Book Reviews

R. Howard Bloch et al., eds. *Rethinking the New Medievalism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2014. Pp. viii+280.

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While the title of this essay collection indicates that the volume "rethinks" the "New Medievalism," in fact that project is a relatively minor part of these interesting and insightful essays. The essays are, for the most part, particular studies of aspects of a variety of medieval works in Romance vernaculars, with a token Chaucer essay included for good measure; there are also several essays on broad issues of authorship, textuality, and genre. Overall, these essays consider topics as diverse as the use of databases of digitized manuscripts, the presence of the visual in verbal media, and the continuities between the medieval and early modern periods. This is an important collection of essays, of primary interest to scholars and students in the field of medieval literature in the Romance vernaculars, but a number of the essays will also be of interest to other medievalists and to literary scholars more generally.

The "rethinking" of the title is an indication that this volume involves certain intertextual relationships which are referenced by several of the essays, though in general these essays are not especially dependent upon these associations. On one level, the volume constitutes the proceedings of a 2008 conference under the same title, held in honour of Professor Stephen G. Nichols; all but one of the speakers at that conference appear in the book, and all but three of the essays here are versions of their conference papers. Further, both the "rethinking" conference and the book are identifying themselves as reconsiderations of a particular approach to medieval studies that is variously called by its practitioners the "New Philology," "Material

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Philology," or the "New Medievalism," as documented in 1) the "New Philology" special issue of *Speculum* (1990), 2) *The New Medievalism*, ed. Brownlee, Brownlee, and Nichols (1991), and *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. Bloch and Nichols (1996), among others.

Professor Spiegel's essay, "Reflections on The New Philology," is the most explicitly related to the titular subject of the collection, offering an account of the genesis, principal themes, and reception of the 1990 special issue of *Speculum* to which her title refers. She finds that the essays in that collection explored "the expansion of semiotics and poststructuralism among literary and historical scholars" in ways that today might seem somewhat "quaint and even out of date" (48). She concludes, then, with some consideration of how current literary and cultural theory, a sort of "post-poststructuralism," continues to change the ways in which medievalism is practiced.

Four of the essays deal with broad issues of medieval texuality and manuscript culture, generally reinforcing a postmodern problematics of authorship. Jan-Dirk Müller's "The Identity of a Text" considers the particular problem of how to assess one particular stanza. It is found in a manuscript miscellany unattributed and among other items of a "sententious" quality; in other manuscripts, a very similar stanza appears as a portion of a song by Walther von der Vogelweide. The "old philology" would see here a form of identity based upon traditional ideas of authorship, would see the differences between this text and the stanza within the song as an example of scribal corruption, and would do little with this manuscript beyond recording the variants from an uninteresting "excerpt" from the larger work. On the other hand, the "new philologist" would understand that medieval literature is by its nature "all variance," and that here is an "original text" that is to be studied within the context of the manuscript in which it appears, not in relation to Walther's poem.

Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, in her "Conceiving the Text in the Middle Ages," takes a somewhat different approach, arguing that the "old" philology focused upon the text as a "document" while the "new" philology sees it as a "monument," since the text is distinct from gloss, and is central where the gloss is marginal; further, that the text resists immediate comprehension and invites the participation of commentators, translators, and copyists (157), provoking intelligent engagement (158). How this idea of the "monumental" text to be distinguished from a traditional idea of the "literary" text distinct from the "non-literary" is not made entirely clear; still, she, too, is attempting to define the "authority" of a text as based upon its "monumentality," not upon its association with a particular author.

Another approach to such questions of textuality and the complex nature of medieval authorship is illustrated in "The *Pèlerinage* Corpus in the European Middle Ages" by Ursula Peters. The "*Pèlerinage* Corpus" is a trilogy of texts, originally composed by Guillaume de Deguileville, but which was "retextualized" repeatedly in the centuries after the original composition. Professor Peters outlines ten "stages" in the "rewriting" of these texts, illustrating how the "textual practice of rewriting" in medieval literature by its nature exceeds traditional categories of textual production,

performance, variants, and versions (218).

