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Geir Farner, *Literary Fiction: The Ways We Read Narrative Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2014)

Geir Farner’s *Literary Fiction: The Ways We Read Narrative Literature* offers a cognitive model for reading and interpreting literature. This model breaks traditional elements of fiction, such as message, structure, and voice, into a précised discussion of how we interpret these elements and their overall effects on the text, arguing that the ‘interaction between reader and text plays an indispensable role’ in literary communication (42). The six-page table of contents makes the text easy to navigate, which may be ideal for literature teachers and students to focus on particular elements; however, the book develops these throughout, and some sections rely on Farner’s discussions in previous sections for the nuances of his argument to be patent.

Early in the book, Farner outlines a number of methodological frameworks that outline what makes fiction *fiction* – which sounds an easier task than it is. By addressing a range of theorists from Aristotle to Hayden White, and considering the incorporation of factual elements into fiction, he encapsulates a breadth of arguments in his discussion. He reaches the conclusion that the greatest difference between fiction and non-fiction is in the intention of the author – or ‘sender’, in Farner’s terms – to be loyal to the truth, and that ‘fictional texts do not purport to render facts in a comparable way, because the only link between fiction and reality is indirect and consists in likeness’ (23). He draws on structuralist and formalist literary theory regarding modes of reading, and critiques some of the dominant theories of genre for their limitations when extended to fiction.

He asserts that all the information we are given about a text is that which is in the text itself, and ‘[b]ecause the text comes into existence simultaneously with narration, it is part of the narrative act and at the same time a result of it, as the only testimony of the finished narrative process’ (33). Thus, the interplay between the discourse of the text and the reader is the ‘only testimony of the finished narrative process’ (33). The information that has been imparted to us has been filtered by the author, and therefore the way in which we interpret the actions in fictional texts is necessarily biased by the author (42). Farner critiques theories that fictional truth is ‘only a question of linguistic perception based on rhetoric’ (43).

Farner’s cognitive model necessitates an acceptance of the subjectivity of the ‘mental’ processes and imagination of the reader in their interpretation as distinct from the ‘real world’, to which a non-fiction text would refer (37-38). His understanding of literature of mimetic necessitates that ‘[t]he fictional world is constructed according to the same pattern as the real world and resembles it. On account of this likeness, the fictional events shed useful light on the general structure in the real world’ (40). The primary function of literary communication, for Farner, is ‘giving insight into the problems of the real world and their possible solutions’ (286) and he asserts that ‘[t]he reason fictional characters and events evoke such strong emotions is that we regard them as representative of our own real world’ (289). He discusses the pleasure of reading as well, and that readers may not be aware that they are learning, but ‘[u]nconsciously he [sic] wants the cognitive influence’ (291); he thus asserts that ‘literature with no cognitive functions should not be termed literature at all’ (295). The extent to which I accept such comments is limited, but Farner offers a reasonable explanation for his logic in ‘The Functions of Literary Fiction’ (Chapter 15).

The later chapters focus the ‘mental model’ of the text. Farner’s mental model is the particular framework of the story’s action interpreted as a ‘coherent whole’ (66) that occurs in fiction, and the elements that are ‘imposed on the action’s own structure without changing it’ (61). This model accounts for the way in which we can think about the action of the story as detached from the text itself, showing that the text is simply a vehicle. The author’s deliberate ‘Selection’ (Chapter 9) of
textual elements, such as voice (Chapter 10), viewpoint or focalization (Chapter 11), frequency (Chapter 12) and order (Chapter 13), mean that a narrative will have particular limitations that impact on the reader’s reactions to the text; while these are elements that must be interpreted by the reader, the reader cannot interpret that which is not within the text, and thus the author’s framing of the action of the text through these elements alters the extent to which the action is open to the reader’s interpretation. Such a framework allows for simultaneous acknowledgement of the importance of the author’s role as well as the reader’s subjective interpretation.

*Literary Fiction* is comprehensive in its analysis of other forms of literary theory, and Farner’s concise yet informative summations of formalism, structuralism, genre theory and aestheticism are useful on their own as an overview of the differing theoretical viewpoints. While, at times, his assertions sit uncomfortably beside the poststructuralist and postmodern modes of analysis that remain prevalent in literary criticism – which he amusingly acknowledges through his statement that despite the diversity of literary scholarship, it ultimately ‘does not matter what solution we opt for, for there are no consequences: no bridges collapse, nobody dies, and the lack of consensus affects neither the ozone layer nor the Gulf Stream’ (333) – Farner’s own theory is one which forces a reconsideration of the communication process of the text and the ways in which we read.

**Rosslyn Almond**

Micaela Maftei discusses issues of memory, truth(s), multiplicity of narrative voice, and uncertainty in her perhaps provocatively titled book, *The Fiction of Autobiography: Reading and Writing Identity*. Her primary concern is writing truthfully in autobiography, but she argues that truth and facts are not necessarily the same thing.

The book is structured in four chapters with an appendix of Maftei’s own autobiographical stories. In the first chapter she discusses truth; the second ‘dismisses’ unity and argues for a multiplicity of voices in autobiographical writing; the third deals with memory; and in the fourth she posits that autobiography is a ‘new product’ created from memory, not a direct transcript fixed in time. The autobiographical stories, which I found to be well written and engaging, were a ‘launch pad for research and critical writing’. Using these she has created a ‘story of the stories’.

In her introduction, Maftei delves further into these aims for her book. She wants to ‘explore the development of a way of thinking about and around autobiography and memoir that has three primary focuses’. She really sets out to unravel old preconceptions of what autobiography actually is: it is not a succession of facts about a person’s life that is set in concrete; the protagonist or subject of the autobiography is not the same person as the writer of the text, and, in fact, both change through time and with each writing out of the memory; memory is a process, as is autobiographical storytelling, and each instance of the latter is a ‘new, creative construction’ that has ‘a strong link to past events’ but is ‘not bound by’ them.

I would like to have seen more discussion of Maftei’s own autobiographical writing, rather than it being relegated to the end of the book and only mentioned briefly. To integrate her own writing into the discussion would have made this especially interesting for those readers who write autobiography themselves.

In Chapter One, ‘Truth and Trust’, Maftei brings in discussions of William Zinsser’s collection *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (1998), and the viewpoints of various contributors. Zinsser’s title alone ‘complicates the categories of invention and truth by binding them’ and making them both apply to the writing of memoir. Maftei argues against the idea of authorial intention as the basis for autobiographical truth, as she feels that not even the author may know his or her own intentions, let alone the reader (25).

In this chapter, autobiography as testimony and a means of surviving trauma is discussed, referring extensively to the writers Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (mistakenly referred to throughout as Lori Daub) and their significant work *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), as well as John Beverley’s *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (2004). Felman and Laub also treat autobiography as a ‘form of reconstruction’, particularly with respect to trauma, which they posit is not something just ‘remembered’ or ‘confessed’. Beverley talks of testimonio as particular to Latin American social justice autobiographies, texts that bind the personal and the sociopolitical, and which are a ‘way of integrating an individual’s story into a larger narrative of social injustice or violence’ (33).

Jill Ker Conway also asserts that there is no single truth in autobiography, that we write a truth rather than the truth (41). A number of fiction writers’ views on truth are also discussed, such as Toni Morrison, Virginia Woolf and Haruki Murakami. Maftei summarises her argument here with the following: ‘The line between truth and fiction is not clear, or maybe there is no line, or maybe sometimes you can see the line and sometimes you cannot’ (42). It made me think of the difference between a camera recording of an event, and human memory; the former is the same every time it is
played, while the latter changes every time the event is recalled, according to all the factors that influence memory, not the least being that 'story, in its telling, changes the memory’ (43).

Maftei includes a discussion of the important French theorist of autobiography, Philippe Lejeune, whose significant essay ‘The Autobiographical Pact’ (1975) included the definition of autobiography and, as Maftei notes, an important distinction between autobiography and the novel. This creates problems, with the necessity for there to be authorial intention for the work to be autobiography rather than fiction otherwise the reader cannot tell the difference. Later, Lejeune revised his views, and noted that the reader brings his or her reading to the text, which is, of course, out of the control of the author: ‘The public is not homogenous’ (qtd 52).

In her second chapter, ‘Me and Not-Me: Dismissing Unity in Autobiographical Writing’, Maftei extends her thoughts on the fluid aspects of autobiography with a discussion of the multiplicity of voices inherent in such texts. She refers to Paul John Eakin’s ideas of ‘living narratively’ – constructing our lives by constructing narratives about our lives (62) – and the importance of language in communicating inner experience. She discusses several writers’ autobiographies and memoirs to engage with these points, including Roland Barthes, Joan Didion and Gertrude Stein. In the latter she shows how Stein actually problematises Lejeune’s pact because the identity between the author, narrator and protagonist is deliberately confused, and the book is an ‘extreme example of creating a persona’ (81).

Maftei addresses memory and its presence in memoir in the third chapter with reference to Vladimir Nabokov’s Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited (2000) and Joan Didion’s The Year of Magical Thinking (2005). Memory is not a fixed object but a tool to create autobiographical text; it is something that the brain can do rather than find, according to Israel Rosenfield (96). Maftei uses Rosenfield’s work to argue that ‘memory can be seen as a process of constant reconstruction performed by the brain’ (97) and therefore is ‘one more source of fiction’, making autobiographies special fictions based on memory rather than purely imagination. She makes a distinction here between lies and inventions; autobiographical work is not exemplified by James Frey’s A Million Little Pieces (2003), where he exaggerated the truth to make the work more sensational, for example. I see her arguing that an autobiography is not a final telling of one person’s story garnered from an infallible, fixed memory, but instead a version of one person’s experience which inevitably involves other people and which will vary with each telling because of the nature of memory.

