

Volume 10, no. 2
May 2018

Book reviews: History, theory and criticism

Contents

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| Ajay K Chaubey | <i>Explorations in Critical Humanities: A Collection of Essays</i> edited by Sreenath Muraleedharan K. & Devi K. |
| Konstantina Georganta | <i>Irish Poets and Modern Greece: Heaney, Mahon, Cavafy, Seferis</i> by Joanna Kruczkowska. |
| Robyn Greaves | <i>From the Edges of Empire: Convict Women from Beyond the British Isles</i> edited by Lucy Frost and Colette McAlpine. |
| Saba Idris | Revisiting India's Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics edited by Amritjit Singh, Nalini Iyer, and Rahul K. Gairola. |
| Suzanne Kamata | <i>Re-Orienting China: Travel Writing and Cross-Cultural Understanding</i> by Leilei Chen. |
| Alana Kosklin | <i>Return Narratives</i> by Theodora D. Patrona |
| Dieter Riemenschneider | <i>A Gesture of Reconciliation: Partnership Studies in Australian Literature</i> by Antonella Riem. |
| Lekha Roy | <i>Border Crossings</i> edited by Diana Glenn and Graham Tulloch |
| Paul Sharrad | <i>Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature</i> edited by Nicholas Birns, Nicole Moore and Sarah Shieff. |
| Umme Salma | <i>East-West Literary Imagination: Cultural Exchange from Yeats to Morrison</i> by Yoshinobu Hakutani. |
| Jean-Francois Vernay | <i>The Hatred of Literature</i> by William Marx |

***Explorations in Critical Humanities: A Collection of Essays* edited by Sreenath Muraleedharan K. & Devi K. (Viva Books, 2017)**

'Humanities,' as a discipline, has always been appreciated by the intellectual society, on the one hand, and has been castigated by the rulers and 'self-referential conceptualisers', on the other since the era of early harbingers of 'critical thinking' like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, among others. So, the humanities has not only been confined to the area of academic, but it also deals with common life in the public sphere. The ignorance of humanities as a subject/discipline, nowadays, questions the critical engagement of the same. Therefore, the academic 'crunch' of humanities as a discipline is now a matter of critical inquiry that needs to be addressed by scholars, especially those who are young. Victor Davis Hanson, in his article 'Death of Humanities,' observes that 'The humanities are in their latest periodic crisis. Though the causes of the ongoing decline may be debated'.¹ Terry Eagleton, too, triggers the debate similarly,

[I]t is the humanities above all that are being pushed to the wall. The British state continues to distribute grants to its universities for science, medicine, engineering, and the like, but it has ceased to hand out any significant resources to the arts. It is not out of the question that if this does not change, whole humanities departments will be closed down in the coming years.²

Keeping in view of the criticality and quandary of humanities, two young scholars, Sreenath Muraleedharan K. and Devi K., the editors of the volume under review, who teach at the Amrita University, Kochi (Kerala, India), hosted a conference on 'Critical Humanities: Modern Perspectives', which endeavoured 'to carve out ... ethical, philosophical, political, and cultural experiences/demands of the twenty-first century' (Foreword). The outcome of the conference ultimately produced the volume entitled *Explorations in Critical Humanities*, which has entered the debate whether humanities as a discipline is really on the brink of extinction. If yes, this volume is going to ascertain a fresh inkling of a newer branch of knowledge in academic society.

The volume, collecting thirty-three chapters, brings an epistemological expectation in the area of liberal arts in a broader sense and sensibility as it opens new vistas of investigative deliberations in pan-Indian academia. The book also covers the intercultural, trans-historical, pedagogical, literary, anthropological questions on pluralism, power-conflict, exclusion of social inclusion, the disadvantage of disability, heterogeneity in discipline and social justice, texts and contexts and so on. Such endeavours mandate, write the editors in the 'Foreword', 'exploration into the problems and potentials for critiquing the domain of humanities.' The book is not only an attempt at reminding us of the significance of humanities but also an effort in reincarnating the discipline.

The volume is decked-up with fourteen exploratory essays on literary texts that contextualise diverse themes like religious propositions, cultural shock, culinary nostalgia, ecological concerns, classical dance forms, gender, sexuality, the quest for identity, familial associations,

¹ Victor Davis Hanson, 'Death of Humanities,' *Defining Ideas*. The Hoover Institution. 28 Jan. 2014. Web. 30 Jan. 2018. <<https://www.hoover.org/research/death-humanities>>.

² Terry Eagleton, 'The Slow Death of the University,' *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 61.30 (2015).

Book reviews: *Explorations in Critical Humanities* edited by Sreenath Muraleedharan K. & Devi K. Ajay K. Chaubey.

Transnational Literature Vol. 10 no. 2, May 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

apartheid rule, public sphere and Dalit sacrifice, et cetera. The essays have been authored by A. R. Chitra, Sonia Chellirian, Geetha Pai, and Kavya Purushothaman, among others.

Apart from the essays on literature, the other essays cover a wide gamut of issues permeating in the contemporary academic scenario, which invites the attention of pan-global academicians. In the opening essay entitled 'Unburdening the School Bag', Vijayalakshmi unearths multiple methodologies, reports, guidelines, policies, procedures, advisories, et cetera, issued by the government agencies to reduce the burden of children's school bag from time to time. The parents, guardians and their wards tilting with the 'burden' of the bags are fraught with the commercialisation of school education. Similarly, Sreena K., in her essay 'Rethinking the Scope of Kitchen in the Post-feministic Era', traces the trajectory of the kitchen in different genres, such as the media and cinema, discerning that 'women play a critical and *crucial* role in attaining the essentials of food security, availability, access and utilization' (12, italics mine). The last essay of the volume, on 'football', by Ashish Krishna critically explores the prospects how the sport became 'instrumental' in shaping the socio-political and cultural history of Bengal and Goa in the twentieth century (222). The other essays, placed in-between, safeguard other significant *leitmotifs* like society, culture, history, anthropology, disabilities, health, ecology, aesthetics, humour, fashion, economic disparity, vocal versatility, food, music, et cetera and offer laconic but tangible critical appraisal on these areas of humanities.

The absence of an introduction to the volume, which could have been appended somewhere, reflects the lack of editorial endeavour. Nevertheless, the volume, finely printed *at par*, deserves bestowal from the 'presence' of Barthian readers who may delve deep by assuming the 'death' of authors of 'critical humanities'. R. Veerasekaran, in his article 'Deteriorating trends in humanities courses', astutely avers,

[T]he deteriorating trend of humanities courses in the campuses can be averted and proper structural changes implemented. The crisis management strategy may be dispensed with and, efforts must be made to attract the volatile strength. A long-term planning is essential to strengthen the do or die exposition of the humanities courses in future.³

Explorations in Critical Humanities: A Collection of Essays adds to the existing scholarship at a time when the field of humanities is in need of inseminating, disseminating and fostering a wide-ranging discussion. The inter-disciplinary conceptual framework presented by this volume, ranging from pedagogical practice to rational reflection, from food metaphor to film interpretation, provides a powerful toolkit for reading, framing, interpreting, construing, enabling or understanding the critique of the cultural impact of humanities. Not only is the volume, as a whole, made up of interdisciplinary critical perspectives, the chapters themselves draw on sources from various disciplines. It extends the scholarship on humanities, which itself is already an extremely ecumenical sphere of study but deserves to be cultivated exponentially. Thus, the volume is helpful not only for students but also for researchers and academicians.

Ajay K. Chaubey

³ R. Veerasekaran, 'Deteriorating trends in humanities courses,' *The Hindu*. 29 Oct. 2002. Web. 01 Feb. 2018. <<http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/edu/2002/10/29/stories/2002102900020200.htm>>.