Professor Nichols's contribution, "New Challenges for the New Medievalism," is, on the one hand, a celebration of the sorts of "new" questions that the scholar can ask with new tools such as databases of digitized manuscripts (for example, the *Roman de la Rose* manuscript database at Johns Hopkins), and, on the other hand, an illustration of the limitations of traditional critical editions. Professor Nichols illustrates what can be done with digitized manuscripts, and illustrates the principle that every different manuscript, however far removed from the date of composition, has its own significance. Professor Nichols's demonstration of what a digital manuscript database can teach us is wonderful, but I believe that he exaggerates the degree to which we find here a radical redirection of scholarship that will allow us to shed traditional ways of reading and editing medieval texts: the new tools allow us to increase the range of questions that we can ask, but they do not obviate our need for the old tools.

Professor Bloch's contribution, "From Romanesque Architecture to Romance," summarizes some of the main characteristics of Gothic architecture as described by Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis with characteristics of the genre of romance as illustrated by the *Roman d'Eneas*, finding that both are searches for synergy and synthesis in an "encyclopedic" form, a complex resolution of oppositional tendencies, including a new interest in the psychological, the natural, and a material expression of the spiritual.

The remaining essays in the volume are more particular studies of specific linguistic and literary questions. Daniel Heller-Roazen considers the development of the concept of the "corsair," the development of linguistic and legal distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate maritime activities in war and peace (the "pirate," the "privateer"), particularly to demonstrate how the development of new public policies and governance drove changes in language. Joachim Küpper discusses the links between religion and the distinctive systems of "epic" value represented in *The Iliad*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and the *Nibelungenlied*. Marina Brownlee considers "The Possibility of Historical Time in the *Crónica Sarracina*," seeing in this fifteenth-century account of the eighth-century Muslim invasion of Spain a "playfulness" with time and temporal distinctions in ways that engage Paul Ricoeur's three conditions for making historical time conceivable: a calendar, an awareness of successive generations, and access to archives of historical documents.

There are two essays on Dante's *Commedia*. Gerhard Regn considers how the poem constructs itself simultaneously as a report of a visionary experience but also as a work of art, creating a tension between divine and human authorizations. Kevin Brownlee discusses the allusions to Daedalus, Icarus, and Phaeton which mark Dante's descent from the seventh to the eighth circle of the Inferno; while these pagan fliers failed and fell, largely because they abandoned their guides, the Christian flier is following his guide, and, paradoxically, his "fall" is subsequently proven to be an "ascent" towards the Paradiso.

Andreas Kablitz offers a close reading of the first several sonnets of Petrarch's

sequence as part of a demonstration that, while Petrarch's focus upon the poet as his own subject is forward-looking, his use of Greco-Roman mythology is backward-looking, but within a Christian context which ensures that the use of the classical is no simple return to the pagan past.

In the one essay on a text that is not from the field of Romance language studies, Andrew James Johnston considers Chaucer's use of ekphrasis in the *Knight's Tale* as serving a particular "narrative politics of representation" (181) which foregrounds the tension between the visual and the verbal as well as between the classical and the medieval, the "epic" and classical story in the mouth of a medieval and "chivalric" narrator.

The remaining two essays, on Montaigne and on Rabelais respectively, turn to early Modern texts, but both do so in order to foreground the degree to which medieval ideas were incorporated into "Renaissance" thought. Jack Abecassis argues that Montaigne's *Essais* anticipate "Henri Meschonnic's central thesis that language theory necessarily possesses historical and ethical dimensions" (198), since Montaigne's engagement with medieval nominalism foregrounds how a language theory is foundational to a politics and an ethics. Montaigne and the Renaissance do not abandon the medieval, but there are aspects of the medieval that were urgent to Montaigne and continue to be urgent to Meschonnic. Similarly, in its focus upon continuities rather than discontinuities across supposed period divisions, Deborah N. Losse examines Rabelais in part to confirm the assertions of Paul Oskar Kristeller (made in 1941) that the very ground of "modern" humanism and Platonism is not through a direct link with the Classical, but an indirect link through Augustine. Rabelais expresses scorn for scholasticism and late medieval thinking, but draws heavily (though without express acknowledgement) upon an Augustinian tradition.