In her last chapter, Maftei builds on this argument. She quotes John Sturrock’s ideas about autobiography as a ‘process of conversion’ but prefers to use the term construction, as it reflects the newness of the writing and structure of the book produced (135). The brain is, according to Martin Conway, more concerned with ‘making sense of things than it is in representing them accurately’ (qtd 141), so memory reflects this process, and our narratives are ‘embroidered with imagination’ (146–47).

Micaela Maftei’s exploration of autobiography is stimulating, well written and argued, and an extremely useful addition to the field of life writing studies, particularly with respect to memory and our contemporary understanding of how it works.

Sue Bond
Beate Neumeier and Kay Schaffer (eds), *Decolonizing the Landscape: Indigenous Cultures in Australia* (Rodopi: Amsterdam, New York, 2014)

*Decolonizing the Landscape: Indigenous Cultures in Australia* is a timely publication. It arrives at a time when Australian Studies departments in several universities are producing some of their most creative offerings, despite the fact that many are facing closure. In Europe, meanwhile, Australian Studies continues to receive scholarly attention with flourishing departments in Spain, England, Denmark and Germany. Not least, the establishment of the Dr R. Marika Guest Chair for Australian and Indigenous Studies in the English Department of the University of Cologne in 2009 provides opportunities for Australian scholars to contribute new work in postcolonial, literary and cultural studies.

*Decolonizing the Landscape* addresses the question of how Anglo-European researchers respond to critical and creative works by Australian Indigenous writers, artists, filmmakers and performers, themes which are central to the development of Australian studies, particularly as the discipline continues the journey toward the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum and contributes to the ongoing dialogue about reconciliation. This collection arose from the international conference on ‘Indigenous Knowledge: Issues of Cultural Transfer and Transformation’, held in July 2011, which sought to acknowledge Australia’s colonial past as a ‘violent history of oppression’, and, through a process of ‘self-questioning and unsettlement’, enter into a ‘true dialogue’ with, and provide a ‘renewed ethical response’ to, those creative and critical works (ix).

The nexus between the creative and the critical is important, as the works of Indigenous writers, poets, artists and filmmakers, in their own ways, offer anti-colonial cultural critiques and provocative new ways to read and contest dominant productions of Australian national identity, including the narrative of white possession that overlies the dispossession of Indigenous Australia.

*Decolonizing the Landscape* reminds us that the process of national meaning-making is not only social and internal, but also broadly intercultural and transnational. The 15 essays collected here bring together Australian, Indigenous and European scholars to debate the uses of decolonising methodologies as critical, ethical and creative practices. New critical readings of creative works by Kim Scott, Alexis Wright and Richard Frankland, among others, consider the need for non-Indigenous scholars to engage in border-crossing, while reflecting on constructions of white subjectivity and the capacity of white scholarship to contribute to respectful knowledge production about Indigenous Australia.

The book is organised in three parts: ‘Sharing Across Boundaries’, ‘Ethical and Other Encounters’, and ‘Reading Transformations’. In ‘Sharing Across Boundaries’, essays by Kim Scott, Steven Muecke and Anna Haebich explore the limitations of Anglo-European knowing, whether in Muecke’s work about the problems inherent in a ‘whitefella’ translating the songs of Kimberley people, Haebich’s critique of the colonial archive’s constructions of Aboriginality as expressions of ‘racism, power and control’(42), or Scott’s work on the tensions inherent in the cultural transfer and ‘controlled giving’ of Indigenous knowledges and cultures in order that those cultures be revitalised and preserved (18). Michael Christie calls for a decolonising methodology in project design, arguing that the politics of non-Indigenous knowing (and not-knowing) are central to a Western research tradition that privileges government knowledge-practices over Yolŋu knowledge-making (62). The closing essay in this section, by Eleonore Wildburger, mobilises Indigenous critiques of the
epistemological work of art galleries and museums to rethink how Western European curators might better interpret and exhibit Indigenous Australian art to foster ‘cross-culturally appropriate communication and mutual understanding’ (85). This cross-cultural work is not only transnational, but remains important inside Australia if understanding about our shared colonial past is to progress beyond what remains, outside the academy, a frustratingly entry-level conversation.

‘Ethical and Other Encounters’ considers problems of Western framing and knowledge systems in the construction of Indigeneity. Bill Ashcroft explores how non-Indigenous readers might apprehend Indigenous knowledge, calling for a willingness to enter into ‘transcultural contact zones’ (113), which offer a form of ‘knowledge beyond words’ (108). These transcultural spaces generate new meanings and new understandings, to enable new processes of negotiation and exchange (111) between white ‘settler’ culture and Indigenous cultures. By contrast, Lisa Slater calls for a form of intercultural understanding that requires the white colonial subject to move beyond ‘anxious’ whiteness (144) to disrupt the peculiarly Australian ‘habit’ of ‘colonial amnesia’ (134) that forecloses any notion of Indigenous sovereignty. Kay Schaffer considers works by non-Indigenous writers Stephen Muecke, Margaret Somerville and Katrina Schlunke as reconciliation narratives, which unsettle dominant modes of ‘white settler belonging’ (151) through their respective engagement with Indigenous knowledges and ontologies. Schaffer is troubled by the ‘risks’ of appropriating ‘Indigenous lifeways’ (158) to examine white settler anxieties, but it is also important, she concludes, to ‘run the risk of being wrong’ to create new beginnings for the exploration of white settler subjectivity (165). Sue Kossew argues that a tendency to construct Kim Scott’s That Deadmen Dance as a post-reconciliation narrative acts out a form of temporary ‘postcolonial trauma therapy’ that only perpetuates colonialist views, seeking instead a coming-to-terms with history that acknowledges white guilt and ‘complicity’ (171).

These are important themes, but as designated Australian Studies departments dissolve into other areas of the Humanities, the question of where, and how, these will be taught remains. For scholars in literary studies, postcolonial studies and cultural studies, the final section of the collection, ‘Transformative Readings’, turns to the ethical and political dimensions of being Australian, to explore problems of white reading and misreading in the interpretation and critique of Indigenous creative works. Philip Mead considers power, the function of literary criticism, and the radical cultural critique of knowledge-making institutions offered by Alexis Wright in Carpentaria. Heinz Antor explores the suppression and reassertion of Indigenous cultures through Sam Watson’s novel, The Kadiatcha Sung, which catalogue colonial violence and white racism in the past and present. Anne Brewster examines the role of Aboriginal humour, situating it as a form of ‘gallows humour’ that critiques racialised violence, coloniality, and whiteness, to decolonise white signification of stereotypes about Aboriginality (249). Katrin Althans also considers the challenge to white signification employed by Richard Frankland, whose short film, No Way to Forget, appropriates and transforms the Gothic mode to tell the story of Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, locating institutional violence as a contemporary reality for Aboriginal people (271). Closing the collection, Beate Neumeier meditates on the ‘performative turn’ in the humanities, and the possibilities for ‘post-traumatic theatre’ to testify to the cultural trauma of racialised violence.

Together, these essays acknowledge and begin to work through the difficulties of Anglo-European academics encountering and entering into dialogue with Indigenous Australian texts, whether by being willing to risk the ‘inevitability of misreading’ or by facing the ‘discomforting recognition’ (xix) of their/our complicity in race relations. Decolonizing the Landscape is of value to scholars interested in the cross-cultural and critical endeavour of a praxis centred on decolonising
methodologies. For me, though, a true dialogue requires more Indigenous speakers. Adding a section in which Indigenous writers, artists and filmmakers respond to these essays would strengthen and complement the collection, and, perhaps, advance the conversation.

Laura Deane
Bernth Lindfors and Geoffrey V. Davis (eds), *African Literatures and Beyond: A Florilegium* (Rodopi, 2013)

In the preface to the volume *Contemporary African Cultural Productions* (2012), Pinkie Mekgwe and Adebayo Olukoshi note that, ‘all over Africa, an explosion in cultural productions of various genres is in evidence’. Commenting on the flourishing cultural life on the continent, both scholars assume that the scholarly community, at least, not African social scientists, did not seriously engage with African cultural productions. One would hardly disagree with Mekgwe and Olukoshi on the contention that the politics of research even in most African universities does not feature local cultural productions and their modes of inscription in global cultural negotiations as prominent objects of scholarly investigation. Nevertheless, a wholesale dismissal of the growing scholarship on African culture is commonplace and reproduces the problem one sets out to address. Largely, the visibility that African cultural productions are gaining nowadays pertains to the work of scholars, cultural and political activists who have been instrumental in creating awareness about African cultural presence in the last decades.

For nearly half a century James Gibbs has been at the forefront of scholarship into Anglophone African literature. You hardly write a piece on Wole Soyinka without mentioning his name, either to align with or interrogate his claims. His colleagues gathered 25 essays and creative writings, ‘to celebrate both the man and his works’; the *Festschrift* edited by Bernth Lindfors and Geoffrey V. Davis and published in the Cross/Cultures series of Rodopi is a commendable book. If many commemorative volumes are designed to revisit the works of a scholar in order to shed new light on the salient features of their works, it appears that the editors of *African Literature and Beyond: A Florilegium* have decided to avoid rendering cheap praise to James Gibbs’s brilliant works. It strikes the reader that only few references to James Gibbs occur throughout the essays.

The structure of the book illustrates the diversity of Gibbs’s research interests. The first cluster of essays focuses on West Africa; two contributions in this section critically engage with Wole Soyinka’s oeuvre. Mpalive-Hangson Msiska examines the notion of power and the idea of the hegemonic in Wole Soyinka’s works. Msiska criticizes narratives which locate the rereading of dominant Marxist ideas of power exclusively in the realm of progressive Western movements such as cultural studies. He contends that, ‘Soyinka’s analysis of power in his creative work has attended to that zone beyond formal theoretical categorization of power’ (5). The essay thus ventures a reading of Soyinka that conflates critical and poetic texts and questions the political and ethical implications of their theoretical elaborations. Msiska convincingly shows that theorizing about African literature did not begin with the emergence of postcolonial theory in the 1980s.

