is echoed in Farrier’s overarching theme in *Anthropocene Poetics*. As he observes, the primary challenge of the advent and awareness of the Anthropocene is to rethink the grounding of existent knowledge with respect to “deep time”; an ontological notion derived from Quentin Meillassoux’s concept of antiquity. Finding that neither traditional-idealistic nor phenomenological-new-materialistic epistemologies have satisfactorily demystified the intricacies of the mind, Meillassoux reminds us – in his provocative work *After Finitude* – of the correlation between the senses and the sensible characterizing all pre-critical philosophy in the western tradition before Kant. The givenness of matter we explore and reflect upon always supposes an anterior reality that precedes such a

manifestation – what Meillassoux calls the “arch-fossil” – and naturally extends our understanding of the present to an unknowable, infinite, and deep past: “We have to carry out a *retrojection of the past on the basis of the present*” (Meillassoux 16). The conventional division between subject and object has therefore been merged into a moderately linear view of correlation – there are always necessarily certain traces in ancestry before the emergence of any life-form, humans being no exception. Hence, we realize that Farrier’s diagnosis of what is at stake in the Anthropocene involves a crisis of meaning: given the frame of deep-time, any meaning needs to be understood with a sense of doubleness, as Meillassoux aptly phrases it, “the immediate, or realist meaning; and the more originary correlationist meaning, activated by the codicil” (14). The entanglements and divisions between the multiple layers of meaning, between being and understanding, and between the material manifestation of deep-time in the environment, our engagements, and our immersions prompt Farrier to find solutions for the reconceived human-ecological relations of the polyvocal discourses of poets and theorists.

As we read the three chapters of *Anthropocene Poetics*, we come to the belated surprise that poets have for a long time noticed and portrayed the thickened and deepened relation between the organic and the inorganic. As we also realize, the kind of poetry using these still-vigorous strategies – elucidated through Farrier’s inventive exegesis – can teach us to face the encompassing tendency of the Anthropocene that exceeds our individual capacity for experience and memory. In such radical hope, Farrier opens the first chapter with Ilana Halperin’s artistic experiments that visually disclose to the audience the geologic and vital intimacy we share with the planet. As Farrier notes, recognizing our intimate relation to the material environment is key to interrupting the accelerating and unifying process of the Anthropocene—a tendency to subject difference to identity: “Intimacy allows us to imagine worlds of possibility; whether in terms of texture, sensuality, or violence, intimacy achieves a form of knowledge in the traffic between entities” (19). Therefore, to thrive in the Anthropocene and to rethink the place of humans in the age of an environmental and ethical crisis, a reciprocal understanding of both the synthesis of geological scales and the diffraction of thickened unity needs to be fostered. Evoking such poems as “Sandpiper,” “The Map,” and “At the Fishhouses,” Farrier shows us the geologic concern deeply embedded in Elizabeth Bishop’s poetry. He informs us that the poet not only reveals the processive dynamism of construction and deconstruction between

the living and nonliving through her poetic sensitivity, but, more importantly, also reminds us of the geologic intimacy that makes the emergence of life possible. The condition for such a feeling of intimacy, Bishop seems to mean, is a keen perception of the world as a multiplicity of interlaced differences. For Farrier, the theories of time proposed by Elizabeth Grosz and Timothy Morton, in line with the evolutionary thoughts of Darwin, help us uncover Bishop's insight: time, for the poet, has the function of "giving form to life" (26), precisely because it is difference. Poetic rhythms, by exploring time to generate repetition and rupture movement, enable us to discern the enfolding and unfolding of life in flow, as well as the possibilities hidden within the infinite stretch of time from deep ancestry to the future. In Seamus Heaney's poems, Farrier discovers the encouragement to be open to learning from the lithic to obtain a better grasp of the geologic intimacy we have with the thickened temporality in the Anthropocene: "It is my contention that Heaney's own encounters with the through-other qualities of *geology* also allow us to reflect on what it means to live enfolded in deep time—that reading across Heaney's output for those 'shifting brilliancies' in which stone offers a passage to a more intimate relation with the monstrous unknowability of deep time" (36). By projecting affective and sensual attentions onto material surroundings, Heaney records in his poems the course through which the rigid boundaries between organic and inorganic begin to blur and dissolve. The poetic sensualities of Bishop and Heaney, therefore, restore the differential multiplicity of scales in the constitution of our geological past and invite us to reconfigure our intimate alignment with the lithic.