In sum, the book's title and its occasional gestures towards "rethinking the New Medievalism" is of less central importance than the title suggests: a close reading of the Christian classicism of Petrarchan sonnets or an essay on Augustinianism in Rabelais hardly seem to represent some "new" medievalism which could not have been practiced prior to 1990. For all of the abstract declarations that these "New Medievalists" wish to separate textual authority from ideas of authors, and to prioritize manuscript contexts over critical editions, the bulk of these essays are based upon critical editions of works attributed to authors, and quite canonical authors at that. The binaristic claims that the "new" supersedes the "old" and obviates the need for "traditional" methods seem a bit of a stretch given that most of the essays here use traditional methods to answer traditional questions. There are some illustrations here of how new methods can be used to raise new questions, but these would appear to be in addition to, not a replacement for, the traditional. But again, for a reader willing not to be too distracted by the self-promotional talk of "newness," one can find here excellent and very accessible scholarly insights on a range of important topics and texts.

Barbara Vinken. *Flaubert Postsecular: Modernity Crossed Out*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2015. Pp. 480.

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The title of Barbara Vinken's recently translated critical study of Flaubert and religion, *Flaubert Postsecular: Modernity Crossed Out*, suggests something of its ambition. While acknowledging Flaubert's renowned status as a central figure in the development of modernism, Vinken argues that Flaubert's works engage in a particular and profound relationship with salvation history and with Biblical and classical texts. She traces a persistent and pessimistic reading, across Flaubert's oeuvre, of a testament against the Gospels and of the idea of redemption through sacrificial love and the image of the Cross. The result is a re-evaluation of Flaubert's major novels, and of his *Trois Contes*, arguing that their modernity stems in part from this thoroughgoing ironizing or incorporation of ancient and Biblical sources, and from a "crossing out" of the significance of the Cross in Christian history and belief. Flaubert is therefore to be read, in Vinken's analysis, as "postsecular:" less a writer whose works reflect increasing nineteenth-century scepticism towards religion, but instead as one whose meticulous research sees intricate Christian symbolism written into his works, designed to offer the bitterest of readings against the New Testament.

Vinken traces images of the Cross throughout Flaubert's works. She notes, among other examples, the cross of the Legion of Honour awarded to Homais at the end of *Madame Bovary*, Dussardier dying at the hands of Sénécal in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, his arms outstretched in a cross, and patterns of intersecting verticality and horizontality in the *Trois Contes*. For Vinken, the persistence of such crosses indicates the idea that for Flaubert, human history echoes the events of salvation history, from Babel, through the Crucifixion and Resurrection; the touchstone for Flaubert's writing is the Bible. Yet the result of such a thoroughgoing engagement with the Bible, as well as with biblical interpreters such as Saint Augustine, is that Flaubert's work becomes an anti-Gospel, a resolutely anti-Christian movement which revises a tradition of love whose primal scene is Christ's act of renunciation on the cross. Instead of embodying self-affirmation or self-transcendence, Vinken's evaluation of Flaubert's crossed-out Christianity sees the crucifixion as an act of forsaking the self and the suffering this entails. She argues for an interpretation of Flaubert's modernity which contradicts a view of this so-called hermit of Croisset as passive, or as a nihilist, as advocated by Sartre or by Nietzsche, seeing Flaubert instead as playing a much more vital role in modernism. She claims that it is instead his rewriting of the crucifixion, seen as an eradication of the self, which makes Flaubert "the founder of modern literature" (93). Her analysis has ramifications for a reading of Flaubert's realism: the obsession with historical truth pertains, she suggests, not so much to realism as to a form of competition with the Bible. The recurring image of the apple tree in *Madame Bovary* is seen as an indication that the novel should be read "not in a realist mode,

but allegorically" (64); less as emblematic of local Norman flora and fauna than as evocative of the tree of knowledge. In this re-evaluation of Flaubert's biblical reading, Vinken also indicates Flaubert's divergence from his contemporaries; she sees certain motifs within his texts as deliberate anti-Christian rewritings of Hugo's texts in particular. Hugo's Esmerelda, for example, in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, is redeemed by motherhood, becoming a martyr to maternal love; Emma Bovary is anything but.