Joanna Kruczkowska, *Irish Poets and Modern Greece: Heaney, Mahon, Cavafy, Seferis* (Palgrave, 2017)

Where all voyages end
There is no way out.¹

Poets who travel and poems that travel, and lines upon lines in a magnificent intertextual and comparative journey between Ireland and Greece; this is what *Irish Poets and Modern Greece: Heaney, Mahon, Cavafy, Seferis* offers its readers. Through a panorama of the Greek travel narratives of Derek Mahon in the period 1970 to 1997, and Seamus Heaney from 1995 to 2006, as well as their translations of and allusions to Greek poets, this valuable book unravels the intricate universe of two brilliant poetic voices. In the 1920s and 1930s, it was James Joyce who famously explored linguistic and literary allusions to Greece in *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) while in post-war Irish writing, 'travels of contemporary Irish poets have engendered some of the most memorable representations of Greece':

From Louis MacNeice's and Richard Murphy's Crete, and MacNeice's Ikaria in the 1950s, through the Irish phenomenon on Paros spanning six decades since the 1960s (Desmond O'Grady, Derek Mahon, Michael Longley, Rory Brennan), Paula Meehan's Crete, Seamus Heaney's Peloponnese and Delphi, Gerald Dawe's Crete and Cyprus, to Meehan's and Theo Dorgan's still-continued visits to Ikaria, Greece has been a destination for cultural and literary pilgrimage, the quest for a spiritual centre, a mediation site for political reflection and analogy, but also a place of chance encounters, fleeting impressions and sensual treat. (xiii)

Now, the poetic voices of Derek Mahon and Seamus Heaney reveal to us a string of varied associations between the land they call their own and the one revealed to them by their literal and metaphorical travels to Greece's present and past. Covering a period from the 1970s to the early years of the 2000s, *Irish Poets and Modern Greece* stages a dialogue between two countries in whose hi/stories many analogies can be drawn due to their extreme geographic positions in Europe and their postcolonial status, among other things.

Mahon travelled mainly to the islands and focuses in his poems on the Cycladic islands of Paros and Delos, while Heaney travelled mainly to the Peloponnese and mainland Greece (Attica and Sterea Ellada) and focuses mostly on Attica and Delphi. The two poets' choices of destinations are telling in themselves, mapping an island perspective versus a mainland one. Mahon's 'The Banished Gods' (1975) offers a political narrative pertinent to a present-day reader.

It is here that the banished gods are in hiding,
Here they sit out the centuries

¹ Derek Mahon, C.P. Cavafy's 'The City,' *Echo's Grove: Translations*, 2013.

In stone, water
And the hearts of trees,
Lost in a reverie of their own natures —

Of zero-growth economics and seasonal change
In a world without cars, computers
Or chemical skies,
Where thought is a fondling of stones
And wisdom a five-minute silence at moonrise.

As Kruczkowska notes, the history of Delos in the years of colonialism and decline is of interest here:

The proud centre of the Delian League was turned into a colony, while the periphery of that alliance, that is Athens, became its coloniser. The process of decline was completed by the desacralisation of Delos: 'the traderoutes' and 'the days of sail' in Mahon's poem remind one of the island's 'career' as one of the largest slave markets of antiquity, and of several raids and pirate attacks resulting in the complete desertion of the island. The failure of memory does the rest to eradicate the traces of former civilisation. The house whose window 'turns grey' seems abandoned like the Peruvian mines 'to a slow clock of condensation' in 'A Disused Shed,' being the territory of expropriation, but also of appropriation, where nature takes over, (re)claiming the island 'after history.' (34)

Finally, the book explores the links between Mahon, Heaney, Seferis and Cavafy. The author suggests that Cavafy led Mahon into a Greece different from that which he could experience with his senses and closer to his 'anti-Romantic disposition'. By contrast, Heaney tried to re-experience history and myth via a trajectory through the ancient sites of the Peloponnese and Delphi mapping out a 'philhellenic poetic pilgrimage' brutally shattered by his poetic references to the violence experienced in Northern Ireland in poems like 'The Augean Stables', part of 'Sonnets from Hellas' from the 2001 collection *Electric Light*:

And it was there in Olympia, down among green willows,
The lustral wash and run of river shallows,
That we heard of Sean Brown's murder in the grounds
Of Bellaghy GAA Club. And imagined
Hose-water smashing hard back off the asphalt
In the car park where his athlete's blood ran cold.

When it comes to Seferis, Mahon's focus is on the themes of exile and catastrophe, while Heaney's is on the poet's public role. Heaney incorporates the Greek poet into his work with two Oxford lectures, in 1989 and 1993, a 2000 Harvard speech in 'Homage to Seferis' and a 2006 poetic letter titled 'To George Seferis in the Underworld', based on Seferis' last poem 'On Aspalathoi'. Interestingly, Mahon had alluded to Seferis 25 years earlier than Heaney: he used an epigraph from Seferis' *Mythistorama* (1935) in his *Ecclesiastes* (1970) to allude to international conflict, internecine strife and exile, relating this situation to his Ulster home

ground. Three years later, he had also used another fragment of the same work as an epigraph to his most famous poem 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford': 'Let them not forget us, the weak souls among the asphodels.' *Irish Poets and Modern Greece* tells the story of these encounters in every detail. The book tells a significant story of 'spiritual cross-breedings' such as that Seferis had located at the core of influences amongst nations, helping writers to find 'within their own national tradition, the most original and least exhausted sources'.

If you wish to get to the heart of the twentieth-century sense of lost bearings and lost roots, there is no better way to do it than through the eyes and 'snug as a gun' pens of two of the most significant poets and their return to Greece.

Konstantina Georganta

***From the Edges of Empire: Convict Women from Beyond the British Isles* edited by Lucy Frost and Colette McAlpine (Convict Women's Press, Hobart, 2015)**

Stories of convicts transported from Britain are familiar to most of us; however, little is known about people, particularly women, who were transported from other parts of the world. *From the Edges of Empire: Convict Women from Beyond the British Isles* goes a long way to addressing this gap. Edited by Lucy Frost and Colette McAlpine, this collection tells the stories of women transported to Australia who were born or tried outside the British Isles. Often described on official records as women 'of colour', these made up only a small proportion of the 25,000 women transported to Australia. The contributors to *From the Edges of Empire* have mined available data and records to piece together and reconstruct the stories of these largely forgotten women; stories which add to the continual revision of history, giving us a broader picture of our national story.

From the Edges of Empire is published by Convict Women's Press, a small not-for-profit organisation dedicated to publishing convict women's histories, based in Hobart, Tasmania. The book comprises three parts: The Indian Ocean, The Caribbean World, and Europeans and the High Seas. An online biographical dictionary has also been created to allow continued expansion of the work. Reconstructing life stories through existing records is easier now than it has ever been, and so researchers are able to piece together disparate stories and gain a greater understanding of the far-reaching effects of colonisation in the nineteenth century. As the introduction notes, 'caught in the complex web of the British Empire,' these women had little agency in their lives, yet they 'play their parts in the story of Australia's convict history'. Their identification on official documents as women 'of colour' ensured they were a distinct minority amongst the other convicts, in some cases making them more visible in the records.

The life courses of the women in *From the Edges of Empire* have been meticulously traced through a range of available sources. There are fascinating stories of slavery, transportation, freedom and destitution. One of the difficulties of tracing these lives is that there are often no records after convicts become free citizens. Similarly, if women didn't marry, commit crimes or misdemeanours, or have children, records are scant. As such, many of the stories in this collection raise more questions than they answer, leading to further speculation about the life-courses of these women and the repercussions down the generations. They led transient lives largely controlled by other people, making the stories particularly poignant. The impotence of these women against their fates is highlighted in a comment about one of the convicts, Catherine Ferris, of whom it was written: 'The prisoner Ferris ... declared that she had not had a fair trial, and was working herself up into a paroxysm of rage, when she was taken out of the Court' (116). As author Jan Richardson notes, Ferris' life was 'far from ordinary', as were the many lives reconstructed in *From the Edges of Empire*. Some appear to be colourful characters who tried unsuccessfully to carve out a life in Australia. Douglas Wilkie writes of Frenchwoman Eugenie Lemaire, convicted of 'Larceny in a Dwelling House', who became a business woman and travelled the world before she is lost from the records. Eilin Hordvik tells the rather sad story of Maria Simonette from the Seychelles, who was convicted for murdering her lover and sent to Van Diemen's Land where she fell pregnant a number of times, giving birth to stillborn babies

Book reviews: *From the Edges of Empire: Convict Women from Beyond the British Isles* edited by Lucy Frost and Colette McAlpine. Robyn Greaves.

Transnational Literature Vol. 10 no. 2, May 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

and ending up a drunk on the streets of Hobart. If they had no support from a man, life was hard for these women; some were declared insane, became prostitutes, or disorderly drunks. Susan Ballyn and Lucy Frost note that these stories serve as ‘reminders that families in colonial Australia might be little more than precarious networks of individuals with nothing much to grab hold of as life tossed them across land and sea’ (248).