Intimacy may well shift to violence – Farrier moves on to warn us in the second chapter – when excessive human efforts are implemented to explore natural resources in the spirit of capitalism and to turn those areas into "sacrifice zones," a term coined by Naomi Klein to designate the circular mechanism of ignoring the well-being of local residences and fabricating intellectual theories to justify such sacrifices. At the center of the logic of the sacrifice zone lies the force of strictly classifying all life into the simplistic categories of resource or waste, in order to "present the world as homogeneous, simplified, and autonomous" (52). Farrier therefore borrows Anna Tsing's term "scalability" to recognize the pragmatic logic of consumerism that bases its grounds for categorization univocally on a value principle separating exportable resources from waste. To counter such a repressing tendency and to make visible the deeply intertwined



scales of material – what Karen Barad calls “diffraction” – Farrier seeks to redirect our attention to the poetry of Peter Larkin and Evelyn Reilly. He argues their visions would disassociate the entanglement of material and unfold the textuality of diverse differences. Particularly interesting is Farrier’s interpretation of Peter Larkin’s poetic technê. In his view, to reveal the complex structure of materiality, tensile terms and semiotics are devised to generate temporal differences – an effort that consequently uncovers buried relations. Evelyn Reilly’s collection of poems *Styrofoam* takes a similar approach through a series of examinations into plastic – a timeless and ideological material that conditions “the vast, transformative processes it takes part in” (74). As Farrier points out, Reilly attempts to show the volatility of the transformative force of plastic by matching its multifarious possibilities of becoming something other through literary “allusion, collage, punctuation, and genre” (77). The intra-active relationality condensed and gradually erased in deep time thus becomes disentangled and perceptible again as the poem flows, revitalizing a bygone consciousness of the geologic and material past that interlaces us deeply with the earth.

Farrier’s first two chapters delve into the various forms of intimacy and violence that underlie our connection with inorganic entities in the Anthropocene. In light of Donna Haraway’s characterization of our clinamen-building process (a collective tendency of atomic individuals to move or to “swerve”) with other living beings as kin-making, Farrier, in the last chapter, aims to expand on the specific modes of symbiotic relations we could have with other nonhuman life-forms. In a way, Mark Doty’s poem “Difference,” which presents his curious observation of jellyfish – “an immensely ancient life-form” (94) – teaches us how to interact with our swerving and malleable planet-cohabitant. Farrier stresses the importance of Doty’s judicious usage of metaphor, a semiotic expression of the clinamen that captures and reflects both the differences and relations between humans and the ancient, nonhuman friend. In *Bee Journal*, Sean Borodale chronicles his eighteen months as a beekeeper and how his intimacy with the beehive thrived despite colony collapse disorder (CCD) threatening ecological biodiversity. The last section of *Anthropocene Poetics* recounts the shocking and ongoing *Xenotext* experiment. In the latter, poet Christian Bök undertakes the futuristic project of encoding a sonnet, “Orpheus,” through the process of the RNA transcription of the bacterium *Deinococcus radiodurans*, also known as “an extremophile bacterium” (110). Assigning twenty-six codons

(genetic codes) to the letters of the English alphabet and accordingly enciphering the sonnet “Orpheus” in the DNA of the bacterium, a new poem emerges as the DNA transcribes the information to RNA, thereby creating a new sonnet, “Eurydice.” In this process, the bacterium takes on the role of the co-author and preserves the artwork against time, promising its presence in the deep future with its enduring resistance to decay (111–12). This evokes the coevolutionary responsibility of the human and the nonhuman in the face of an uncertain and unimaginable future.

*Anthropocene Poetics* assembles a curious and thoughtful collection of poetic and artistic vignettes forcing us to reconsider what it means to be human in the Anthropocene. We are constantly reminded of our entangled deep past that runs the risk of vanishing, while facing the pressure of the principle of scalability. Farrier aptly demonstrates that poems are not only decorative and sentimental, but can also encode educational and instructional strategies for living with our intimate geological inheritance and other knotted life forms. First and foremost, behind the practical solutions offered in this book, what is really touching and illuminating is perhaps the *care* that these artworks radiate – an intersubjective affect that first makes us human and then not distinctly human.