Vinken applies her reading of Flaubert as "postsecular" to each of his major completed works. *Madame Bovary* is analyzed as a novel in which the lust of adultery is seen less as banal and physical, than as allegorical: adultery is related to a form of reading gone astray. Vinken connects Flaubert's novel with a line from Augustine's *Confessions*, in which he describes his reading of the *Aeneid* as a form of adultery against God; *Madame Bovary* is also seen as a novel about the dangers of false reading, and a false relationship with the world. Flaubert's insistence, though, is that the Gospels too represent a form of false reading; through the scapegoated figure of Emma Bovary, Flaubert shows how the world is not redeemed. Discussing a number of possible ancient intertexts, including the metamorphosis of Arachne, the tragedy of Phèdre, the myth of Cupid and Psyche, Vinken sees that Flaubert employs these ancient tales and their symbolism in a retaliation against the Gospel, which was intended to overcome and supersede them. In answer to the Augustinian doctrine of selfless Christian love, the love stories in *Madame Bovary* represent a love gone wrong, a love that seeks only profit. In the society depicted by Flaubert, the adulteress is not redeemed by the blood of Christ; adultery remains a death sentence for women. When Emma kisses the statuette of the crucified Christ on her deathbed, this gesture is seen as a continuation of an "inevitably tragic adultery against God" (87). Flaubert maps Emma's journey meticulously following a sequence of biblical echoes. Vinken suggests, for instance, that Emma travels the way of the Cross in reverse, from the Lion d'or, the inn where she and Charles spend their her first evening in Yonville, whose name obliquely refers to Jesus, the Lion of Judah, as the golden, resurrected Christ, to the Croix rouge—but Emma's death leads not to transcendence but to the understanding that the cross means nothing but suffering. Vinken's discussion of detail can be persuasive and nuanced. The evacuation of Christian love is illustrated in the image of the box in which Rodolphe keeps his old love letter, an old Rheims biscuit tin. Vinken perceives that these "billets doux" have lost their sweetness; this allusion to the city where French kings were anointed and endowed with the right to rule by the grace of God has been rendered flavourless and meaningless. And just as *Madame Bovary* is seen as a novel which erases love, so *L'Éducation sentimentale* is seen as a text which erases revolution. Flaubert's 1869 novel, and its bitter depiction of the 1848 revolution and its aftermath, is seen as an intertextual montage, which evokes the biblical image of Babel, Augustine's *City of Man*, and Lucan's *Pharsalia*, an account of Caesar's civil war under Nero. The founding of Rome, based on fratricide, is echoed in the depiction of the forest and palace of Fontainebleau described by Flaubert in 1848, characterized by images of oaks and wolves evoking Roman

symbolism. The struggle between Romulus and Remus is traced in fratricidal relationships in *L'Éducation sentimentale*, most notably in the killing of the republican Dussardier by his former comrade-in-arms, Sénécal. Taking issue with critics who argue that the novel enacts a critique of the myth of history (such as the German Jauss), Vinken argues that "by no means did Flaubert miss his rendezvous with History" (181); instead, using Saint Augustine as a model, she sees him represent earthly history as anti-salvific, as the "eternal destitution of everything" (181).