While some of the women featured in the case studies in *From the Edges of Empire* prospered, these are largely tales of displacement, dislocation and otherness due to race and circumstance. Cassandra Pybus describes the case of two girls aged 8 and 11 convicted for attempting to poison the woman into whose service they had been placed. The girls were accused of putting arsenic into Madam Morel’s tea (the powder was later found to be an emetic) and sentenced to transportation to NSW. Elizabeth and Constance were placed into the service of First Police Magistrate, Henry Croasdaile Wilson, who appeared to be an advocate for their welfare, giving them a better start than they would have had otherwise. Elizabeth died relatively young and in poverty, while Constance flourished. Pybus speculates on the extent that race could influence life outcomes for convict women in Australia, concluding that ‘the different life stories of Elizabeth and Constance provide insights into the specificity of convict experience that challenge our assumptions about colonial society and the way that identity was formed and reformed in the colonial environment’ (75). Cheryl Griffin, in her examination of Caribbean women transported to Australia, considers the effect of the convict system and race in the following way: ‘What we can tell from the records that remain is that while they were within the convict system they were treated the same as all other convicts. In this way, the convict system had an equalising effect’ (140). Insights such as these throughout the book add to our understanding of the myriad effects of transportation and the convict system.

Reading the stories in *From the Edges of Empire* as a whole gives a disquieting sense of how the British Empire, with its extensive colonies, affected the lives of people across the world with far-reaching consequences, helping shape the Australia we know today. Jan Richardson sums up the lives of these women: ‘from the small fragments that have been gathered piece-by-piece from around the world ... fascinating and heart-breaking stories are now revealed, encapsulating themes of poverty, crime, prostitution, bigamy, illegitimacy, insanity, slavery and emancipation’ (128). While the internet and digitisation of material have made information more accessible, tracing stories such as these is still a painstaking and time-consuming task, so we can be grateful to the contributors of this book, its editors and publisher, for making this research available to the public. I hope *From the Edges of Empire* is widely read and serves as a catalyst for the revelation of more forgotten stories such as those contained here.

Dr Robyn Greaves

***Revisiting India's Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics* edited by Amritjit Singh, Nalini Iyer, and Rahul K. Gairola (Lexington Books, 2016)**

Sixty-nine years after partition, this book studies the subject that has haunted the subcontinent ever since. The world knows of the importance of the events of 1947 and 1973 that have shaped the present relations of the three countries that were once India. This subject is still studied by international scholars and this book takes the study further by moving away from the political narratives of partition and viewing the subject from different perspectives. The editors have divided their book into five sections according to the authors' different approaches to the subject. These perspectives are so diverse that to give a collective summary of them would not do justice to them all.

The first section deals with the different approaches to the partition. For example, Rahul K. Gairola discusses the misuse of the sentiments of people of the sub-continent by the international advertising market. He studies the Google and Coca Cola advertisements that play on these emotions and present feeble attempts at overcoming differences. He also studies the tendency in the audience to mimic the US, which plays an important role in the success of the advertisements. He uncovers the false idealism of these approaches and the picture of bridging of the gap between these nations that is based on ideas that go against the different cultural and religious ideologies of the nations concerned. He unveils the superficial basis of the wish to eliminate differences: he says that paradoxically it is because we know that we are different that we talk about the inhumanity of differentiating between peoples. If we really believed that we were the same then there would not be any need to talk about a unified whole.

The second section takes up works of fiction and memoirs as a source of mini narratives that were ignored in meta narratives about the partition. These essays discuss the everyday choices that came to determine lives of people of the sub-continent and the incidents that they encountered due to the partition. Debali Mookerjee-Leonard discusses a short story 'Maachh' (or 'Fish') by Dibyendu Palit, Shaktipada Rajguru's novel *Meghe Dhaka Tara (The Cloud-Capped Star)* and Jyotirmoyee Devi's *Epar Ganga Oper Ganga (The River Churning)* with reference to the effect of partition on Hindu Bengali women. She shows how women have to assume responsibilities of their families and sacrifice their dreams for them. They become the 'shock-absorbers' and have to re-live the loss of families due to conditions created by the partition. This essay draws not only from literature, but also from analytic articles and books on partition, as well as on feminism.

In 'Borders and Borderlands', the essays deal with the disputes arisen due to the new formed ideology of borders. This section is also based on diverse sources. 'Property, Violence, and Displacement: Partition in Sindh' by Nandita Bhavnani analyses the condition of Sindh during the partition and the reasons for the eruption of violence in the province, despite being the most peaceful province. She has studied the religious conditions of the area and the minimal effect of national politics on its people. Bhavnani analysis the material reasons for the rise of animosity between the Hindus and the Muslims. She gives a chronological analysis of the Sindhi history with respect to culture, economic conditions, religion, and politics. She shows how these factors

Book reviews: *Revisiting India's Partition: New Essays on Memory, Culture, and Politics*. Saba Idris. *Transnational Literature* Vol. 10 no. 2, May 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

determined the behaviour of the general public, and the changes that they faced in 1947 and in the subsequent years. The analysis contributes towards an understanding of the condition of the province during the partition.

Unlike Mokherjia-Leonard, who discusses literature as a medium to channel personal and communal suffering caused by partition and to present a realistic picture of the common condition of people in the sub-continent, Nazia Akhtar discusses the use of fiction to promote a narrative of hatred between communities of a nation. Her essay 'Hyderabad, Partition, and Hindutva: Strategic Revisitings in Neelkanth's "Durga"' discusses the narrative of an episode in Kishorilal Vyas Neelkanth's novel *Razakar* and studies the portrayal of Sikhs and Muslims in Hyderabad. She studies the bias against Muslims and the problematic linking of the present Muslim community in the region to the political group of Razaraks in the early 1940s. She further shows the use of Sikh mythology to inculcate a feeling of brotherhood among Sikhs for the Hindus. This would unite them in the spirit of nationality and self-respect against the Muslims, who are believed to seize any opportunity to rape, murder, and torture Hindus and Sikhs. Akhtar has not made it clear whether she means the Indian Hyderabad or the Pakistani city. Nevertheless, the essay is an engaging discussion on the image of Muslims, and Sikhs, and the politics of Hyderabad in the near past, the use of mythology to create nationalist sentiments and to arouse certain political views in the masses.

Although this book deals with a very sensitive issue for the people of these areas, all but a couple of the essayists exhibit complete emotional detachment from their subject. On the whole, the strength of the book lies in the engaging contributions by scholars who take different and innovative sources as their bases for studies. The few essays briefly mentioned above are only examples of the many perspectives discussed in *Revisiting India's Partition*. The collection analyses the short-term and continued impact of the partition on the three countries, and presents narratives that have been ignored by political historians.

Saba Idris

Leilei Chen, *Re-Orienting China: Travel Writing and Cross-Cultural Understanding* (University of Regina Press, 2016)

As scholar Leilei Chen writes in her introduction, although research into travel writing has increased greatly since the publication of Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism* (1978), very little has been written about travel literature pertaining to China. Furthermore, what little there is focuses mainly on travel between the Victorian period and 1949, when China became a Communist country. Criticism of these earlier works was frequently concerned with the authenticity of the writer's reported experiences, and 'the traveller's relationship with otherness' (3). In this volume, Chen seeks to go beyond the 'traveller vs. other' binary to find points of connection between cultures, and to examine the ideological underpinnings of six rarely studied travel writers. All six are based in North America and have travelled to China after 1949. Chen herself was born and raised in China, and is now living and teaching in Canada.

She begins with a discussion of American Peter Hessler's *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze* (2001), an account of the author's experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Fuling while in his twenties. Unlike the imperialism evident in earlier travel writing, as cited by Said, Hessler's approach is humble. He realises that he has a lot to learn, and that his own culture is not superior to that of the villagers that he has been sent to help. He recognises the need to learn the local language in order to form relationships with the people in his village. Throughout the book, he remains self-critical. As Chen writes, 'For Hessler, cross-cultural understanding means remaining ambivalent about the dichotomous vision of the self and the other and about the knowledge produced about the foreign place by one's writing and filming' (42).

Chen has arranged the chapters thematically, not chronologically, so an analysis of Hessler's memoir is followed by a chapter on Canadian Jock Tuzo Wilson's 1958 trip to China, as detailed in *One Chinese Moon*. Like Hessler, Wilson arrived in the country with a positive view. However, Chen points out that his visit was carefully controlled, and that he happened to be in China during a year in which there was a good harvest. Nevertheless, Wilson, a geologist, was able to engage with other scientists on a personal level, and found that they did not conform to Western stereotypes of the Chinese ('impassive and inscrutable people') (46). Chen points out that travel allows a critical distance from one's home culture, which might be serving up propaganda. She has a favourable impression of Wilson, who expressed the desire for humanities education to expand beyond Western culture, encompassing global cultures, way before 'multiculturalism' became a buzz word.