Further contributions to the first section of the volume include Sola Adeyemi’s article on the narratives of the postcolony in Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*, Awo Mana Asiedu’s essay on the enduring relevance of the earliest Ghanaian play, *The Blinkards*, one hundred years after its first production, and Eustace Palmer’s exciting review of five plays by Sierra Leonean dramatists. Gareth Griffiths’s insightful study on The Rev. Joseph Jackson Fuller: A Native Evangelist and Black Identity in the Cameroons substantiates the results of recent research into the use of black evangelists in Africa: ‘In the process it has become clear that the story of the successful missionizing of black Africa is the story of its indigenous evangelists’ (69). Griffiths traces the desperate struggle of native

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Baptist Christians to remain under the authority of the Baptist Mission Society of London after Germany took control over Cameroon in the mid-1880s and the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society was now to take over the Baptist congregations and schools. Alluding to the question of native agency, Griffiths finds out that ‘both groups seem willing to treat the people of the Cameroons as items in a set of transactions rather than as people with their own views, emotions, and commitment to their Baptist faith and their preferred form of worship’ (85). Griffiths’s contribution is illuminating, though further investigations should explore the position of other missionary groups represented in this part of the continent on the eve of the Berlin Conference. While the editors’ choice to organize the essays around geographical regions is appealing, their understanding of regional boundaries becomes embarrassing when they place Griffiths’s study among the contributions focussing on West Africa.

The second section of the book groups three essays relating to Eastern and Central Africa. Jane Plastow and Geoffrey V. Davis give accounts of field experiences in Eritrea and in Zimbabwe, two countries in which artists face the disastrous consequences of political bankruptcy. In their audit of the Zimbabwean cultural sector, Davis and his colleagues of the ‘culture cluster’ within Commonwealth Organisations Committee acknowledge that ‘there is a sense that things are at last beginning to improve’ (133). Plastow’s report on the contrary takes an apocalyptic twist in the end: ‘I ceased writing about live theatre in Eritrea some years ago because it was no longer anything but a vehicle of state propaganda. The tender shoot of local-language radio drama now seems to have been cut off in the same way’ (101). Pia Thielmann examines memories of the Arab slavery in Jonathan Sajiwandani’s Road to Emancipation: From Slavery to Happiness. His contribution resonates with Chris Dunton’s study of four poems on the sinking of the troopship Mendi, which falls into the next section of the book focussing on South Africa. Raoul J. Granqvist’s reading of Carl Linnaeus’s fieldwork as translation is impressive. His definition of translation as ‘a term for appropriation and conquest’ (149) is highly convenient for the discussion of foundational texts of ethnology, anthropology, linguistics and humanism.

Another section of the book contains contributions dealing with other parts of the world. The pioneering role of the University of Bayreuth in promoting African studies in Germany is acknowledged by three contributions from scholars linked to that institution. In an interview with Anne Adams, Theodor Wondja Michael brings the legacy of German colonial rule to the fore. Their conversation is inspiring. Eckhard Breitinger, one of Germany’s best specialists of Anglophone African literature, died in August 2013 before the publication of the book. His essay examines romantic and revolutionary visions of Caribbean history as documented by German explorers, scientists and storytellers over six centuries.

The section presenting creative writings is as diverse as the book itself. Poetry, fiction and drama are represented; the content of the book thus becomes as colourful as the kente cloth chosen for the book cover. The last contribution to the book reveals an unknown dimension of Gibbs’s immeasurable talents. Innes’s short text and the accompanying pictures document the 2011 staging, in Goldsmiths College’s Pinter Centre, of a script written by James Gibbs. The photographs showing James Gibbs on the scene as well as the creative writings in this book constitute the best illustration of its title. James Currey and Lynn Taylor make a similar assessment: ‘James Gibbs, in his steady work for both African Theatre and African Literature Today, has […] made a singular contribution to the serious evaluation of work from Africa, both published and performed’ (338).

Mathias Donfouet

The use of memory as a historical medium has been growing in popularity since the first Holocaust survivors told their personal accounts. While it can be problematic to question the authenticity of personal stories told with passion and pathos, the stumbling block of veracity remains. Even if the criteria for historical truth-telling is reduced to the transmission of emotions, rather than facts, then how does a historian determine if a mood has been appropriately captured? This is particularly important if the subject is contentious and has more than one viewpoint expressed by those involved in events.

Yet merely examining the veracity of a personal account can call into question the memory and even identity of the person relating the story. This is even more complicated if seen through a postmodern lens that regards every opinion and point of view as valid, regardless of any competing external information.

While Kelly Jean Butler, in *Witnessing Australian Stories*, laments the problematic relationship between history and memory studies, this book does little to address the different approaches used by the two fields. In fact, she avoids addressing the concerns historians have with a methodology which does not compare oral history with available records. By linking witness to trauma, and more specifically the Holocaust, with the treatment of Aboriginal people, Butler invites an emotional response from the reader, rather than an intellectual one.

Butler concentrates her study on Australian cultural memory to attitudes towards Aboriginal people and asylum seekers. Limiting the scope has the advantage of making the subject matter a more manageable size, but it also situates her study in a particular political framework. This is an intentional decision by Butler, as she concentrates her study between the book marks of Prime Ministers Paul Keating and Kevin Rudd, both of whose leadership she praises as a ‘demonstration of ethical Australian citizenship’ (3). This period also covers Prime Minister John Howard, who Butler claims ‘worked to discredit the truth value of “other” voices in the public sphere’ (p 4). Butler is keen to assign blame for events, not just to assess them. She applauds Ann Curthoys’s contention that, ‘All non-indigenous people share the situation of living on someone else’s land’ (10).

This political framework is reinforced by terminology which is far from neutral: for example, ‘settlers’ for non-Aboriginal Australians. In addition, those who are perceived as disagreeing with Butler’s stance are given labels which are unnecessarily polemic. For example, Andrew Bolt is described as a ‘tabloid journalist’ (28), and ‘conservative’ is never linked to attitudes or actions of which Butler agrees, thereby imbuing the term with imputed shame (e.g. 187, 202, 209).

These value statements set the tone of Butler’s analysis and influences both her choice of material and conclusions. Butler’s use of descriptors such as ‘witnessing’, ‘truth-telling’ and ‘testimony’ invite the reader to accept at face value any oral history and she avoids assessment of the authenticity of the examples she relates, preferring to examine how they have shaped cultural attitudes and self-identity in positive ways (see 22, 24, 28-29). Butler equates the failure to unequivocally accept indigenous testimony with a lack of empathy and even with violence against a group (209). If, as she asserts, ‘national memory has become the ground of key political and ethical debates in which witnessing and truth-telling have become tied to the production of civic virtue’ (23), then this assessment of its effectiveness is determined solely by Butler’s assumptions of what constitutes civic virtue.


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This is a shame, as the chosen events are described in detail and the discussion of the value of fictional and autobiographical accounts as historical testimony (which Butler calls ‘creative witnessing’) is engaging and insightful. More neutral language would have enabled her arguments the opportunity to stand on their own merits and made them more accessible to a wider readership.

Particularly disappointing was Chapter 5, which analyses cases of autobiographical fraud, specifically Norma Khouri’s Forbidden Love, and disputed accounts of the South Australian Hindmarsh Island Bridge affair. Butler’s choice of well-known and accessible topics had the potential for lively and insightful analysis. Her discussion of the fracturing of the pact between reader and narrator is excellent. However, this section is again distorted by Butler’s political views and there is an overuse of inverted commas to indicate the parts of the debate with which Butler disagrees.

Butler introduces the Hindmarsh Island Bridge affair to discuss the accusations that Ngarrindjeri women were lying about the spiritual significance of the island. Butler acknowledges the existence of a dissident group of Ngarrindjeri women. However, she sidesteps the potentially interesting analysis of two groups with apparent equal community standing disputing each other’s claims about the land. Butler thus privileges the testimony of the group with which she agrees and dismisses without comment that of the opposing women. In my view, she is committing the same rejection of Aboriginal oral testimony that she deplores in ‘settler Australians’.

Butler’s obvious political standpoint slants her assumptions and assessments and makes her study opaque to anyone who does not share her views. She writes with the assumption that all intelligent, right-thinking, ethical people agree with her, which betrays a lack of engagement with the complexities of the issues discussed and thus detracts from her argument. A more even-handed assessment of what are complex issues would have made this book a more useful addition to the field.

Jennifer Hein
When the subject of a study himself declares, as J. Hillis Miller does of Éamonn Dunne’s book (in the Preface), that it is ‘the best introduction I know to my work’, it gets our attention. Dunne’s book is indeed a useful, clearly written and thoroughly informed entry point into the astonishing range and acuity of Miller’s many publications, from 1958’s *Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels* to 2012’s *Reading for Our Time: Adam Bede and Middlemarch Revisited*. I know this because Dunne provides an excellent annotated bibliography of Miller’s ‘major works’ at the end of this book. Before this, as his title suggests, Dunne has, in the manner of a classic primer, used the alphabet as a practical way of structuring his ‘provisional, even speculative foray into’ Miller’s works. Dunne cleverly uses Miller’s own thread metaphor to characterize this working-through of both Miller’s meditations on reading and the maze of narrative itself.

Dunne tells us at the outset that ‘what has most interested me about Miller’s work ... is [his] attention to the *event* and *act* of reading’, specifically the ways in which narratives ‘have an uncanny way of escaping cognition and will, given half a chance, always exceed a reader’s expectations’ (xviii). Miller’s (post)structuralist readings attest to his keen interest in the uncanny ways in which texts are spatial and temporal – on the page, in the moment of reading – and yet, at the same time, exist in a kind of Platonic, ever-changing, ‘virtual’ world of words and stories. Dunne bears this out nicely in his A to Z entries. This does not mean that Dunne assumes Miller’s work is programmatic, only that this approach is a good as any other possible one.