Vinken's discussion of Flaubert's intertextuality is at its most persuasive when she is dealing with the texts which bring religion most prominently to the fore, *Salammbô* and the *Trois Contes*. In *Salammbô*, the key question of the novel is that of the nature of sacrifice; Vinken proposes that the sacrifices carried out by the Carthaginians are to be read as perversions of Christ's sacrifice out of love, and of its antecedents in the Old Testament; the burnt offering of the children, who are fed to the god Moloch, is read as a distortion of the crucifixion, as well as Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac. Here too, Vinken brings to the fore a discussion of kenosis, the self-emptying of one's own will, in order to become wholly receptive to the divine will of God. In Flaubert's work, though, kenosis becomes nullification; self-sacrifice is simply emptiness. This is illustrated most graphically in the deaths of the Barbarians in *Salammbô*, whose crucified corpses are echoes of the crucified lions glimpsed earlier in the novel: crosses are, indeed, everywhere in Flaubert's pre-Christian novel. The relevance of the cross in a text set after the First Punic War, 241 years before Christ is, for Vinken, indicative of Flaubert's reading of history. The cross becomes a paradigm for the atrocity of human behaviour throughout time, and can be read as a deliberate contradiction of Michelet's nineteenth-century rewriting of earthly history as salvation history; the French Revolution seen as a replaying and reconfiguring of the Virgin Birth, the Passion, and the Resurrection. Vinken argues that Flaubert counters this view by deciphering history as the erasure of the promise of salvation. Such a reading is developed in relation to the *Trois Contes*, in which the three figures of the tales, John the Baptist, Saint Julien and the simple-hearted Félicité, illustrate a form of love which leads, again, to kenosis, to absolute emptying. Here, Vinken perceives that in the relinquishing of the self, performed in the death of each of these saintly characters, the figure of the human is lost to idiocy, to animalistic nature, to material decay and to empty mechanics. The endings of these short stories are often read as moments of ascension which reveal Flaubert's double-edged writing, oscillating between irony and pathos, as in the conclusion of *Un Cœur simple*, in which the dying Félicité envisages the Holy Spirit as a parrot. Vinken sees these climaxes as representative of blinding and deluding illusion. Intertwined into *Un Cœur simple*, she suggests, is Courbet's painting *Woman with a Parrot*, which evokes a sexual act between woman and bird; the parrot hovering over Félicité at the moment of her death is thus read as a sexualisation of the Annuciation. In the ascension scenes, which are seen as hackneyed, Christianity is considered as an idolatrous religion, no different from the religions of antiquity which proliferate in *Hérodias*. At such

moments in the texts, then, Flaubert is seen to offer a key practice of literature, the renunciation of art's potential for illusion.

Vinken's book, which was published in German in 2009, is an assertive and fascinating critical study. It is impressive in its ambition and often persuasive in its central argument and its use of detail. The boldness of the discussion can sometimes lead to over-assertion, or to the downplaying of aspects of realism often linked with Flaubert's work: though Vinken's foregrounding of the representation of religion sheds new light on biblical interpretations of the novels, she is quick to claim its emphasis over and above other key themes, such as science. She asserts, for instance, that Flaubert's portrayal of Emma Bovary's corpse owes its verisimilitude less to the morgue or to anatomical handbooks but instead to a statue of Guiseppe Sanmartino's "The Veiled Christ" in Naples; her acknowledgement that "Flaubert gives no hint of this source' but that 'those who have seen this sculpture are bound to recall it vividly when reading the book" (50) is an example of the way Vinken's book can tend to claim too much for its evidential analysis. There are times, too, when recent Anglo-American criticism on Flaubert is overlooked; Jennifer Yee's work on Orientalism in Flaubert is not referenced, despite Vinken's insistence on oriental themes in *Salammbô* and *L'Education sentimentale*. But this remains a translation of a key critical study of Flaubert, particularly illuminating in the discussion it brings to the *Trois Contes*, and to that most challenging of texts to interpret, *Hérodias*, the last of Flaubert's religious tales.

A. Kirk Denton, ed. *The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 2016. Pp. 473. $45.00/£33.00 paperback.

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The Columbia Companion to Modern Chinese Literature, edited by Kirk Denton, is a kaleidoscopic collection of fifty-seven scholarly essays written by an international team of academics and covering a broad range of topics, works and authors from the late-Qing period (1895-1911) up to the present day. Its geographic purview goes beyond the borders of the nation-state to evaluate the literary contribution of Chinese diasporic and Sinitic literary communities and, in so doing, it gives ample space to the relatively new research field of so-called Sinophone literature. Moreover, the book offers an extremely user-friendly and easily browsable table of contents followed by a handy chronology of major historical events from the First Opium War (1839-42) to the victory of the Progressive Party in the 2000 Taiwan election, as well as a comprehensive final index (pinyin only).

Logically structured and extremely informative, the *Companion* opens with a

short preface, where the purpose of bringing to life this collection of essays is spelled out. It is primarily meant to be used as a classroom resource for students to complement the reading of primary texts in modern Chinese literature, an intent which is perfectly in line with the etymology of the word "companion," whose meaning is to "accompany" the reader.