Chapter Three centers on Jan Wong's 'egological' memoirs, *A Comrade Lost and Found: A Beijing Story*, and *Red China Blues*. In the current publishing climate which privileges 'own voices' one might expect that a book written by a Chinese-Canadian journalist who can speak Chinese would offer an especially authentic view of the country. Wong, it would seem, is more of a cultural insider than Wilson or Hessler. Chen finds, however, that Wong's view of China is distorted by her overly high expectations and her personally traumatic experiences in China.

Book reviews: *Re-Orienting China: Travel Writing and Cross-Cultural Understanding* by Leilei Chen. Suzanne Kamata.

Transnational Literature Vol. 10 no. 2, May 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Chen writes, 'It seems that Wong's difficult time in China leads her to represent virtually all her Chinese associates as unpleasant and unlikeable' (67).

In Chapters Five and Six, Chen takes up Chinese-American Leslie T. Chang's *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China*, in which the author appears as a 'character' – the interviewer; and *Coming Home to China*, an account of a journey made by the Chinese-born Yi-Fu Tuan after living abroad for 64 years. Tuan, founder of the field of human geography, intersperses his account with other travel experiences and academic speeches. His experience in China, as one who is between cultures, emphasises the perpetual homelessness intrinsic in the human condition.

Chen also dissects the more nuanced *Looking for Chengdu: A Woman's Adventures in China* by American anthropologist Hill Gates. Gates points out that travel writing is fictional because it is written for a particular readership. Some elements are left out, some embellished, and insights are often added later. The experience itself is crafted and edited in the retelling to suit the expectations of the intended audience.

Re-Orienting China was written for scholars, but it is accessible to the general reader. Throughout this book, Chen's writing is intelligent and intelligible – happily free of jargon – and her analysis is persuasive. In her Afterword, Chen writes of how she herself was transformed by her research, and suggests areas for further study: 'This project has probed the important questions of cross-cultural understanding; however, it remains unfinished. It has not elaborated on the question of gender' (154). Not only that, but *Re-Orienting China* also invites examination of more intersectional texts, such as those written by black or other Asian travellers in China, disabled travellers, those from the LBGTI community, and those in mixed marriages in China.

Suzanne Kamata
Naruto University of Education

Theodora D. Patrona, *Return Narratives: Ethnic Space in Late-Twentieth-Century Greek American and Italian American Literature* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2017)

Return Narratives: Ethnic Space in Late-Twentieth-Century Greek American and Italian American Literature, written by Theodora D. Patrona, presents a revised version of the author's doctoral dissertation on Greek American and Italian American contemporary writing. Here, Patrona examines six works that fall into the return literature sphere, with a stated aim of beginning the scholarship of comparative Greek American and Italian American literature in this space. All six works are written in English, and almost all are by second or third generation authors, which was a deliberate choice by Patrona to highlight 'their oscillation between two worlds and languages' (xiii).

Return Narratives is an attempt to answer two questions: "How are the journey to self-definition and the formation of subjectivity connected with the recourse to ethnic cultural pools in each of the novels examined? To what extent are these two elements affected by the constantly changing framework of social, historical, and economic conditions?" (xiv) Patrona successfully answers these questions through a comparative close reading of the texts under examination. She also puts forward an interesting argument for the similarity of Greek American and Italian American literature, making a comparative study of the two fertile ground, and possibly inspiring others to continue where she leaves off.

The six works explored by Patrona are *Cora* (Daphne Athas, 1978), *Umbertina* (Helen Barolini, 1979), *The Priest Fainted* (Catherine Temma Davidson, 1998), *No Pictures in My Grave* (Susan Caperna Lloyd, 1992), *When the Tree Sings* (Stratis Haviaras, 1979) and *In the Garden of Papa Santuzzu* (Tony Ardizzone, 1999). For a book published in 2017, it is notable that none of these were published this century. Patrona does, however, acknowledge the increasing publication rates of return Greek American and Italian American literature towards the end of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty first, so this is perhaps an area of further work for the author. Indeed, in her closing remarks she notes that an expanded comparative study could include more contemporary writing.

The works are examined in pairs, dividing *Return Narratives* into three sections of comparative close readings. Patrona notes that she selected the six narratives as they share a common theme of 'the challenging journey toward the ethnic persona's self-definition, as well as the changing perception of ethnic space' (xiii). On ethnic space, the book sticks to a rather loose and flexible definition, allowing Patrona to explore diverse avenues. It is defined early on as including spatial, geographical and sociocultural elements, with a focus firmly on the home country. In some ways, this definition functions to exclude a concept of Greek Americanness as a distinct and separate ethnic culture, by tying all ethnic self-definition to this concept of the homeland.

Although Patrona's writing is about return literature, where such a definition of ethnic space may indeed be more common, the function of the emigrant culture as a distinct entity from the homeland should not be discounted when discussing ethnic identity and concepts of ethnic

Book reviews: *Return Narratives: Ethnic Space in Late-Twentieth-Century Greek American and Italian American Literature* by Theodora D. Patrona. Alana Kosklin.
Transnational Literature Vol. 10 no. 2, May 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

space. While the emigrant culture is likely to have been heavily influenced by the home culture, it is also likely to have significantly shifted and evolved when influenced by the environment of settlement.

Patrona seems to acknowledge this when discussing the influence of myth, ritual and storytelling on the six works, with the characters using these cultural elements 'in their attempt to acquaint themselves with their ancestral home' (xiii). These myths, rituals and stories are seen through the lens of the emigrant culture, though, and an acknowledgement of the role of this culture in shaping views of the homeland could add much to the analysis of ethnic space and identity presented here.

Four of the works examined by Patrona have female authors, and she has involved a degree of feminist theory in her analysis, focusing on female self-representation in the creation of ethnic space and identity in these narratives. This can certainly be a useful frame of analysis, as much ethnic space is gendered. There is always the danger, however, that a reliance on feminist discourse can obscure other valid paths of investigation. Patrona manages to walk this line, and her use of feminist analysis helps to shed light on other areas of enquiry, rather than cast them in shadow.

Return Narratives marks a beginning point in the comparative study of Greek American and Italian American literature, particularly with regard to what they can tell us about ethnic self-identification and space. Patrona's detailed close readings of the six texts illuminate useful areas of thought and illustrate the limitations imposed on the characters in their journey of ethnic identity creation. Patrona herself notes that the field is ripe for further study, with expanded comparative studies of Greek American and Italian American literature encouraged. She also points to possible further study of the similarities and connections of the two emigrant cultures themselves. These all seem worthwhile points of enquiry, for which Patrona has established a solid foundation in *Return Narratives*.

Alana Kosklin

Antonella Riem, *A Gesture of Reconciliation: Partnership Studies in Australian Literature* (Forum, 2017)

Studying Australian literature, in particular Patrick White's novels, has been Antonella Riem's concern since at least the 1980s while her interest in analytical terms like partnership and the creative word can be traced back to essays published in 2004 and 2014 respectively. Both are placed at the centre of the present study that addresses not only the novelist's *Voss*, *The Aunt's Story* and *Memoirs of Many in One* but also works by Marcus Clark, Randolph Stow, Peter Carey and Blanche d'Alpuget, well-known representatives of the Australian literary canon of the twentieth century.

Riem has adopted a two-pronged approach that is grounded in theoretical considerations of Riane Eisler (whose *Afterword* concludes the book) and Raimon Panikkar, the one an anthropologist and social scholar, the other a philosopher and theologian, both professing scholarly disciplines that do not immediately suggest their interest in literary criticism. Riem however adopts criteria central in their work for her own project to work out a reading of the novels from an ethical and a performative angle.

From the ethical point of view, Riem aims to establish whether the work of these white Australian writers grapples successfully with the problem of reconciliation. Reconciliation would entail creating a partnership between human beings, man and woman, people and land, life and cosmos in the face of a dominating political, social and cultural system that had been established by the European colonisers and determined their relations to the continent and its indigenous people; and also those among them who would deviate from 'values' such as degenerating and exploiting the 'other', perhaps deriving even pleasure from doing so, and quite generally, exerting total control over them. This control is expressed in manifold ways, among them a language that 'articulates aggressiveness and a hierarchical attitude' with 'positivist scientism prevail[ing]'; a language Panikkar calls scientific (16). Partnership, on the other hand, would be grounded in caring for the 'other', in feeling, sympathy, in humanity.

The performative aspect Riem's analyses pursue is linked to the function of language writers employ, the creative word, as opposed to the scientific, that relates to 'the symbolic, poetic, epiphanic and spiritual power of language' and performs, in dialogical dialogue, 'a process of constant transformation and renewal': a 'joint search for the shared and the different', as Panikkar put it (17).