The first entry, ‘A before B – of course …’, exemplifies this. Quoting from Miller’s 1999 book *Reading Narrative* (whose abbreviation Dunne has listed, along with 21 other Miller titles, at the outset), Dunne writes: ‘“Anacoluthon doubles the story line and so makes the story probably a lie” (RN, 149).’ In what proves to be characteristic, Dunne goes on to unpack the quotation in brisk and well-illustrated fashion. The line tells us, writes Dunne, ‘that storylines are assembled and dismembered by the implicit demand made on each reader to remember the way at all times, to follow the line back and forth from the clue . . . to the center of the labyrinth’ (1). But doing so is bound to include some ‘wandering’ from what the text is asking of us. The word anacoluthon – literally, an ungrammatical, nonsensical sequence – here means ‘an abrupt breach in the line’, such as Proust’s habit of switching pronouns mid-sentence to call our attention to the fictionality of all narratives, including ones we think are based on true memory. By drawing on a wealth of literary examples, Miller shows us how storytelling, which after all constitutes memory, rests at the juncture of ‘lying and remembrance’ (3). Since storytelling is both a retrospective act and, as Dunne emphasizes in his book title, the ‘now’ of active reading, we miss the point if we ask that a text be factual (such as the controversies over so-called lies in certain autobiographies). The trick is, instead, to detect the degree of trust we can (or are willing to) place in our authorial host. This first entry displays Dunne’s own (acknowledged) editorialized prerogatives, for he sets out here some of Miller’s most significant concerns.

Dunne’s primer goes on in similar fashion to discuss Beginnings, Character and Decision, as well as Uncanny, Virtual and Writing, unravelling a sophisticated but cleanly threaded path through Millerian interpretation. A term that recurs frequently enough to warrant its own entry, in my view, is ‘strange’. In discussing Miller’s understanding of the uncanny, for instance, Dunne describes how the reading of a comic passage in David Copperfield reveals its ‘strange and uneasy mix of the horrid...
and the ridiculous’ (69), a mix that resembles Freud’s use of uncanniness. As Dunne observes in his introduction, Miller is famously drawn to such ‘bizarre and esoteric moments’ in literature (xvi) because they are microcosms of all narrative and all reading, which is itself a staging of the strange and, as we read, an experience of linguistic strangeness. It is, therefore, says Miller (quoted by Dunne) the business of critics to ‘translate’ this realization of ‘how very strange the works of literature are’ (xvii). The result is an equally strange commentary, says Dunne, further illustrating the mainspring of Millerian reading, namely, that each text (indeed, each phrase) is weird and unfamiliar in some way until placed within a more familiar cultural pattern. But this uncanny sensation is never fixed since, ‘Each act of reading is a performative action, a finding of what was there already’ (xvi).

The performative nature of reading explains part of Dunne’s choice of title, ‘reading now’. Reading is inescapably temporal, yet always somehow situated, a bit like Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle. But is Dunne right to emphasize theory, given his observation that ‘theory is not the end of reading, but its beginning’ (xxv), and that Miller isn’t a theorist in the sense that he advocates particular interpretive rules? Judging by Dunne’s masterful summary of Miller’s oeuvre, it seems so. Miller is less a traditional theorist than one whose works offer a lit-crit version of Snapchat, the software that lets you send emails that disappear after a set time. Apply these insights to your favourite literary works, Dunne seems to be saying, and they can make them more meaningful.

Meaning is thus pragmatic and processual, not fixed. Miller’s ideas help us appreciate that reading is at once naively pleasurable and consciously critical, and that all texts are fluid, shifting with time, circumstance and person. When Dunne says, therefore, that ‘there is no escaping theory’ (xxv), he does not mean we all must use critical jargon, simply that we – especially we teachers and students of literature – must acknowledge that language is a serious, profoundly ethical matter. ‘To read well,’ Dunne declares, reflecting Miller’s view, ‘is to struggle with theory’s grip, to write from the heart as well as the head’ (xxix). Miller has clearly been doing this for over a half-century, and Dunne’s excellent introduction shows that he, too, has clearly taken this to heart, as should we all.

Alan Johnson

Book reviews: Reading Theory Now: An ABC of Good Reading with J. Hillis Miller by Éamonn Dunne. Alan Johnson.


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Nicolas Kenny, *The Feel of the City: Experience of Urban Transformation* (University of Toronto Press, 2014)

The subject of the modern city and the experiences of urbanites that dwell within it has long been a subject of critical attention. However, as Nicolas Kenny’s text *The Feel of the City* argues, ‘Large, diverse, and powerfully attractive, cities like Paris and New York garner such extensive scholarly attention that they are widely seen as the archetypes of urban modernity’ (4). This, Kenny says, has obscured the fact that ‘most city people tended to live in places like the lesser-known cities’ (4) of Montreal and Brussels, which become the subjects of interrogation in his work. Kenny’s text is a valuable addition to the voluminous existing scholarship on the urban experience of modernity in part because of this illuminating and suggestive reading of Montreal and Brussels as more indicative of the urban experience of the average city-dweller of modernity, whereas much urban studies work focuses on the modern metropolises and world cities constituting the London-New York-Paris triad.

Drawing from a litany of sources and documents, Kenny’s text documents the experiences of citizens in Montreal and Brussels in impressive detail.

In addition to opening up these underexplored centres of urban experience, Kenny’s text also challenges the way in which tradition notions of urban subjectivity have been discussed. Kenny’s primary impulse is to explore the way in which ‘sensorial experience and bodily practices’ (4) are constituted in the urban environments of Montreal and Brussels. This thesis rests on the argument that ‘the body played a fundamental role in mediating the relationship between city dwellers and urban environments, propelling the tangible physicality of streets and buildings into the realm of individual consciousness and public discourse’ (4). By contending ‘that the individual body and the shared space of the city were mutually constitutive’ (5), Kenny’s work draws upon and wrestles with an impressive array of theorists of modernity (including Marshall Berman, Georg Simmel, and Michel de Certeau) to ‘build on understandings of the modern urban experience that tend either to understate the body’s vitality or disfigure it from the material environment in which its workings and significance were rooted’ (11). Specifically, Kenny’s text focuses on the sights, sounds, smells and haptic sensorial experiences that an urban dweller experienced in late-nineteenth and early twentieth century Montreal and Brussels.

Rather than focusing on settling the argument of whether language mediates experience or whether experience produces linguistic representation, Kenny ‘spans the busy crossroads of corporeal practices and their representations, arguing that the two are inextricably linked in the experience of the modern city’ (18). This, Kenny argues, aligns his study with historian Martin Jay’s declaration that experience stands, ‘at the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior’ (19). In this way, Kenny draws from an impressive and wide-ranging group of sources and ‘draws heavily on sources frequently glossed over in urban history scholarship, especially in Montreal and Brussels, but that offer insights into urban dwellers’ intimate musings about their environment’ (20). These sources include administrative records, travel guides and hygiene manuals in addition to more commonly analysed sources such as novels, newspapers and magazines.

As with many studies of modernity and the modern, Kenny’s project seeks to establish temporal boundaries around his study. For Kenny’s text, modernity begins to shape the cities of Montreal and Brussels around 1880. This is because the 1880s marked the beginning of ‘economic recovery from a global recession in renewed industrial and urban growth that continued until the outbreak of the First World War’ (22). The study’s periodization comes to a close in 1914, as
German forces initially occupy Brussels in August of 1914. However, for Kenny ‘these dates serve as markers that situate the link between urban environments and human interiorities within a period of particular social and cultural agitation, rather than as flat delineators of precise events’ (22). Kenny’s work identifies the tumultuous changes that occur during this period and their effects on the citizenry of these transforming modern cities.

The first chapter of the work provides a historical background for the material and environmental changes in both Montreal and Brussels. The second chapter of the work serves as the most impressive in its chronicling of discourses produced on the city in the time period covered. Particular to this section is the development of the ‘panorama’ as ‘a powerful rhetorical tool with which urban elites reinforced the rationalist project of modernity and inscribed upon the urban landscape the image of order and prosperity they wished it to incarnate’ (42). The chapter then moves to a discussion of the industrial periphery and the way in which these areas were in fundamental tension with the ‘image of order and prosperity’ of the urban elites. The final three chapters shift into an examination of the workplace (Chapter Three), the home (Chapter Four), and the streets (Chapter Five) to ‘tell the story of how the inhabitants of modern cities felt, moved through, and appropriated their environments’ (22-3). The Feel of the City is an engaging examination of the understudied urban centres of Montreal and Brussels, and appeals to not only readers interested in urban studies, city planning, and sociology, but also readers in the humanities through its examination of the subjective experience of the modern city.

Adam R. McKee

How can an entire library disappear? This is the first question addressed by literary historian Nicole Moore in *The Censor’s Library*. The answer is an unsettling one. It was an open secret that Australian censors kept a reference library of banned books from the 1920s to the late 1980s, but after this period the collection mysteriously disappeared. Moore found a reference to it in an anti-censorship newspaper article in 1971, but then ‘across more than thirty years I couldn’t trace another encounter with the collection’ (xi). Her journey of research had just begun.

It wasn’t until 2005 that the Censor’s library – all 793 boxes and 12,000 titles of it – was rediscovered. Working with Moore, National Archives of Australia staff tracked it down in the basement of one of their branches in western Sydney; it had been carefully stored seven storeys underground, its whereabouts incompletely recorded. The Censor’s library had become an unnamed deposit in an uncatalogued file series, pertaining to the Customs department.