As Denton further explains, the coverage of the *Companion* spans fiction, poetry, and drama, but leaves out the essay (*sanwen*) because this is not generally taught in university courses, and due to lack of space. Though somehow understandable, this choice nonetheless appears a bit perplexing because the essay was instrumental in the construction of the modern Chinese concept of literature. As Denton himself pointed out in his 1995 edited anthology *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, "this process of intellectual exploration and the move toward modernity was embodied in, among other things, writings about literature, which stands at the very heart of this cultural tradition" (1).

The essay collection is divided into two parts. Part One features a series of thematic essays which help the reader start making sense of the huge volume of literary phenomena and elements of novelty characterizing over a century of experimentations, alterations, and homecomings, and exposed, individually and more in detail in the informative essays that flesh out the much longer and chronologically-structured Part Two. An extensive bibliography is provided at the end of each essay and the reader is encouraged to consult the MCLC Resource Center for further bibliographic sources (23).

The thematic essays, which are preceded by a historical overview, address key aspects and issues related to the making of modern Chinese literature throughout the twentieth century. Together, they form a rather cohesive whole, like a puzzle made up of the following pieces: "Canon and Literary History" (Yingjin Zhang), "Language and Literary Form" (Charles Laughlin), "Literary Communities" (Michel Hockx), "Contested Classical Poetry" (Shengqing Wu), "Diaspora" Shuyu Kong), "Sinophone Literature" (Brian Bernards) and "Literature and Film Adaptation" (Hsiu-Chuang Deppman).

Denton's historical overview debates the origins of Chinese literary modernity and offers a complete periodization, which is based on politically driven "conventional PRC representations" while simultaneously questioning them (4). The overarching theme concerns the changes in what constitutes modernity for Chinese writers, highlighting the political use of literature and the pulverization of literary trends in post-socialist China due to market needs. The reference to the difference between Chinese and Western modernism (11) is crucial, although it could have been given more space. The distinction between the concepts of *wen* and *wenxue* (6) would deserve to be clarified more accurately in an introductory essay. In *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, Victor Mair remarks that "in order to understand the intellectual life of China of the last two thousand years, one must grasp the importance and significance of *wen*" (2). In his essay included in the *Companion*, Michel

Hockx fills this gap by succinctly stating that “emphasis in teaching shifted from memorization and reproduction to the reading and analysis of literary texts” (50). Hockx also clearly specifies the difference between the first phase of modernization (debates in journals) and the second phase (the creation of new works).

Liang Qichao is mentioned for assigning to fiction the role of an instrument of national reform. However, Liang also praised drama as a form of popular literature because of its effectiveness and accessibility. When introducing the section on the return to modernity in the post-Mao age (1977-1989), Denton stresses the parallel between this period’s search for new modes of expression with that of the May Fourth writers. However, I was a bit surprised by the absence of David Der-wei Wang and Ellen Widmer’s 1993 coedited book *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*, which precisely investigates such a linkage, from the bibliography.

Charles Laughlin’s essay on language and literary reform focuses on the debate surrounding the adoption of the vernacular as the language of modern Chinese literature. No mention is made of the role of Dante and his treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia* in inspiring the literary revolution advocated by Hu Shi, who mentions the Italian poet in his essay on this topic. However, the bibliography for this contribution includes Zhou Gang’s 2011 volume *Placing the Modern Chinese Vernacular in Transnational Literature*, where this aspect is amply dealt with.

Shuyu Kong’s and Brian Bernard’s respective thematic essays made me appreciate the subtle difference between diasporic and Sinophone literature. The first explores a “new cultural space, which transcends any single nation, and vividly describes the experience of living in it” (69), thereby involving a complex negotiation process between home and roots. The second is defined as “literature written in Sinitic languages” (72), a synonym of what has generally been known as “overseas Chinese literature” (73), and which includes Malaysian, Tibetan, and Taiwanese aboriginal texts as well as Sino-American literature. Drawing on Shu Mei Shih’s theoretical framework, the essay terminates with a very interesting observation on the appropriateness of the Sinophone designation to frame those works that employ Sinitic languages to discuss issues not directly related to China.