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**Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey. *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. Pp. 280. ISBN: 9781478004711.**

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Elizabeth DeLoughrey's *Allegories of the Anthropocene* is a strikingly timely book, given that within four months of its publication, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its alarming Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (in September 2019; see [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch)). DeLoughrey's monograph draws extensively on the climate science invoked in such reports, but seeks to address a lacuna in Anthropocene discourse by focusing specifically on the interface between (social) sciences and the humanities, within a field that has, until recently, been dominated by masculinist, ethnocentric, and geological perspectives (20). Further, DeLoughrey emphasizes her exploration of Caribbean and Pacific ecologies as an important counterbalance to the disproportionate bias towards the global north in Anthropocene discourse. As she points out, the islands and archipelagoes she investigates are at the forefront of climate change impacts, in spite of contributing minimally to the carbon dioxide emissions that have precipitated our current climate crisis.

In responding to recent debates focused on the temporal dimensions of the Anthropocene, DeLoughrey asserts that its origins should be dated back to western imperialist expansion into the Americas in the early 1600s, rather than being linked with more recent developments such as the invention of the steam engine. She roots this argument in the work of more recent scholars of the Anthropocene such as geographers Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, who argued in 2015 that colonization of the Americas “‘made industrialization possible owing to the unprecedented

inflow of new cheap resources’” garnered through the exploitation of the lands and peoples of the “New World” (qtd. in DeLoughrey 21). A decade after the term Anthropocene was coined, DeLoughrey notes, we can now associate it with a range of processes entrenching socio-economic inequalities between the global north and the global south, including capitalism, empire, patriarchy, white settler colonialism, twentieth-century globalization, and the accelerated processes of production and consumption following the end of the Second World War. DeLoughrey’s book is designed as a corrective to the “lack of engagement with postcolonial and Indigenous perspectives” that has “shaped Anthropocene discourse to claim the *novelty* of crisis rather than being attentive to the historical *continuity* of dispossession and disaster caused by empire” (2, emphasis in original).

The book is divided into six chapters, the first of which offers definitions of the central terms and debates – focused on the Anthropocene, allegory, ecology and other key concepts – explored throughout the volume. Subsequent chapters are structured around what DeLoughrey terms “constellations” of the Anthropocene: chapters one to three focus on anthropogenesis through explorations of agriculture; radiation / militarism; and waste, while the final two chapters explore oceans and islands – spaces in which, DeLoughrey argues, the Anthropocene is rendered “most visible.” Drawing on Dipesh Chakrabarty’s influential study *Provincializing Europe* (2000), she argues that given the “enormous scales” invoked in discursive figurations of the Anthropocene, it is important to “ground” our understanding of ecological relations in specific *places*, in order to help us navigate what can seem an overwhelming and discursively abstracted ecological crisis. Each chapter in the book duly undertakes this “provincializing” process by offering a series of close readings of Caribbean and Pacific literature, film and visual artistic material rooted in specific island and oceanic modalities in which climate change is registering most acutely. Her approach is avowedly “multiscalar,” situating these careful contextualized readings alongside the macro-discourses of climate change, the Anthropocene, and allegory, and “telescoping” between “space (planet) and place (island)” to explore how they “mutually inform each other” (2).

DeLoughrey argues that allegory is the “fundamental rhetorical mode for figuring the planet,” as well as the “rift between part and whole that is symbolized by the Anthropocene” (18). This configuration is rooted in the work of key theorists of allegory including Fredric Jameson – who, in

*The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, argued that “the world system [...] is a being of such enormous complexity that it can only be mapped and modelled indirectly” (Jameson 169) – and Walter Benjamin, who argued in *The Origin of German Drama* that allegory emerges in times of acute historical crisis, and asserted that modern allegory “triggered a new relationship with nonhuman nature that recognized it as a historical rather than an abstract ideal,” as DeLoughrey puts it (5). DeLoughrey builds on Benjamin’s “radical shift” from the figuration of “universalized nature” to its “parochialization” (5), arguing that an analysis of narrative allegory (in the novels, short stories, artworks and climate change documentaries she explores) can reveal crucial modalities of climate change in the Caribbean and Pacific locations she explores.