As Moore opens the boxes and unpacks the books, she gives the library many names: the Customs library, the Censor’s library, the ‘purloined library’, the non-Australian library. She also uses the expression ‘the negative library’: these books went unread. They were confiscated, wrapped in brown paper and ‘removed from public sight … the mistrustful, practical men who exercised authority’ (124) deemed these works too dangerous – obscene, blasphemous, seditious – for Australian eyes.

The books in question were as varied as Aldous Huxley’s famous *Brave New World* (1932) and Robert Close’s unmemorable *Love Me Sailor* (1945). Kathleen Winsor’s *Forever Amber* (1944), one of my favourite trashy novels when I was a teenager, also made it to the hit list -as did Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722). Petronius, Boccaccio, George Orwell, D.H. Lawrence, Harold Robbins, Jackie Collins: the history of censorship is somehow always as banal as it is intriguing.

Reading with hindsight, you have to wonder what all the fuss was about. Here its most interesting aspects are the reflections made on *Australian* society. Why were Australian censors so very reactionary, and so over-zealous? What were they trying to ‘protect’ us from?

Moore explores these issues in the sixteen chapters of her well-written, thoroughly-researched book. The arrangement is thematic, so a reader can easily learn that, at different times, Australians were prevented from reading particular political pamphlets, comics, gay and lesbian material, birth control information, romance fiction, poetry and the work of modernist authors. One chapter deals with the so-called ‘Bastards from the bush’, Australian authors who fell foul of post-war censorship: Frank Hardy, Sumner Locke Elliott, Christina Stead and ‘Ern Malley’. (On the latter, there is a wonderful irony in the idea that the work of an imaginary person could be declared obscene.) The ‘Homosexualists and pornographers’ section highlights the fact that ‘in its various forms, homosexuality was often treated as a threat more dangerous, more pervasive and more in need of erasure than any other manifestation of obscenity’ (131). Many ‘suspect’ titles from Europe and Australia were censored, including Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Jean Devanny’s *Virtuous Courtesan* (1935).

‘Brave new moderns’ turns attention to the great modernist authors whose literary works were also banned overseas. But while D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) and Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) were the subjects of notorious world-wide censorship controversies, Huxley’s *Brave New World* was banned in only two countries: Ireland and Australia. As Moore comments drily, the irony of suppressing a novel that satirized totalitarian regimes was lost on determined Australian and Irish censors.
Another entry point into Moore’s book is the excellent index; from here the reader can quickly check the status of authors, titles and controversies whose history interests them. Which novels by Balzac were banned? What about Orwell’s famous political satire, *Animal Farm*? Or books challenging the laws on euthanasia? The notes and bibliography are also helpful and generous, pointing the reader to primary sources and further reading that cover court transcripts, interviews, archival sources, books and journal articles.

With meticulous scholarship, Nicole Moore offers a number of reasons for twentieth century Australia’s infamously active history of censorship. She considers the impact of the former settler colony mentality, the fact that Australia’s book market was dominated by British imports, and the nation’s status as an island (‘a national border easily policed through parcel post and ship and air traffic’ (5)). She emphasises that Australians were subject to particularly extensive ‘modern bureaucratic control’ that took the form of ‘a rigorous and successful censorship regime’ (6). The system was widespread, invasive and costly to establish and maintain. How many myths of Australian culture and identity does this overturn? The ‘lucky country’, the ‘classless society’, the relaxed and easy-going mentality of a tolerant, laid-back culture? How much does it confirm the image of Australia as the site of ignorance and philistinism, the ugly ‘cultural cringe’? Like all good scholarship, Moore’s work raises as many questions for consideration and debate as it answers with evidence and interpretation.

*The Censor’s Library* – ‘uncovering the lost history of Australia’s banned books’ – is a scholarly and insightful work that is also stylishly written and a pleasure to read. I would recommend it to anyone interested in twentieth-century Australian history and culture, to readers of literature and to advocates of democracy and freedom of expression. It is disturbing to discover just how many books Australians were not allowed to read.

Jennifer Osborn
Philip Tew (ed.) Reading Zadie Smith: The First Decade and Beyond (Bloomsbury, 2013)

Edited by Philip Tew, Reading Zadie Smith is a collection of essays that looks at Zadie Smith’s work from her first novel, White Teeth (2000), to her then most recent book, NW (2012). The essays in this collection engage critically with Smith’s novels, short stories and other writing. The contributors do not look at Smith’s work through a monochromatic postcolonial lens or try to fit Smith and her work into a predetermined theoretical framework. The novelty of the collection as a whole lies in the variety of critical approaches to Smith’s œuvre that it presents.

The first three essays of Reading Zadie Smith are on Smith’s first and by far the most famous novel, White Teeth. The first essay, Brad Buchanan’s “The Gift that Keeps on Giving”: Zadie Smith’s White Teeth and the Posthuman, highlights Smith’s intellectual engagement with posthumanist traditions to wrestle with the problem of what unites human beings through a persistent use of Oedipus trope. In Buchanan’s reading, the climax of White Teeth questions Fukuyama’s theory that ‘science takes away a human being’s autonomy’. The second essay, Ulrike Tancke’s ‘White Teeth Reconsidered: Narrative Deception and Uncomfortable Truths’, traces the early positive reception of White Teeth as well as the latter, more critical questioning of the commoditisation and ‘perceived exploitation of exoticism’ of, both, the author and the novel, but does not agree with either of the views. According to Tancke, White Teeth is a layered presentation of uncomfortable truths under a veneer of humour where migration is ‘the original trauma of not belonging’, hybridity is a source of anxiety, and multicultural coexistence is an experience threatening the idea of selfhood and identity owing to the blurring of ethnic boundaries. The third essay, Joanna O’Leary’s ‘Body Larceny: Somatic Seizure and Control in White Teeth’, gives us yet another reading of White Teeth that is totally different from the rosy, utopian version of multiculturalism in the initial reviews. Through the characters of White Teeth and its central theme of somatic manipulation and genetic engineering, O’Leary analyses the way Smith presents the ‘human body’ as a site of expression of identity as well as a site of conflict between the desire to control and the resistance to it, of conflict between acceptance of the existing/actual body form and the quest for a desired/ideal body form.

The next two essays focus on Smith’s second novel The Autograph Man (2002), generally considered a disappointing second act. The first essay is Philip Tew’s ‘Celebrity, Suburban Identity and Transatlantic Epiphanies: Reconsidering Zadie Smith’s The Autograph Man’. Tew opposes the initial criticism of the novel’s ‘irrelevant intensity’ and superficial presentation of the equally superficial ‘hollow things of modernity’ such as cinema, celebrity and overvaluation of symbol over reality, experience and substance. Tew’s aim is to redeem the novel by highlighting Smith's rejection of the contemporary obsession with symbols, of over-intellectualisation of life that occludes the ‘human’ desire and quest for identity, meaning and authenticity. The following essay, Tracey K. Parker’s ‘I Could Have Been Somebody’: The Articulation of Identity in Zadie Smith’s The Autograph Man, reads The Autograph Man as a continuation of Smith’s ‘exploration of the meaning and value of popular culture in contemporary subject's life’ (69) begun in White Teeth. Parker draws attention to Smith’s simultaneous engagement with Jean Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreal, wherein image has replaced the ‘real’ in the current era and pursuit of the simulacra has rendered human existence superficial, and Stuart Hall’s interrogation of this pessimistic vision of contemporary life as meaningless to focus on the ‘meaning’ that the contemporary individual ‘reads’ in the hyperreal image.
In the following essay, “‘Temporal Layers’: Personal and Political History in Zadie Smith’s On Beauty” Susan Alice Fischer focuses on Smith's third novel, On Beauty (2005). In Parker’s reading, On Beauty, as a part of contemporary literature’s ‘historical turn’, subtly ‘highlights the place of history in our everyday lives’ (83). According to Parker, Smith explores the ways in which slavery and the more recent debates around ‘affirmative action’ play a role in the formation of US identity with the aim to indicate that the ‘only way forward’ is to become aware of and acknowledge past hurts and the way they affect contemporary life.

The next two essays look at Smith’s most recent novel NW (2012), published only a few months before Reading Zadie Smith. In ‘The Right to a Secret: Zadie Smith's NW’, Lynn Wells observes Derrida’s influence on NW, where the right to keep secrets is an expression of uniqueness and of the desire to maintain one’s individuality. Derrida thought of secrets as a resistance to hegemonic, panoptic space of collective narratives. According to Wells, by revealing the secrets of the social/marginalised/stereotypical ‘others’, Smith invites the reader to go beyond the social norms and hegemonic narratives to seek the unique story of each individual. The following essay is ‘Revisionary Modernism and Postmillennial Experimentation in Zadie Smith’s NW’, by Wendy Knepper. Knepper reads NW as an experimental novel and an expression of Smith’s belief that ‘style is a writer’s way of telling the truth’ (111). Knepper highlights the links between NW and Smith's critical essay, ‘Two Directions for the Novel’, placing the novel within the avant-garde prose tradition from Melville to Kafka to Tom McCarthy. In Knepper’s reading, Smith experiments with spatial narrative, disrupted chronologies, and graphical presentation in search of a new aesthetics to respond to the effects of postmillennial, post 9/11 global anxieties and prevailing norms of racio-cultural ‘othering’ on a ‘locality’.

The rest of the essays focus on certain aspects of Smith’s oeuvre. In “‘That God Chip in the Brain’: Religion in the Fiction of Zadie Smith”, Magdalena Mączyńska considers Smith’s ambivalence toward religiosity in view of the centrality of the theme of religion in her fiction, both, as an influence that shapes the modern world and continues to have a hold on contemporary imagination. Mączyńska highlights Smith’s understanding of the aesthetical, spiritual need and longing that drives people to religion as well as her strong aversion to fundamentalist beliefs and sects whether in religion or science.