Following her Introduction in which Riem briefly and intelligibly outlines the methodological foundation of her detailed character analyses, the main part of her study is introduced by analysing Clark's *For the Term of His Natural Life* as representing 'the convict system ... as a continual battle between partnership and dominator cultural paradigms' (29). The comprehensive second chapter on White's *Voss* and *The Aunt's Story* and Stow's *To the Islands* is a very-well documented presentation of their individual protagonists' 'Journeying towards partnership', a journey motivated by their search for self, leaving behind their erstwhile lives

Book reviews: *A Gesture of Reconciliation: Partnership Studies in Australian Literature*. Antonella Riem. Dieter Riemenschneider.

Transnational Literature Vol. 10 no. 2, May 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

ruled by the dominator system to establish a harmonious relationship between self, land and life and to experience the ‘unity of all things’ (71).

In part two, ‘Shaping Reality in Dialogical Dialogue’, attention is shifted from the hitherto primarily thematic approach to narratological and linguistic aspects – or ‘from Eisler to Panikkar’ – in Stowe’s *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* and *Tourmaline*, Carey’s *Bliss*, d’Alpuget’s *Turtle Beach* and White’s *Memoirs of Many in One*: all of them densely argued analyses of their authors’ achievement to have made ‘dialogical dialogue ... shape reality in positive, creative and constructive ways through the creative word’ (117).

While *A Gesture of Reconciliation* presents altogether convincing readings of these Australian novels within the theoretical framework chosen, it invites two comments and raises a few questions. Repeated references to the study’s theoretical underpinnings are not always necessary since their function has been outlined from the beginning. More examples would have served to carry the argument of Carey’s use of the creative word even more convincingly (131-132). And finally, gestures of reconciliation of the novels’ (white) protagonists extended to Aboriginal people are based on their (and their creators’) perception of indigeneity – which can be read as self-conceived; a projection. Would the inclusion of at least one Aboriginal text not have been helpful to avoid such a conclusion, as much as questioning d’Alpuget’s simple confrontation between the western dominator paradigm and Malaysia’s ‘more partnership oriented society’? (163) Nonetheless, Riem’s minute analyses and consistent pursuit of her thesis – including the book’s well-wrought structure – will be of interest to students and scholars of the twentieth-century Australian novel.

Dieter Riemenschneider

Goethe University Frankfurt

***Border Crossings* edited by Diana Glenn and Graham Tulloch (Wakefield Press, 2016)**

Border Crossings, as the name suggests, is a collection of essays that explores crossovers – between past and present, between reality and literature, between silence and expression, between genres, and between established borders of nation, life and theory. The essays traverse eras from the age of Dante to the emergence of digital libraries in the present, challenging conventional modernist binaries that mark temporal and spatial domains, interrogating the theoretical bases that mark them as closed domains of interpretation. Beginning with a quote by the Zimbabwean writer NoViolet Bulawayo, ‘Those with nothing are crossing borders,’ (1) the collection explores the contradictory elements of hope and the permanent erasure and reformulation of elements of the self that such cross-border migration entails.

Divided into eight sections, the twenty-two articles in the collection celebrate hybridity in literary musings that begins with the first essay, ironically titled ‘The Mash-up Novel: What Fresh Disrespect is This?’ In this essay, Michael X. Savvas explores the challenge posed to existing literary genres by the mash-up novel that creates a new literary genre in the twenty-first century through a juxtaposition of elements from existing ones. While examining the structure and the content of these novels, Savvas is more concerned with the border between respect and disrespect that these novels cross, especially in relation to the position of the reader. In the next essay, Ron Blaber’s exposition of the musical border crossings of the British Afrobeat band, Osibisa, delineates the band’s attempt to distinguish between affectivity and authenticity, which he equates with Africanness. Blaber argues that the failure to affect this transition lies in a number of translocations which hinder a connection to the abstract notion of an African aesthetic.

The second section in the book, titled ‘Interpretive Crossings’, explores the relationship between interpreter and interpretant, playwright and audience, text and reader. In the first essay of the section, Susan Mason delineates how meaning is given to the healing ceremony outlined in Richard Nelson’s *Sweet and Sad* through a ‘collective creative participation of actors and audience’ (42). In the next essay, Kelli Rowe talks of allegorical interpretation as translation, wherein the critical reading of a text is performed through a conscious illustration of codes. She defines interpretation of literary texts as *différance*, wherein readers are called upon to hold many contradictory positions as they deconstruct the interplay of meanings in the text. In studying an initiative by Google to partner with the libraries of several universities in the United States to make their collections available digitally, Tully Barnett’s essay traces the transition of the text from material to immaterial object and the resultant reformulation of the relationship between humans and books in the digital age.

The third section talks of crossovers between past and present. The study of the overlapping of apocalyptic themes in contemporary films and in Shakespeare’s works by Ben Kooyman is followed by Adrian Thurnwald’s comparison of the representation of the masculine heroism of medieval chivalric knights and modern superheroes in comic books. The next essay in the section by Irene Belperio and Diana Glenn explores Otherness and literary borders in an innovative study of otherworldly domains in Dante’s *Commedia*. In the same section, the subversion of Victorian normative modes to cross the naturalised border between the public and

Book reviews: *Border Crossings*, edited by Diana Glenn and Graham Tulloch. Lekha Roy. *Transnational Literature* Vol. 10, no. 2, May 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

private worlds forms the central idea of Lauren Butterworth's study of Sarah Waters's *Affinity*. The essays in the section themselves move back and forth in time, thus transcending the limiting effects of literary temporality.

The fourth section in the collection comprises two essays that are a reimagining of the borders of nation and its representation. The first essay, by Sue Hosking, is a critical juxtaposition of true-life stories as discovered in a booklet printed in Calcutta in 1891, and fictional and cinematic representations of India which she terms 'ambiguous allure' (120). The second essay, by Fran Bryson, examines the similarities and differences that govern the authorial motive in the works of six authors who wrote travelogues about Brazil. Both these essays examine the overlapping of borders between fiction and reality in writing about a country and its people. In a revisiting of the colonial *Raj*, India is seen as a saviour to the First World in Hosking's essay, while Brazilian social life, with all its ironic undertones, supersedes the Darwinian exposition of the natural world in Bryson's study of the various facets of life that travellers to the country described.

The fifth section in the collection, titled 'Crossovers Between Real Life, Art and Fiction', brings together three essays that study the impossibility of these three spheres existing as mutually exclusive with clearly defined borders. Emily Sutherland's essay studies the emotional divide crossed by fiction and non-fiction talking of the same subject, whether metaphorically or in reality, and concludes that there is no clear emotional border that demarcates the two. Gay Lynch explores Berlin crossings by Funder and Sornig in their fiction, delineating the historical schisms that exist just underneath the surface to make the city a postmodern simulacrum of the many crossings that it represents, both physical and metaphorical. Chelsea Avard's essay concludes the section by proving the inseparability of the artist and the subject through an examination of the projection of the intersubjectivity of the dichotomous relationship of the self and other in Alex Miller's *The Sitters*.

The idea of imaginary borders is extended into the two essays in the next section, titled 'Creative Writers and Border Crossings'. This includes Dennis Wild's insightful essay on the porous borders between silence and creative forms of expression. Terming his own literary journey an exploration, he traces the role of the memory in creating a coherent narrative that finds expression in varied literary genres. Mary Lynn Mather, on the other hand, traces the transnational author's quest for identity through characters that voice her own uneasiness at displacement. Both these essays trace the creative process as intensely personal, portrayed through different narrative techniques.

The last two sections, on 'Transcultural Passages' and 'Transnational Border Crossings', deal with specific incidents of border crossing reflected in literature and films. Thus, while Laura Lori argues that there is a continuous space-time crossing between the colonial past and the postcolonial present, Chloé A. Gill-Khan explores what happens when diasporic citizens refuse to remain suspended between two conflicting borders, choosing instead to free themselves from mourning. Arianna Dagnino's essay on the novel as a literary mutant, a *créole* form, studies the emergence of the transcultural novel at the edges, countering exotic stereotypes through territorial heterogeneity. The resultant polyglossia, she argues, has made possible the destabilising of the dominant language, contributing to an 'identity mobility' (215) reflected in the geographical settings of the novel, and a deconstruction of one's cultural identity. In the same section, Stefano Bona explores

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Book reviews: *Border Crossings*, edited by Diana Glenn and Graham Tulloch. Lekha Roy. *Transnational Literature* Vol. 10, No. 2, May 2018.
<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

the need to invent new methodologies in Italian Film Studies in its representations of China. This is followed by Daniela Cosmini-Rose and Desmond O'Connor's essay on the repercussions of the Bilateral Assisted Migration Agreement between Italy and Australia signed in 1951, and Colette Mrowa-Hopkins and Eric Bouvet's detailed study of French migration to Australia in the post-Second World War period, aided by two schemes, The General Assisted Passage Scheme (GAPS) and The Special Passage Assistance Program (SPAP).