The non-thematic essays in Part Two, which cover notable authors, works and schools—with the remarkable addition of Internet Literature at the very end—are characterized by a variety of approaches: some provide an overview of the subject, others provide a more or less in-depth analysis of a particular work or set of works by one or more authors; some are more descriptive while others are more argumentative. Despite these inevitable differences, they are all generally captivating, crisp and easy to read, as well as providing the reader with a wealth of factual information, which is sometimes a bit overwhelming, although necessary for a book of this kind.

In terms of editorial choices, perhaps Chen Xiaomei’s historical overview of modern Chinese drama could have been placed in the group of thematic essays in Part One to better highlight the unique role of theatre as an agent of cultural change.

Further, given the recent publication by Penguin of two of Lao She's novels (*Cat Country* and *Mr. Ma and Son*), as well as the importance of his theatrical masterpiece *Teahouse* (1957), the related essay by Thomas Moran, which focuses solely on his most famous novel *Rickshaw* (1936), could have been turned into a more comprehensive overview of this writer's prolific career, patriotic engagement, creative individualism, and cross-cultural influences. Moreover, as a drama specialist, I cannot help to point out that that the coverage on theatre could have been slightly expanded to include presentation and/or analysis of a few more individual plays. In this collection, the only dramatic work that is discussed at length is Cao Yu's 1934 tragedy *Thunderstorm*, in Jonathan Noble's eponymous contribution.

On a more specific note, I was a bit surprised to notice that not a word has been spent to highlight the late-Qing scholars and May Fourth writers'—including Lu Xun's—extraordinary preoccupation with (Western) tragedy as an epitome of modernity and which has been defined in Chinese scholarship as China's "modern tragedy complex" (*xiandai beiju qingjie*). This aspect of China's search for a new form of drama is tremendously important not only because it informed the playwrights' new aesthetic choices, such as the rejection of the so-called "great reunionism" (*da tuanyuan zhuyi*), but also because it offers an interesting alternative view to the death-of-tragedy theory that led twentieth-century Euro-American debates on tragedy's (un)suitability to stand the test of time and accommodate modern sensibilities. If not in Chen's essay, these general remarks could have been exposed in the aforementioned essay on *Thunderstorm*, a play whose structure and aesthetics are greatly indebted to classical myths and tragic plots of Western descent. In his 1936 Preface to this play, Cao Yu famously referred to these models as "threads of golden yarn" which he acknowledged having subconsciously stolen "to mend" his "ugly and coarse garments."

Amongst the monographic contributions on individual authors, Mabel Lee's essay on Gao Xingjian, which attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of the latter's eclectic talents and whose title recalls Izabella Łabędzka's 2008 book-length study on Gao's drama, caught my attention due to the growing body of research being published on this author in the past few years. While the essay introduces some less debated elements of Gao's literary stance, such as his Zhuangzean view of the creative impulse and his loathing of Nietzsche, as well as his cinematic poems, it also omits some crucial aspects of his dramaturgical system such as the theory and technique of the tripartite actor, the tragic view of the Self of the individual, his engagement with gender relations and language of the post-exile plays and the transcultural nature of his works.

However, and accepting that every book has undoubtedly flaws and shortcomings, the *Companion* will definitely make a valuable contribution to the field of Chinese Studies while also serving as an indispensable tool for students and scholars of comparative and world literature. Furthermore, due to the compact but insightful nature of its components and its deliberately pedagogic scope, it is hoped that the useful-

ness of this book will not be limited to the confines of academia, but that it will also stimulate the interest of a more general and nonspecialized readership, thereby contributing to lifting the thick veil of Maya that still shrouds the Western perception of China in the contemporary age. If adequately promoted, this book could therefore serve as an eye-opener for a good number of curious readers who, by reading at least the historical overview, will find out with great surprise that China's early form of "opening up" to the foreign Other came about in the second half of the nineteenth century. This engendered an unprecedented cultural revolution that instigated profound changes in the production and circulation of literature, and which translated into a nonstop quest for modernity that—with twists and turns—would span the whole of the twentieth century, and whose general knowledge is essential to understand China's uncontested centrality in the new millennium.