In ‘The Novel's Third Way: Zadie Smith's “Hysterical Realism”’, Christopher Holmes draws attention to Smith’s faith in the ability of the ‘novel’ as a literary form to deal with the complexities of contemporaneity. Holmes argues that, in Smith's aesthetics, Novel as an ‘analogue of thought’ is capable of ‘meeting’ and dealing with contradictory ideas. For Holmes, Smith suggests a new way of looking at ‘reading’ by thinking of novel as an architectural structure that ‘invites thoughts in’ in various ways; a structure/form that offers gaps in relationality, and thereby an opportunity for readers to bridge these gaps, to ‘come to know and understand’ through this process.

In ‘Eliminating the Random, Ruling the World: Monologic Hybridity in Zadie Smith’s White Teeth and Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children’, Lewis MacLeod traces the similarities between Midnight’s Children and White Teeth to point out the ease with which Rushdie and his novel can be used to critique White Teeth. Underlining the classificatory and ‘othering’ impulse inherent to the idea of ‘dirt as impurity’, Lewis draws attention to the fact that once any dirt is accepted within the folds of a counter-establishment practice of classification it becomes part of that system and a determinant of what then is considered as ‘dirt’. The analogy is very clear. Lewis here is suggesting that though White Teeth has been praised for its portrayal of hybridity, heterogeneity and for the newness of this portrayal, its newness and its subjects are always already contained within an
established ‘countercanonical’ literary practice that is a Rushdian legacy, just as they are circumscribed by prevailing homogenised and hegemonic critical expectations.

The last essay, Lucienne Loh’s ‘Zadie Smith’s Short Stories: Englishness in a Globalized World’, is different from the rest of the collection because it focuses on Smith’s short stories to identify and analyse three key themes in the body of this short fiction. These themes are British multiculturalism in a globalized world, Smith’s white English bourgeois women, and post-war English masculinity and Smith’s men. As the themes indicate, Smith’s short fiction explores the contemporary notion of Englishness, the way it manifests itself in non-English situations in real and fictional world, and the way it is manifested differently by English middle-class women and men. Loh suggests that Smith's short fiction combines elements from the American and English traditions of short fiction.

Barring the missing last letters from a few words, nothing mars the stimulating experience offered by these essays. This collection is an important addition to the corpus of critical response to Smith’s work and a must read for those who wish to engage with her fiction, whether for study or pleasure.

Ashwinee Pendharkar
If I recall correctly, my farmer father on South Australia’s Eyre Peninsula enjoyed the ‘Ben Bowyang’ cartoons which appeared weekly in the Adelaide Chronicle in the 1950s. ‘Ben Bowyang’ was one of the later creations of renowned popular poet C.J. Dennis, who as Philip Butterss’s excellent new biography shows, was himself originally a country boy from rural South Australia, and is now regarded as one of the State’s more significant literary figures. However as Butterss’s title has it, he was not, as the title of his most famous verse has it, ‘a sentimental bloke’. His was to be a more complicated character.

It was a surprise too to learn that C.J. Dennis remains Australia’s most popular and financially successful poet, due to his larrikin verse dating from the early twentieth century, especially The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke (1915) and The Moods of Ginger Mick (1916). These titles have sold phenomenally well over time, and are still available today. Even so, the flow of Dennis’s career had its ups and downs. Maybe, Butterss concludes, conflicting aspects of his personality were integral to his output and popularity (222).

Clarence Michael James Clement Dennis was born in Auburn in the South Australia’s picturesque Lower North in 1876. He spent his first 21 years in that area, where his father was a hotelkeeper, mostly somewhat further north, at Laura. The Dennis family was of Irish and Roman Catholic origin, which no doubt accounts in good part for the young C.J.’s unsettled youth, along with an unsympathetic father. Fortunately for the young Dennis, he would find his feet in the tiny world of Adelaide’s radical journalism at the turn of the century. There, as Butters puts it, ‘he learned to write in different voices’ (30).

In 1907 Dennis left Adelaide for Melbourne, where he worked until his death in 1938 aged 62. As early as 1908, long-term Melbourne colleague and poet Hal Gye introduced him to Toolangi, a small village in the Victorian mountain country north of Healesville, his haven thereafter; and although success did not come quickly, he soon found his way into Melbourne’s much larger Bohemian culture. Moreover – and tracing this is one of the strengths of Butterss’s biography – a major transformation was soon underway in his work, from radical to populist verse, to be manifest five years later in the publication of Backblock Ballads and other verses, by Melbourne’s radical bookseller E.W. Cole in 1913. The book included a cover by New Zealand-born artist ‘Dave’ (David) Low, thereafter a close friend and later an internationally renowned cartoonist in London.

Dennis’s persona was changing too. Reared at Laura by single aunts, according to previous biographer A.R. Chisholm as ‘a little Lord Fauntleroy’, he was on his way to the larrikinese that made his name with The Songs of the Sentimental Bloke and The Moods of Ginger Mick. In 1917, to the surprise of his friends, aged 40 he married Tasmanian-born Olive Price, who outlived him by thirty years, having become a writer herself. In this biography we get a clearer picture of the marriage, a subject barely touched upon by previous biographers.

Just as 1901 is a key reference point in the life of Miles Franklin, so the years 1915-16 must be deemed pivotal in any account of the life and work of C.J. Dennis. In a well-structured work of fifteen chapters, the last two of which deal with the afterlife of Dennis and his writings, Butters places these years at chapters six to eight. There he discusses the creation, publication and enthusiastic reception of The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke and The Moods of Ginger Mick. In a neat and powerful summation, these two works in the vernacular made him ‘the laureate of the larrikin’ and ‘the laureate of the Anzacs’.
The year 1916 was the pinnacle of Dennis’s career (121). Even so, he continued to write poetry until the mid-1920s, when he became a literary editor at the Melbourne Herald. By then, his ‘larrikinese’ was becoming increasingly out-of-date, and sales figures declined. Of this, the ‘unsentimental bloke’ of the book’s title was well aware; and the danger of heavy drinking which had dogged him from his young days, again loomed. What probably saved him was his high profile, and the translation of his best-loved work into other genres, such as film: Raymond Longford’s ‘The Sentimental Bloke’ (1919) is now regarded as a classic of the silent film era (149). In fact, Dennis’s work did mostly still sell quite well: a print run of even 2,000 copies of a new title would satisfy most poets these days. Moreover, he had regular job, and a manageable marriage. It should also be noted that some of the later fictions are evidently of considerable interest, for example the reflections of ‘Digger Smith’ and ‘Jim of the Hills’.

Two (very different) aspects of Dennis’s approach to emerge from this biography will be of wider interest: first, his use of language, and, second, the historical significance of his World War I writing with its insight into the digger mentality. Regarding language, in 1915 Dennis began compiling (but never completed) a ‘Dictionary of Australian Slang’, a subject of increasing interest to linguists but too time-consuming for a creative writer (47). This is a pity because of his command of the contemporary vernacular there can be little doubt. Regarding his wartime writing, it serves not only as a pointer to an increasingly conservative personal approach to life but as a message for troubled times: The Sentimental Bloke was ‘a deeply unifying text’ in 1915, and its sequel in Ginger Mick captured the transition from bush to city larrikin (147). In my view, the latter of these two subjects has not yet received its scholarly due in Australia.

Readers will find much of interest in this book. It is highly informative and well written, with suitable scholarly supports in the form of a select bibliography, notes, and an index. It is also well produced, with 19 graphics, some in colour. C.J. Dennis may not to be everyone’s taste today, but his place in Australian literary history is assured and strengthened by the thorough and thoughtful treatment provided here. Butterss’s book will be the standard biography of the poet for many years to come.

Jill Roe


Cross/Cultures 170 provides readings in Post/Colonial Literatures and Cultures in English; however, the editors of Postcolonial Studies Across the Disciplines explain in their excellent introduction to the book that the Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English (ASNEL) originates in German-speaking countries. Notwithstanding that the cultural distinction is clearly framed – geopolitics do matter – the domain of postcolonial studies is understood to be a global and interdisciplinary field of inquiry.

The editors of ASNEL Papers 18 suggest that the postcolonial movement manifests ubiquitously within various academic disciplines and institutionalised departments and is often aligned with linguistics, literature and cultural studies – just another framing device in the vast range of critical approaches in literature, history and culture. However, there is an embedded caveat to study in the field. Scholarly engagement is often repressed or marginalised until Master’s specialisation and often endowed with a negative aura within establishments because of its challenging nature. Postcolonial studies are concerned with critical consciousness-raising in complex matters ‘of racism, colonialism, Orientalism and Eurocentrism while simultaneously engaging the mantra of race, nation, gender, class and sexuality’. 1 Inevitably, in exploring the underbelly of colonialism – master/slave relationships, marginalisation, inclusions/exclusions, solidarity and social justice issues – postcolonial scholars are drawn towards deconstruction and revisionist discourses (including the criticism of entrenched Western-style models of knowledge production). And change – especially the transfer of power and privilege that goes with the devolution of master narratives – is often resisted by those authorities with a personal stake in maintaining the status quo. Postcolonial scholars however believe in the possibility of metamorphosis. Attitudes, intentions and life-systems may be moved in response to alterity – something completely strange/familiar in [an]other – and the need for communion. The suggestion here is that they work in a space where altruism and realpolitik must be calibrated in practical application and contemporary issues filtered through sensitive, open minds in proximity and dialogue with that irresistible other.