Crossing Borders is thus a collection that explores borders, real and imagined, historical and contemporary, physical and psychological, and the impermanence that marks them. Tracing the changing contours of the nature of borders as well as that of the domains they demarcated, the collection explores the ways in which literature, history, migration, language and the arts have contributed in the transmutation of fixed and impenetrable binaries into a heterogeneity of self, geography and identity. As the editors note in the Introduction, the crossing of borders changes things irrevocably, and this collection offers a comprehensive study of the wide spectrum of areas where such crossings reorient definitions.

Lekha Roy

***Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature* edited by Nicholas Birns, Nicole Moore and Sarah Shieff (MLA, 2017)**

Many collections purporting to discuss teaching strategies end up as sets of standard readings of texts. This one manages to keep a fairly consistent focus on pedagogy while simultaneously providing readings of key writers and genres. These are not proffered as ‘a conclusive or exclusive canon’ (4) but as samples of contested cultures and national histories entwined with overseas influences.

Two of the editors (Birns and Moore) open the collection with ‘Relocating Literary Sensibility: Colonial Australian Print Culture in the Digital Age’. They sketch historical phases (European imaginings, explorer narratives, convict literature, early women’s writing) making the important observation in passing that Australia differs from New Zealand in having a colonial past predating the Victorian era. Anna Boswell (‘The Making and Unmaking of New Zealand’) also underlines the variety of text types comprising colonial writing, ‘the foundational role of violence’ (30) and anxieties about belonging that repeat ‘arrival scenes’ and cross-cultural misinterpretations. Frederick Maning’s shiftiness in *Old New Zealand* provides a useful case study, Jane Mander, Ian Wedde, Maurice Shadbolt, C.K. Stead and historical films providing useful foils to earlier work. Australian equivalents of Lady Barker and Maning are canvassed in David Carter’s ‘Bush Legends and Pastoral Landscapes’, which shows the bush being pushed into history by early poems so it could be covered in a romantic glow by urban clerks and struggling farmers, a legend both consolidated and called to question by critics and novelists in the 1950s.

Several strands of debate can be pulled from this collection. One is the tussle between ‘relevance’ and ‘understanding’. These days of ‘student-centred learning’ oblige some to prompt students to elicit from texts questions and lessons that inform their own circumstances. Obviously this is a worthwhile thing to do, and (as some contributors stress) demonstrates the value of literary study in times that emphasise the sciences. However, such personalised inferences may have little to do with the actual content and style of the text without close reading informed by historical and cultural context. We can also ask what students might be looking for if they choose to study Australian or New Zealand literatures: presumably some understanding of the society and culture of those countries and how writers reflect them. Students (as Claire Jones points out in the Australian context: ‘Liberating Australian Literature: Teaching from the Postnational Space’) can also be put off by relentless challenges of their positions within the nation, especially when they have been going on right across their secondary schooling. The task of the teacher, then, is to supply background knowledge and a guide to reading without being a ‘top-down’ instructor and without fixing old hegemonic models of national difference. Equally, teaching might highlight *literary* vision, rather than making texts over into pretexts for discussion of social movements and ethics.

Close reading, cultural contextualising and making both connect with reader interests (and the three really cannot be mutually exclusive) raise the question of whom we are teaching. What a

Book reviews: *Teaching Australian and New Zealand Literature* edited by Nicholas Birns, Nicole Moore and Sarah Shieff. Paul Sharrad.

Transnational Literature Vol. 10 no. 2, May 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Japanese student will take from or need to know about an Australian novel will be significantly different from how an American student deals with the same text. Given its MLA publication, the book assumes that American students are the target. Most contributors project outwards from teaching in Australia and New Zealand (where classes nowadays are often an international mix), though some speak from teaching in France, Austria, the UK and Germany. All deal with the challenge by comparing the focus text to ones that students are likely to be familiar with, pointing up similar strategies of form and style but using the other texts to show specificities of the Australasian works.

The book opens with six overviews: 'Histories and Contexts' includes the three chapters mentioned, along with Melissa Kennedy's 'Teaching International Postcolonialism: Witi Ihimaera and the Familiarity of Family', Russell West-Pavlov's "'Terror Nullius': Contemporary Australian Frontier Fictions' (*Remembering Babylon*, *The Secret River*, *Journey to the Stone Country*, *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* and Liam Davison's often overlooked *The White Woman*) and Wenche Ommundsen's survey of the emergence and challenges to literary values of 'migrant writing', 'Teaching Australian Multicultural Literature'.

The second part brings together eight essays on 'Frequently Taught Authors': Katherine Mansfield, Frank Sargeson, Christina Stead, Allen Curnow, Patrick White, Les Murray, David Malouf and Kim Scott. Lydia Wevers finds Mansfield useful for crossing various category boundaries, including nationalist realism and international modernism. Sarah Shieff points to subtleties of narration in Sargeson and the crossing of mateship with homosexual desire. Susan Sheridan presents Stead's novels as 'a rich resource for the classroom because of their range of social and historical contexts, their complex constructions of gendered character, and innovative uses of language and genre' (111), concentrating on *The Man Who Loved Children* and *For Love Alone*. Alex Calder suggests comparison of Curnow and Robert Frost, looks at the former's mix of realism and modernist interest in 'depth', and tracks shifts across Curnow's long career. For once, we do not get a disquisition on White's *Voss*, Elizabeth McMahon reflecting on teaching *The Twyborn Affair* as a particular 'queer' instance of Australian literature's 'processes of identity formation without stable definition or closure, betraying a fascination with perverse and volatile identities.' (133) that messes with the usual contract between author and reader, and with the tendency to teach texts as national allegories. This is more or less Rod McRae's approach to Les Murray's *Subhuman Redneck Poems*, though he notes the poet's project of decentring various centres of political and literary orthodoxy. Tanya Dalziell reads *Remembering Babylon* as an interrogation of whiteness, home, and the limits of imagination, using it to lead students to ask 'why they do not know certain things'. Hilary Emmett inspects the relation of language to sovereignty in *Benang*. She makes the important observations (teaching American Studies in the UK) that students know much less about Australia than the US, and that it is easier to teach Australian texts overseas because students do not feel so immediately threatened by implication in racial and historical injustice. Emmett also has some interesting ideas on prompting engagement with 'the book's inhospitality' (168).

Part Three takes us outwards into 'Global Connections'. Claire Jones closes this group with what might have been an opening discussion of the limitations of teaching Australian literature

in the old essentialist/exceptionalist national identity framework, though her piece relates mostly to a set of Australian problems. The answer to these comes at the start of the section: Chadwick Allen's description of the texts and comparative exercises he provides to his students of global indigenous writings. Brigitta Olubas uses Nam Le's *The Boat*, his speech on receiving a literary prize, and William Faulkner's Nobel speech to have students consider literary value and ethics: to whom does the writer owe loyalty – to himself, his character, to his father, to the reader? Maggie Nolan and Rebecca Weaver-Hightower report on their interviews with American teachers of *The Secret River* (supporting Emmett's idea that an 'alien' text can be used to lead students indirectly to confront their own position within histories of colonial injustice but adding the distinction between teaching texts as inroads to history and as literary devices) and Rosanne Kennedy looks at the range of approaches to Sally Morgan's *My Place* (identity formation, genre disruption, trauma narrative, postcolonial critique, gender studies, the politics of reception).