Although the chapters are not arranged chronologically as a rule, the first chapter explores plantation slavery as “an early marker” of the Anthropocene, analyzing the “radical social and ecological climate change” (24) that attended plantation slavery (or the “Plantationocene”) in the Caribbean. In exploring the various strands of Caribbean discourse focused on “routes” and “roots,” and the relationship between plantation cultivations and provision grounds (where slaves grew their own crops), DeLoughrey offers an extended close reading of Erna Brodber’s *The Rainmaker’s Mistake* (2007), a densely allegorical “cli-fi” novel commemorating the bicentennial of the British abolition of the slave trade. Refiguring Benjamin’s assertion that allegory stages a “natural history” signified by ruins rather than symbols of progress, DeLoughrey posits Brodber’s novel as an allegory of plantation history in which roots, soil and rot become “visible ruins of the past” (25). With reference to the work of influential (male) theorists of the Caribbean environment (Edouard Glissant, Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris), DeLoughrey asserts that Brodber offers a markedly feminist critique of the legacies of slavery in the Caribbean, by featuring a complex plotline involving a post-emancipation community that begins to question its phallo(go) centric origin stories after unearthing the corpses of female ancestors.

Chapter Two returns to the subject of nuclear technology explored extensively in several of DeLoughrey’s previous publications, this time focusing more specifically on radiation (represented through allegories of light and energy in atomic discourse) as a figure of the daemonic – a liminal entity that moves between the realms of the physical and the spiritual, the mundane and the divine. Noting that militarized radiation is now widely recognized by scientists as a stratigraphic marker of the

Anthropocene, DeLoughrey traces the ways in which indigenous Pacific authors such as Hone Tuwhare, James George and Chantal Spitz counter the strategies by which Cold War discourse “naturalized” military radiation through heliotropes (which figured the light and heat of nuclear detonations as equivalent to solar radiation), thereby occluding what Rob Nixon terms the “slow violence” of the destructive effects of this military technology upon the indigenous communities and environments located at the testing sites in Micronesia and French Polynesia.

Chapter Three explores the “technofossil” – non-biodegradable waste that now permeates the world’s oceans and waterways since the “Great Acceleration” of manufacturing, consumption, and “disposability” following the Second World War – through a nuanced analysis of works produced in the 1990s by Dominican artist Tony Cappelán (who has created a montage installation from recycled waste materials such as plastics and barbed wire), and Orlando Patterson’s first novel *Children of Sisyphus* (1968), which explores the slums of Kingston in 1960s Jamaica. Here DeLoughrey draws on Benjamin’s notion of the allegorist as collector (one who assembles the “ruins of uneven human history to provide new possibilities for meaning for our present and past as well as to ‘augur’ the future” (100)) to explore the ways in which both artists reveal how human beings (as well as inorganic refuse) have been relegated to “figures of waste” in a “spatial collapse between the human and nonhuman nature” effected by late capitalism and “regimes of state disposability” (100–101). DeLoughrey locates Cappelán and Patterson within a tradition of Caribbean writers and artists who “have long examined how the region, often relegated to a backyard and (often literal) junkyard of the United States, has utilized the material and discursive constructions of waste as political and formal critique” (104). She situates Cappelán’s work within the context not just of increasingly severe climate change impacts such as sea level rise (resulting in floods which deposited the hundreds of flip-flops used in Cappelán’s installation *Mar Caribe* along the Dominican shoreline), but also the contemporaneous crisis precipitated by the refusal of entrance into the U.S. of Haitian (and other) asylum seekers, many of whom drowned in the Caribbean sea.

Chapter Four marks the turn from the “historical remnants” of the Anthropocene to explore “allegories of our planetary futures” (134). The focus of this fourth chapter is the ocean, approached through an overview of the consolidating field of what DeLoughrey terms “critical ocean studies,” and a discussion of the burgeoning corpus of books, films

and photography offering apocalyptic visions of the consequences of sea level rise, followed by detailed close readings of several stories from New Zealand Māori author Keri Hulme's collection *Stonefish* (2004). Whereas popular western conceptions of the open ocean represent marine space as "profoundly exceptional or alien to human experience" (146), DeLoughrey takes Hulme's work as exemplar of the ways in which indigenous Pacific ecologies acknowledge the intricately intertwined and quotidian "multispecies" relationships between humans, the sea, and its nonhuman inhabitants. Noting that the ocean is increasingly becoming a "renewed space of empire and territorialization" (339), DeLoughrey also situates Hulme's work within the context of legal disputes over New Zealand's 2004 Foreshore and Seabed Act, which "sought to naturalize state appropriation of the foreshore and seabed" from Aotearoa's indigenous peoples (144).