ASNEL Papers 18 is the product of the 22nd Annual conference held in June 2011, a collaborative venture, drawing in the main upon communities surrounding the Atlantic – the Americas, Africa, the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean and Europe – and for those researchers interested in comparative reflection in areas of specialised interest, despite the spacial distances between their homelands or milieu. This publication cogently reflects current nerve endings in academia; for instance, the editors observe that the dominant school in British cultural studies has tended to exclude literature in its preference for popular cultural forms after the sociological turn in the 1970s. The convenors of this conference see their project as providing an alternative which redresses past omission with the stress primarily although not exclusively on literary contexts. Given these drivers, the essays here are arranged according to regional, thematic and methodological considerations. There are four sections following an introduction by Jana Gohrisch and Ellen Grünkemeier which presents a clear, informative and persuasive overview of the whole venture.

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‘Interdisciplinary Reflections’ contains six essays and focuses on neighbouring disciplines: history, textiles, art, linguistics, music and cultural studies. I am particularly fascinated by Johannes Ismaiel-Wendt’s analysis of popular music as a paradigm for recent cultural experiences of migration and academic scholarship in the contemporary context. This scholar pays tribute to the prominent cultural theorist and writer Stuart Hall. He calls on Hall’s expertise in popular culture and media studies and references his use of Reggae musical form to explain such terms as ‘diaspora’, ‘cultural identity’ and ‘imagined community’. His purpose is to question ‘how and to what extent popular music and postcolonial theories correspond to utopic understandings of culture’ (90) and to examine – cogently, I suggest – the motivations, reasonings and frameworks that couple postcolonial theory with popular music and praxis.

Ismaiel-Wendt postulates that music and music theory have always been critical to inspiring and shaping postcolonial studies, not merely by way of illustration but ‘as an epistemological system’ and the carrier in its own right of a worldview which informs habitual working practices. This is a grand claim. This scholar links pure music theory to an altruistic longing and search for an alternative poetics, one devoid of racist logic, coercion or cultural usurpation. In this intention, Ismaiel-Wendt is reaching for a utopic vision of migration – de-territorialisation without violence. He suggests that track studies correlate with the concept of ‘trek’ studies – movement across the landscape and takes up the notion of [re]mix to clarify how discrete patterns and traces of previous compositions negotiate new contact and adaptively respond to changes in the environment. Ismaiel-Wendt counsels the researcher to let go of history’s imbroglio and the polarised rhetoric of past confrontations and talks of the necessity to respond to present life-experience with an open mind. He suggests that fixed systems which smack of ‘nationalist, racist or heteronormous’ (104) discourses must be resisted. He is persuasive. But however passionate for cultural [ex]change Ismaiel-Wendt explains that this attitude is not always about rebellion and neither does it mean renunciation of cultural heritage. Echoes of the past are permitted, indeed necessary, in the process of recognition and meaning-making – the refrains give context. Nonetheless, track studies are about de-linking, a de-colonial epistemic shift towards alternatives which counter the hierarchical divisions of ‘First World’, ‘Second World’ and ‘Third World’. Music is recognised as but a small part of the whole picture and the methodological discipline of sonic de-linking ‘means disobeying the burdensome obligations of acoustic representation, liability, and belonging’ (102). Strategies and techniques of disruption are introduced for the purpose of turning the audience towards a new focus. They are given the opportunity to listen differently and to hear an alternative poetics. Ismaiel-Wendt also references the postcolonial guru Edward Said in order to naturalise the word ‘contrapuntal’ from music into the domain of postcolonial/cultural studies. Said imports the term – taken from his expertise in classical music – to express the dialogic relationship between independent and autonomous subjects, as they engage in successful communication with one another despite their differences. The connotations are both qualitative and procedural to explain the line and mode of entry of an ‘outsider’ into an already established conversation/convention – elevating the focus on expressive behaviour, relationships and the right to be heard. I suggest that Ismaiel-Wendt is convincing. ‘Track Studies: Popular Music and Postcolonial Analysis’ sustains the argument that track studies raise awareness and that the knowledge produced is not determined by master narratives or political bias.

‘Interdisciplinary Atlantic Studies’ – also six essays – presents particular issues of culture, race, class, family groupings and character in which analyses of literature bears the burden of extended metaphor. Works of imagination are given a privileged position in unravelling and signifying human
narratives – historically situated or fanciful and allegorical. Australia gets entrée in the section called ‘Crossovers: Historiography, Fiction, Criticism’ with an article by Dennis Mischke on ‘othering’ in auto-ethnographical fiction, along with two papers located in the Indian experience of colonial relationships. Matthias Galler writes about the aesthetics of contemporary Indian historiographical fiction and Cecile Sandten starts her work from the observation that ‘otherness’ has always been a central issue in postcolonial criticism; she considers the character of Othello not as a ‘foreigner’ but as an ‘untouchable’.

In academic practice I am beset by canonical issues of alterity and ethics of production in my specialist area, creative writing. I was therefore drawn to Mischke’s essay first. He explores the paradox of ‘self’ and ‘other’ when he draws on Stephen Muecke’s experience as a white anthropologist engaging with Indigenous Australians in his paper, ‘Othering Otherness: Stephen Muecke’s Fictocriticism and the Cosmopolitan Vision’. Fictocriticism is from my own experience considered to be a controversial hybrid strategy for research which challenges the strictures of meaning and knowledge production in Eurocentric academic disciplines. Mischke argues, however, that fictocriticism has a useful place in the struggle to avoid the inherently destructive tendencies of ‘mining the landscape’ and appropriating the other for our own ends. He suggests that a fictocritical approach contributes a cosmopolitan vision because it ‘endeavours to enact a communicative situation in which the alterity of the other is not overwritten but maintained’ (335).

I was disappointed neither by Mischke’s arguments in favour of open-ended, unbiased and rigorous self-questioning and the necessity for responsive intersubjective dialogue in situ, nor by his advocacy for the acceptance in academia of expressive individualism; nor yet by his celebration of the momentum generated by contact with [an]other which culminates in ‘a successful performative utterance’ (333) on contemporary issues – anything and everything permitted. The dynamic generated – which I joyfully espouse – is one of reactive creativity. However, Mischke concludes that the experience of alterity must be deliberately estranged and framed for rational judgement by ‘what Michael Taussig and Walter Benjamin have described as a mimetic faculty, the capacity to perceive “un-sensual similarities” and to turn the “experience of the foreign” into an “estrangement of experience” itself’ (335). One is distanced, out-of-body, out of harm’s way: learning is mediated. Mischke is aware of the dilemma of the all-knowing subject collapsing into the text as the narrative of engagement with the other takes shape. Nonetheless, the author makes it clear that Muecke’s bent is not the desire to be subsumed by another culture but in fact a realisation of the positive values assigned to alterity and the quality of the writer’s relationship with his subject – mutual respect. Mischke suggests the focus is on yearning for alternative non-combative human pairings in which winning and losing are not the operatives and whose creative impulse springs from an intense self-consciousness about the right way to live. His final observation is that ‘if one assumes – as I do – that cosmopolitanism is in fact a utopian and experimental attempt to understand otherness without destroying or appropriating it, then fictocriticism definitely offers postcolonial studies a strategy worth exploring’ (335).

The cover image of ASNEL Papers 18, ‘The Door of No Return: House of Slaves, Gorée Island, Senegal’ (© 2010 Ulrike Schmieder), gives an interesting clue to the origin of postcolonial studies in the recognition of master/slave relationships and the radical (awesome) movements towards self-determination that emerge from historical and geopolitical contexts. The plenary lecture of the 22nd Annual conference, given by Sabine Broeck, was about the denial of subjectivity to slaves and black people and also the denial of ‘voice’ to black scholars and feminists, and more specifically the role of race in the formation of modern Western societies, cultures and in the production of
knowledge. The editors suggest that Broeck’s call ‘for both the decolonization of our own positions as scholars and the transnational decolonization of literary studies (and other disciplines)’ gave impetus to passionate discussion and a self-conscious critical bent among the academic scholars at the conference in regard to their research frameworks.²

I cannot do justice to all the fine articles and issues raised in this compendium. I can praise the intent and rigorous scholarship brought together through the project. The avowed object of the conference was to forge new horizontal links between researchers and to make progress in the production of knowledge by an underlying vision of inclusivity and diversification. The last section called ‘Postcolonial Studies in Research and Teaching’ brings into focus eight short statements from participants – on pedagogy, methodology and administration. These essays arise from the round table discussions and teachers’ workshops. They explore the pursuit of an applied postcolonial perspective both in research projects and through teaching commitment in universities and schools.

Broeck herself concentrates on the rub of disaffection and deconstruction. She broaches the (de)merits of working outside established frameworks and the (dis)advantages of the lack of embedded cultural knowledge in modern scholarship. She calls for ‘methodological and intellectual re-articulation of our work in the academy’ (355). However, the challenge is not so much in interdisciplinary cooperation over the obvious common denominators but in an urgency to understand deliberate disciplinary policies of ‘willful ignorance’ (Broeck, quoting Charles Mills) and to find ways of circumventing ‘a politico-ethically motivated trace’ (356) within academia that reinforces the modern forms of enslavement inherent in globalised incorporation, institutionalisation and empire-building to the detriment of new researchers in any field. Her discourse is on the side of the ‘outsider’ who struggles to survive adrift from the centre in scholarly isolation. This publication of conference proceedings (contained in ASNEL Papers 18) is therefore welcome; it brings news from abroad, provides grist-for-the-mill and affirmation for independent scholars and collates a rich resource for the postcolonial movement across the disciplines, now and into the future. But I wish I had been there then.

Christine Runnel

² The editors write that Sabine Broeck’s lecture is not included in the ASNEL Papers 18 because her central ideas will be presented in a forthcoming publication, No Slavery for the Subject: Slavery, Modernity and Gender. The editors also acknowledge the value to academia of an alternative way of knowing with the inclusion of creative writers in performative mode: ‘The authors Libor Mikeska and especially Bernadine Evaristo, who read from her verse novel Lara and her satirical novel Blonde Roots, added a note of reflective humour to our undertaking’ (xxiv).