Part Four ('Course Models') addresses the fact that how and what we teach depends on the packages we work with in university curricula. Like Chad Allen, Jeanine Leane outlines what she teaches in 'Aboriginal Literature in the Classroom' but goes further in describing the sometimes difficult negotiation not only of student expectations and responses, but of her own role as an Aboriginal instructor. Margaret Orr writes of how she relates Maori texts to other modes of Maori culture (song, carving, creation myth, oratory). This is an interesting approach that is attuned to indigenous cultural contexts, but prompts this reader to wonder about unintentional side effects of ghettoising the writing into anthropological difference. One important message the essay contains is the need for a good deal of 'homework' on the part of teachers relaying texts from outside of their own cultures to students even more removed from the writers' world. Julieanne Lamond writes about *My Brilliant Career* in the context of gender studies, showing Sybylla's and Franklin's efforts to resist entrapment, and Claire Bazin rehearses theories of autobiography to show how Janet Frame's *An Angel at my Table* can be situated in classes on life writing. Claudia Marquis ('Threshold Moments: Teaching the New Zealand Adolescent Novel'), surveys major texts, from Margaret Mahy's onwards, raises the questions about what makes an 'adolescent' novel, and makes the notable point that characters are given some connection to Maori tradition as part of their entrance into maturity. 'Criminal Pursuits: Teaching Crime Fiction from New Zealand and Australia' by Roger Nicholson closes the essay collection, showing how the genre breaks with simple formulae, works with mobility, raises critical questions about seriality, and carries with it cultural preoccupations (Australia's being colonial history and race relations).

One thing that this book makes clear is our continued prizing of reading as a means of making better people. Despite history, despite theoretical rejections, the undercurrent in this book is that we teach to create self-reflective, socially aware, ethically attuned, broad-minded students. To do this (and in the context of two 'settler-colonial' nations speaking to another one it is only fitting), we teach to *unsettle*. It is perhaps a dangerous project in terms of keeping young people drawn to reading literature, but it is nonetheless a worthy one that asserts the positive role of the humanities in contemporary life. Another thing evident in these essays is the teacher's predilection – whatever the pedagogy – for textual complexity. Levels of competing meaning, internal contradiction, ironies, allow the performance of skilful interpretation and the conversion

of close reading into discussion of cultural production and reception, the perpetuation and the subversion of social discourses. There is a conflict here between what amounts to allegorical readings by teachers and the deprecation of both allegorical texts (pre-modern? pre-empting the teacher's work?) and texts that simply refuse complications. This reflects back onto the fluctuating critical fortunes of older nationalist and realist work, and is something picked up on by several contributors.

Reviews of anthologies always indulge in a 'what's in, what's not' game. One might point to many writers as deserving of attention as those included here. This would provide a sketch of how literary tastes have changed over time (once you couldn't talk about New Zealand literature without mentioning J.K. Baxter, or Australian poetry without citing Kenneth Slessor or A.D. Hope; shifts in 'women's writing' subjects have sidelined the once seemingly obligatory inclusion of *The Bone People*). However, selection is unavoidable, and there's no one included that most editors would *not* include. More significant is the book's strong concentration on fiction and the total absence of drama – always a cinderella at critical balls.

The editors close with a fifth section on resources: databases and electronic, blogs, journals, anthologies, general histories and critical work, film and multimedia. Anyone interested in teaching the two literatures will find this section invaluable. It is, of course, selective (work from Europe in *JEASA*, *Coolabah*, *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies* could be mentioned, for example), but the works listed will take you to almost everything you are likely to need, wherever you happen to be teaching. The index is thorough but only contains people's names: cross-referencing of 'realism', 'left-wing writing' etcetera no doubt meant costs beyond the publisher's budget. This is a minor quibble about an otherwise very useful and readable book.

Paul Sharrad

Hakutani, Yoshinobu, *East-West Literary Imagination: Cultural Exchange from Yeats to Morrison* (University of Missouri Press, 2017).

Yoshinobu Hakutani's *East-West Literary Imagination: Cultural Exchange from Yeats to Morrison* is a theoretical text. It analyses the influence of the Eastern philosophies, literature and arts on the Western literary imagination, with a specific focus on the Irish poet W.B. Yeats and some American poets and novelists. Hakutani contends that among some major Eastern philosophies such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, Buddhist literary practices influenced the Western writers most and helped them to create a hybrid literature throughout nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The text groups the selected Western writers in terms of three literary periods, transcendental, modern and postmodern, and highlights the influence of different sects of Buddhism on those writers. Hakutani takes a comparative and contrapuntal approach. He re-reads American and Irish writing and claims that, although American literature has been originated from the European literature, none can deny the influence of Confucianism and Buddhism on it.

The first part, 'Transcendentalists', discusses Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. Hakutani shows that the liberal thinker Thoreau was well-versed in some of the major Eastern religions and preferred Lord Buddha to Jesus Christ. Thoreau was heavily influenced by the Confucian ethics, and this interest is reflected in his book *Walden* and his essay 'Civil Disobedience'. He, like Confucius, regarded silence as the sound of the universe and plunged himself in the solitude of the nature to acquire wisdom and peace. Accordingly, his concepts of individualism, individual conscience, individual and nature, individual and society become a reservoir of moral precepts.

However, unlike Thoreau, Emerson was critical of Zen philosophy, a sect of Buddhism that calls its followers to achieve Buddhahood within themselves through the state of *Mu*, nothingness, and the 'satori', the enlightenment. Although Emerson was intrigued by the mysticism of the Eastern ontologies, he explained the relationship of God, the Over-soul, with the human self in a different way. To Emerson, a human soul can be self-reliant when it juxtaposes the power of itself with the power of God. Thus, not the nothingness and the unconscious, but the subjective perception of soul and Over-soul, enlightens an individual and makes him or her self-reliant. In this way, Emerson diametrically opposes the concepts of the unconscious, the unsymbolisable and intersubjectivity that Jacques Lacan, Emily Dickinson, Roland Barthes and Ezra Pound shared with Zen philosophy. He rather has more affinity with Whitman who was ambivalent towards Zen doctrine, as expressed in his 'Song of Myself' and 'Passage to India'.

The text also illustrates East-West cultural exchange in the modern and postmodern tradition of writing poems. Hakutani begins his analysis with the Irish poet W.B. Yeats. Yeats became familiar with the Japanese literature through his predecessors Lafcadio Hearn, Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound. He disliked the conflict between science and spiritualism of the Victorian period and the concept of realism which considered an artist not 'a human being, but an

Book reviews: *East-West Literary Imagination: Cultural Exchange from Yeats to Morrison* by Yoshinobu Hakutani. Umme Salma.

Transnational Literature Vol. 10 no. 2, May 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

invention of science' (85). He developed friendship with Yone Noguchi, a Japanese writer,¹ and became interested in the spiritualism and symbolism, represented in Japanese Noh plays. A Noh play generally narrated 'the human tragedy rather than comedy of the old stories and legends seen through the Buddhistic flash of understanding' (73). Yeats found those elements congenial and adapted the form of Noh plays to serve his purpose of reviving Irish legends.

Like Noh plays, the Japanese haiku also influenced the European and American writers. Hakutani provides a detailed historical and stylistic account of the haiku and praises the contribution of Noguchi in making the West familiar with this poetic form in the second decade of the twentieth century. Hakutani cites many beautiful haiku, translated by Noguchi from Japanese into English, in the text, as for example,

Sunset on the sea:
The voices of the ducks
Are faintly white. (97)

Fascinated by the haiku form (a verse form of seventeen syllables) and its impersonal portrayal of concise imagery, Ezra Pound constructed his idea of imagism, which he called a 'VORTEX' (98). Nevertheless, World War Two temporarily suppressed the interest of Western poets in haiku. British writers in Tokyo, such as Harold G. Henderson and R. H. Blyth, renewed that interest after the war and consequently, the African American writer Richard Wright and poets of the Beat generation such as Jack Kerouac started to compose haiku. Wright himself wrote over four thousand haiku in the last eighteenth months of his life. His haiku exposed the aesthetic principle of *yugen*, *sabi* and *wabi* and combined both traditional and modernist motifs and traits of writing haiku.² One example can be given here:

A thin waterfall
Dribbles the whole autumn night, –
How lonely it is. (139)

In the same way, Kerouac, being influenced by Mahayana Buddhism,³ wrote haiku. He emphasised the expression of spontaneous emotions in poetry and thus advocated an unlimited freedom of the poetic sensibility. Also, the next generation of African American poets, such as Robert Hass, Sonia Sanchez and James A. Emanuel, inspired by Wright's poems, experimented with haiku. Among them, Emanuel created a new tradition of Jazz haiku, combining aesthetics of jazz and haiku together.

¹ It is interesting to note that Yone Noguchi had an intimate relationship with the Bengali literary giant Rabindranath Tagore. The period when Tagore, Yeats, Pound and Noguchi came in touch with one another was the time around which Tagore published 'Songs of Offerings' (1913) and won the Nobel prize.