The final chapter of the book turns to the context of islands and archipelagoes, places where the impacts of anthropogenic climate change are registering most acutely and visibly in the form of sea level rise, increasingly extreme weather events, and species extinction. DeLoughrey explores ways in which a flurry of documentaries produced since 9/11 have posited various low-lying Pacific islands and atolls (in particular, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands) as synecdochal figures for the threat climate change posits to the world as a whole, enlisting stereotypes of endangered Pacific "paradises" as harbingers of eventual globalized mass extinction. Noting that these films peddle well-worn clichés of the "vanishing native," occluding the colonial and military-imperialist histories that have contributed significantly to the climate change impacts in these islands, DeLoughrey ends the chapter – and the book – by invoking the poetry of Marshall Islander Kathy Jetřnil Kijiner as an example of cultural work that resists colonial stereotype and exhorts a global audience to share the responsibility for anthropogenic climate change.

Overall, this is a meticulously researched, compellingly argued and richly suggestive book that builds on various strands in DeLoughrey's previous research to produce an important and timely intervention into ecocritical, indigenous and literary / visual studies. DeLoughrey has an enviable ability to summarize and synthesize enormous bodies of scholarship across multiple disciplines, and to bring them into productive relation, also deploying highly nuanced close reading skills in relating (social) scientific discourses to specific literary, artistic and filmic

“texts.” Given the vast volumes of material with which DeLoughrey has engaged in researching this book, it is inevitable that there are occasions on which bodies of scholarship, or social movements and historical events, are summarized with less nuance than one might hope for (this is notable, for example, in the claim that the “antinuclear movement has adopted a homogenising one-worldism” (89), which glosses over significant cultural and regional differences within the Pacific alone), and although in her introduction DeLoughrey commendably commits to a sustained engagement with feminist and indigenous perspectives, the volume as a whole invokes fewer indigenous critical voices than one might have hoped to see. Further, the meticulous historical and theoretical contextualizations that open and inflect each chapter, while hugely suggestive for future scholarship, do at times threaten to swamp the analysis of “primary texts,” with the weight of exemplification carried by a relatively small number of works in some chapters. However, inevitably sacrifices have to be made in a work of this magnitude, and on balance this exciting new monograph upholds the usual standard of brilliant scholarship witnessed in DeLoughrey’s existing critical corpus, generously offering readers a rich range of critical frameworks to carry forward in their own research and teaching.

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## Brève présentation de l'AILC

Fondée en 1955, l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (AILC) offre un lieu d'accueil à tous les comparatistes dans le monde et encourage les échanges et la coopération entre les comparatistes, tant à un niveau individuel que par l'intermédiaire de la collaboration avec diverses associations nationales de littérature comparée. Dans ce but, l'Association promeut les études littéraires au-delà des frontières de langues et des traditions littéraires nationales, entre les cultures et les régions du monde, entre les disciplines et les orientations théoriques, et à travers les genres, les périodes historiques et les media. Sa vision large de la recherche comparatiste s'étend à l'étude de sites de la différence comme la race, le genre, la sexualité, la classe sociale, l'ethnicité et la religion, à la fois dans les textes et dans l'univers quotidien. L'Association vise à être inclusive et est ouverte à tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la littérature comparée, y compris les écrivains et les artistes. Elle encourage la participation d'étudiants de master et doctorat et de jeunes chercheurs en début de carrière.

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Founded in 1955, the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) offers a home to all comparatists in the world and encourages exchange and cooperation among comparatists, both individually and through the collaboration of various national comparative literature associations. To that end, the Association promotes literary studies beyond the boundaries of languages and national literary traditions, cultures and world regions, among disciplines and theoretical orientations, and across genres, historical periods, and media. Its broad view of comparative research extends to the study of sites of difference such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion in both texts and the everyday world.

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