Let’s start with a quiz. Complete this sentence: ‘Oh gosh, sir; I think the thing I would most like to do in all the world right now is to …’

Manohar Malgonkar was one of the novelists regularly celebrated in the early days by Commonwealth Literature scholars, usually because his novel *The Princes* could be compared with Mulk Raj Anand’s *The Private Life of an Indian Prince*, or his *A Bend in the Ganges* could be included in studies of fictional treatments of the Indian independence struggle and of Gandhi in particular. Most of the critical work on him dates from the mid-1970s, runs for a decade and then tapers off. This is partly because the novelist, as a former military man and big game hunter, presented an often unfavourable position towards Indian politicians in his books, and because he chose to write in English, but also because as Indian writing in English became acceptable in university studies his admittedly commercial impulse and popular genre fiction (adventure, romance, espionage, war) came to seem jejune by comparison with more literary stylists. With Indian English fiction now an established field, both commercially and as a focus for scholarship, and with new editions of Malgonkar’s work coming out from Rupa and Indiaink/Roli, it is time that a new book should appear assessing the oeuvre of someone R.K. Narayan declared to be one of his favourite writers.

What we have is a well-written study in the old style of ‘descriptive appreciation’. In fact, the author – a senior figure in India’s Sahitya Akademi – wrote most of the book in the 1980s, later updating it and incorporating some feedback from Malgonkar himself. Dr Rao provides us with a thorough outline of all the books – nine novels and four collections of stories, not counting nonfiction – appropriately weighing them according to questions of craft (mainly characterisation, plausibility of plot, manipulation of readers’ sympathies, and internal consistency of dating and behaviour). Craft is the appropriate focus in that Malgonkar made no claims to be more than a writer of popular entertainments designed to swell his income.

Malgonkar’s credentials as an Indian English novelist stem either from his ability to tell a ripping yarn or from his focus on historical settings. His output in fact covers events in modern India from early 1940s colonial life, through Partition, hostilities with Pakistan, the formation of Bangladesh and Indira Gandhi’s ‘Emergency’. He also writes a novel favourably revaluing Nana Saheb’s role in the ‘Mutiny’ (*The Devil's Wind*) and his most critically approved work, *A Bend in the Ganges*, providing a comprehensive view of disparate political strategies and conflicted personal motives in the Independence movement. Rao does a good job of showing the merits of these books, and productively uses his text-based approach to defend *The Princes* against V.S. Naipaul’s misuse of some scenes in the novel to denounce the Indian social order by showing the logic and significance of actions according to the characters’ experiences within the novel.

As is common in much of the scholarship on Indian English writers, the books are not only discussed from a self-sufficient New Critical viewpoint, but are also cited only from the Indian editions (here mainly Orient paperbacks, many of them undated). This limits what can be said about them. D.S. Rao does point to the regular glossing of Indian words with phrases suggesting a non-Indian readership. He also explains the unusually light-hearted nature of *Open Season* by recording its origins as a commissioned (but never filmed) screenplay for US viewers. However, unless we know, for example, that in addition to Malgonkar’s wanting to write in English to maximise his sales, *Combat of Shadows* appeared first with Hamish Hamilton in London and Viking in New York before it came out in India, we cannot fully account for this story, with its constant references to Jim Corbett.
and its astonishing ventriloquism of colonial romance fiction. Rao credits Malgonkar with complexity of characterisation and keeping us onside with the leading characters in this book by allowing British characters to have sexual relations across the colonial race barrier, but the fact remains that the Indians in the novel are dumb or sly or hissing vengeance, the Eurasians are stereotypically brash or wanton, and the protagonist plantation manager is basically racist. As a colonial romance, the story is well-constructed, and it is true that the rash young white man is given his flaws and his come-uppance, but the real success of the novel is its amazing act of ventriloquism: the world of clubs and shikar and chota pegs that Malgonkar could only have known secondhand through his associations with princely families, post-independence tea plantations and the residual anglo rituals of the military mess. Once we know the publishing history, we can understand why an Indian writer would produce such a book and how Malgonkar got to be one of the highest earning novelists in English from India (before Rushdie hit the scene). We can also understand how this novel might not fare as well amongst Indian critics trying to establish nationalist credentials for Indians writing in English, and why a book like A Bend in the Ganges would have received more attention as part of ‘Commonwealth Literature’ studies. Rao’s observation that Malgonkar steadily includes more Indian words with less explanation might be explained by a contextual reference to the international audience becoming more familiarised with writing from the subcontinent, but also by Malgonkar’s apparent recourse to Indian publishers from 1978 and a contemporary market within India for English-language books.

Rao’s primary conclusion about Malgonkar’s work is that his love of unexpected twists, contrastive parallels and reversals shows a vision of life similar to Thomas Hardy’s grim humour in ‘life’s little ironies’, though he implies that Malgonkar’s ironies are a touch less bleak. This may ultimately be so because the novelist is really only setting out to write entertainments, and that may continue to limit critical regard. However, new attention to the middlebrow, to ecocriticism (Malgonkar forsook his hunting to become a wildlife protection advocate and his books mention constructing dams as a disruptive but progressive part of national building), to the sociology of literature and new historicism may well follow the lead of Rao’s revisiting of this readable body of work. His book itself is elegantly produced and makes a worthy addition to collections on modern Indian literature.

And (remember the quiz?) the rest of the sentence (from Combat of Shadows) is: ‘shoot a rogue elephant.’

Paul Sharrad

A timely contribution to studies of the poetry of the First World War, *Perspectives on World War I Poetry* is part of Bloomsbury’s multiple-genre ‘Great War’ collection, whose aim, in the centenary year of the outbreak of the First World War, is to provide a ‘one-stop resource for those seeking to understand the Great War and its impact’ (see: [www.bloomsbury.com/thegreatwar](http://www.bloomsbury.com/thegreatwar)).

As the book’s preface set out, its aims are primarily pedagogical and equalizing: to bring to the foreground of the study of the poetry of the First World War numerous relevant literary theories, while also dispelling the notion that literary theory is difficult or daunting. Many so-called ‘simple’ introductions to the study of literature through literary theory confuse rather than clarify through their attempts at simplification or accessibility, but Evans’s study, perhaps because he chooses a specific literary focus for the theoretical exposition, is not one of these.

It is unfortunate that there still should be an apparent need to dispel the myth of theory as the preserve of the over-complicating academic critic. And yet, in the average high school or even undergraduate classroom, the fear of ‘theory’ that this book seeks to address, is still all too apparent, manifesting as a disparagement of anything remotely abstract, and a resort to close-textual, biographical, or thematic readings. The pressures on teachers of literature by national or institutional bodies to take a ‘bit of everything’ approach to pedagogy (in the UK, the English A-Level ‘Assessment Objectives’ which each student must hit in order to get a high mark, springs to mind), coupled with the resistance of the student to read anything outside the text at hand, perhaps also contributes to the fact that the ‘theory myth’ is often only debunked once the reader in question has reached advanced undergraduate level or beyond.

As Evans writes in his introduction, ‘any reader of a literary text inevitably uses literary theory of some sort’ (1), and it is with this in mind that Evans uses the springboard of a selection of First World War poems to introduce the complexities of various theoretical approaches to his reader. In order to provide a framework through which the interested ‘lay’ reader can begin to engage with literary theory, Evans takes as a starting point M.H. Abrams’s schematic of writer-text-audience-reality-critic (2), which is expanded and tabulated in terms of the different literary theories the book later introduces in Table 12.1 (218-19). And in the chapters that ensue, the author looks at poems from a wide, international range of poets of the First World War, elucidating their various complexities from the most appropriate literary-critical angles.

To the academic reader who will likely take as a given that it is now impossible to ‘do’ literary criticism without a strong literary theoretical knowledge, Evans’s use of Abrams’s framework may seem outdated, as may his use of a chronological theoretical trajectory, from the Classical literary criticism of Aristotle and Plato to those theoretical standpoints more popular in present-day criticism (such as ecocriticism and postmodernism). The short paragraph summaries of a selection of 18 different theoretical approaches will seem both generalising and reductive to the literary critic, and the emphasis placed on Classical approaches to literary criticism will seem rather strange. However, these summaries, when used alongside the table (12.1), the list of further reading, and the final chapter of the book (a series of questions, written by Christina M. Garner, demonstrating the ‘kinds of questions different critics ask’ (203)), are a useful tool for teaching advanced school students, and may also be of some use as a revision tool for undergraduates taking literary theory courses.

The first eleven chapters of *Perspectives on World War I Poetry* take as a starting point a short lyric, or excerpt from a longer poem, from the First World War period. Each chapter is concerned with at least three (sometimes many more) poems; each poem or excerpt which is addressed is
printed in full. The scope of Evans’s selection is broad. Although slightly more attention is paid to the more canonical war poets (Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen), this is not surprising, and no little attention is paid to less well-known poets (for instance, there are poems by Sara Teasdale, James Weldon Johnson and Vera Brittain) or to those poets who are not immediately associated with war poetry (Thomas Hardy, A.E. Housman, e e cummings). Twenty-four poets and 39 poems are discussed in total, and in this way the book serves well as a rather short but thorough annotated anthology, and a springboard to deeper study of any of the poets or the period.

The perhaps predictable way in which Evans structures each chapter – each poem is printed in full followed by a few paragraphs on different theoretical approaches – is not elegant, but functional. However, for a book which does not seek to be a critical work, but, rather, a useful student/teacher text, I would hazard that this is the best and clearest manner in which to demonstrate the ways in which close reading of poetry can never be exclusive of a theoretical approach. And although there is perhaps too much emphasis placed on the Classical precedents to Anglophone literary criticism (four of the 18 approaches addressed by Evans are Ancient), the critical apparatus is sound, and benefits immensely from Evans's deft and sensitive critical touch.

Heather H. Yeung