² *Yugen* is one of the delicate principles of the Japanese art. It denotes modesty, concealment, depth and darkness (132-3). *Sabi* is a familiar term in Japanese poetics which refers to 'what is described is aged' (133). It is the sensibility of loneliness which denotes 'a grace rather than splendour' and 'quiet beauty rather than robust beauty.' *Wabi* refers to 'the uniquely human perception of beauty stemmed from poverty'. It proposes that those who are poor are blessed, but the emphasis is not on the moral aspect of poverty, but on the aesthetic principle of deprivation (132-6).

³ It is a sect of Buddhism that preaches that the goal of life of a follower of Buddhism is to achieve Buddhahood, 'a celestial state of enlightenment an acceptance of all forms of life' (155).

East-West Literary Imagination examines the influence of the Buddhist philosophy on the American modernist and postmodernist tradition of writing novels. Hakutani argues that unlike the Victorian novel, modern novels do not sketch realism and naturalism or tell a story and convey a moral. Rather they depict a ‘different self’ (13) which emerges once the central character’s ego is destroyed and leads the hero or heroine to a new form of self-realisation. Hakutani finds this self-realisation as the manifestation of the Buddhist concept of karma (human deeds) and nirvana (the state of oblivion of the self) which the novels of the existential tradition portray. He reinterprets Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) and Richard Wright’s *The Outsider* (1953) and moves away from the existential interpretation of Wright’s novel. He argues that, unlike Albert Camus’s *The Stranger* (1946), Wright’s novel is a discourse of race where the hero Damon struggles to be an insider in the American society. However, both novels depict the universal human condition through the Buddhist concept of karma and nirvana and thus become specimens of the cross-cultural writings.

Likewise, postmodern novels, such as Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple* (1982) and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), and travelogues, such as Richard Wright’s *Black Power* and *Pagan Spain*, reflect the concept of enlightenment in Buddhism. Hakutani re-reads all these three novels and finds them as the conveyors of the East-West literary practices. The novel *Colour Purple* delineates the female protagonist Celie’s quest for voice and identity in the male-dominated society. It shows that Celie finds her voice and identity through Buddhism where the colour purple in the field symbolises the divine communion between her and nature. In the same way, Wright’s travelogues and Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) portray the East-West crossroads through their representation of the African’s ‘primal outlook upon life’ (229). Hakutani finds that the Akan religion and Buddhism share the concepts of the divinity of the self; unity, continuity and infinity of the life and death; and reincarnation which both Morrison and Wright uphold through their portrayal of the force of kinship and love, prevalent in the African culture.

The text *East-West Literary Imagination* is written in a lucid and understandable language. However, Hakutani’s structuring and handling of the broad and complex issue of the East-West literary reciprocity at times appear haphazard. Also, his title is a bit too broad, and runs the risk of conveying a mistaken impression about the book at a first glance. Still, I hope the book will attract students, academics and researchers interested either in the Eastern, specifically Japanese or Western, specifically Irish and American Studies.

Umme Salma

William Marx, *The Hatred of Literature*, translated by Nicholas Elliott (Belknap Press, 2018)

Thanks to Nicholas Elliott's fine translating skills, and only three years after its initial publication at Presses de Minuit, *The Hatred of Literature* (*La haine de la littérature*) fittingly comes out in translation in the United States, a country otherwise known as the 'Suing Society'. Though in no position to mete out justice, William Marx – a self-appointed defence attorney for the occasion – brilliantly takes up the cudgels for literature, which seems to have been repeatedly disparaged throughout the centuries. Over nearly 190 pages of pleading, readers of *The Hatred of Literature* are made to attend this mock trial through a series of four indictments (authority, truth, morality and society) whose boundaries are porous enough to allow some examples to overlap, such as Plato's *The Republic*.

With what exactly is literature being reproached? Its former hegemony leading onto a turf war which eventually paled into insignificance (authority); its mendacity which in the meantime has been solved by philosophers like Maurice Blanchot, Tzvetan Todorov and Peter McCormick (truth);¹ its occasional immorality which could also be seen as plain transgressiveness or subversion (morality); and its illegitimacy through its alleged lack of usefulness – an invalid claim that Cognitive Literary Studies would have easily countered (society).² Because literature, like any object, is unfit to plead, the onus is on William Marx to do it.

But expect neither court cases nor legal judgements involving literature, as Marx merely uses this lexical field rhetorically to create a kind of judiciary-inspired hermeneutics to seduce his readers – a sensationalism of sorts reflected by the title itself which is inspired by one of Flaubert's melodramatic ejaculations. So, is hatred perhaps too strong a word? One could legitimately question whether all the instances provided in *The Hatred of Literature* are cut from the same cloth.³ In other words, could these antagonists have harboured other more subtle individual emotions such as jealousy, scorn, fear, moral anger, resentment, rancour, moral disgust, or indignation? Or, rather than a single emotion, could these enemies of literature have been under the sway of a constellation of emotions?

As Marx reminds us, literature remains a somewhat elusive concept which 'does not have a proper definition':

¹ See chapter 8 of Jean-François Vernay, *The Seduction of Fiction: A Plea for Putting Emotions Back into Literary Interpretation*. Trans. Carolyne Lee (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

² See Terence Cave, *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) and my review of it in *Transnational Literature* : https://dspace.flinders.edu.au/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2328/37627/Vernay_Thinking_with_Literature.pdf?sequence=1

³ Among the cases under scrutiny, readers will come across 'Plato's banishment of poets' and 'Socrates's aggressive attitude towards poets' (42), Charles Percy Snow's 'succession of good-natured platitudes' (60) combined with 'more or less direct homophobic allusions' (63), Gregory Currie's argument against psychological novels (96), the bowdlerising of *Huckleberry Finn* (130), the mocking of *The Princesse de Clèves* on the syllabus of a recruitment examination for administrative officers (157), *inter alia*.

Book reviews: *The Hatred of Literature*, by William Marx, translated by Nicholas Elliott. Jean-François Vernay.

Transnational Literature Volume 10 No. 2, May 2018.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Our current conception of literature, focused on the novel, poetry, theatre, and the essay, is relatively recent. It was not until toward the end of the eighteenth century that the word literature (or its equivalents) finally eliminated its rivals in the European languages and began to be used in reference to such a heterogeneous body of texts. (186)

Therefore, it is only logical that ‘anti-literature’ – that which defines itself *against* literature – should be an even more elusive and all-encompassing concept. In a nutshell, one could define it as anything which antagonises literature, ranging from archived and contemporary broadsides to public disgrace (courtesy of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy), not to mention censorship (in the form of bowdlerisation and bans), book-burning and other manifestations of so-called hatred.

By raising a defense of literature and resisting those who indulge in slighting its potential, William Marx cooks up a few blindingly clever counter-arguments which occasionally segue smoothly into biting ironies, if not witty punchlines (‘With friends like Snow, literature doesn’t need enemies’ [64]) and razor-sharp wry humour.⁴ For instance, after quoting a couple of Nicolas Sarkozy’s repeated mocking rants, Marx sarcastically adds:

This heart-wrenching picture is enough to bring tears to your eyes: the forty-year-old mother reading Madame de la Fayette in one hand while preparing a meal for her children with the other – a twenty-first-century version of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. Surely, international conventions will soon ban obligatory reading of masterpieces as inhumane and degrading treatment. (157)

After answering the main charges and contesting some of the complaints, the author of *Un savoir gai*⁵ counter-attacks by laying a charge against homophobia, which he rightfully detects in C.P. Snow’s snide comment (62). But the following sweeping generalisation might be too much of a stretch: ‘As I have earlier had occasion to note, anti-literature has always been highly compatible with homophobia, all the way through the twentieth century’ (146).

If it is often said that writers have a way with words, and William Marx is quintessentially articulate. In many respects, *The Hatred of Literature* is an apt illustration of the intellectual playfulness which underlies French critical writing. Authors like Marc Porée, Michel Schneider, Jean-Jacques Lecercle, and the like, often make extensive use of a clever mix of wit and erudition which largely account for the much sought-after pleasure of the text – a treat which, sadly enough, one all too rarely experiences when perusing nonfiction.

Jean-François Vernay

⁴ See the postscript he adds to the *Princesse de Clèves* study case. ‘The rest is history: *The Princesse de Clèves* became the symbol of opposition to the president-elect; its print run increased by unprecedented amounts; discussions were organised by the media; public readings were held on the street, in theaters, and at universities; books were published; the novel was transposed to the present day in a good film adaptation; and Madame de la Fayette was added to the prestigious Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, the ultimate recognition for a French author.’ (162)

⁵ *Un savoir gai* (Paris: Presses de Minuit, 2018) is a more personal book in which William Marx discusses his homosexuality.