Víctor Figueroa. *Prophetic Visions of the Past: Pan-Caribbean Representations of the Haitian Revolution*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2015. Pp. 336. $69.95 hardcover; $29.95 paper.

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In his second book, *Prophetic Visions of the Past*, Víctor Figueroa offers a relevant, often compelling study of the modern literary imagination of colonial being in the Caribbean, with the Haitian Revolution at its center. Interweaving theoretical reflections on coloniality with literary analysis of texts by key twentieth-century Hispanophone, Anglophone, and Francophone writers, Figueroa invites us to grapple with the ghosts of the Haitian Revolution without romanticizing its leaders or achievements. He proposes instead a decolonial critique that, in looking back to the revolution, imagines the possibility of "alternative, ever more inclusive 'wholes' on which to locate Caribbean history" (24), as well as its present and future.

The first chapter brings together two of the most well-known portrayals of the Haitian Revolution: the Trinidadian intellectual C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* (1949). The analysis in this chapter is particularly insightful for its comparison of the texts's divergent meanings: James presents a "vision of the revolt as a strictly social and political endeavor that [...] relies exclusively on the rational language of enlightened ideas" (46) while Carpentier foregrounds "Vodou's view of the cosmos, as opposed to the instrumental approach of colonial reason" (59). Through this comparison, Figueroa illuminates the respective silences of the texts. He argues, on the one hand, that James minimizes the impact of black cultural and religious forces in the insurrection, and, on the other hand, that Carpentier's snapshots of otherworldly black spirituality conceal the social agency of the rebels. Figueroa's comparative analysis

insinuates thus that an ideal decolonial approach to the Haitian Revolution should learn from both *The Kingdom of this World* and *The Black Jacobins* and, at the same time, go beyond the opposition between rational agency and religiosity that characterizes most Eurocentric narratives about Haiti.

The second chapter focuses on the Puerto Rican poet Luis Palés Matos and his portrayal of blackness and Haiti in *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* (1937). Figueroa navigates with aplomb the scholarly polemics about the *Tuntún*: he does not condemn the book's often comical images of Afro-Caribbean bodies as mere racist, ahistorical forms, nor does he celebrate them as positive affirmations of regional identity. Instead, he considers how some poems reinforce Eurocentric stereotypes about race, while others pay homage to blackness and the Haitian Revolution, positioning them as central elements within the history of decolonization in the Caribbean. Interestingly, Figueroa explains this contradiction by stressing the constant use of ironic distance in these poems, which he reads as a symptom of the poet's anxious ambivalence about Afro-Caribbean culture and his desire to cultivate a "safe" space" as a member of the predominantly white intellectual elite of Puerto Rico (91).

But, in venturing this claim, Figueroa does not consider the fact that irony and ambivalence are not specific to Afro-Caribbean themes in Palés Matos. Moreover, the Puerto Rican poet often ironizes the value of his own texts. For instance, in the first poem of the *Tuntún*, "Preludio en Boricua," he associates his poetry with: "time wasted, / whose last page is boredom. / Things glimpsed or envisioned / scant actually lived, / and much concoction and fable" (Palés Matos 165-66; my translation). Through this playful yet melancholic moment of self-reflexivity, Palés Matos deflates the ideological authority that the reader might attribute to the *Tuntún*—it is all "lost time" and "lies and stories"—signaling that loss and the limits of representation are central to his vision of not only the Caribbean but the act of writing itself.

In the third chapter, Figueroa analyzes the Martiniquan writer and politician Aimé Césaire's relationship with the Haitian Revolution by examining the historical essay *Toussaint Louverture* (1961) and the play *The Tragedy of King Christophe* (1963). In the dialectical thought of Césaire, the particularities of the struggle for black equality and affirmation—exemplified by the Haitian Revolution and the poetics of *négritude*—signify an alternate universalism of human freedom and self-determination. Figueroa explains that, for Césaire, Louverture's tragedy lies in his inability to translate the ideals of the French Revolution unto the particularities of his people, while Christophe's mistake was to impose the European colonial model—monarchy and forced labour—onto his vision of black independence. Figueroa takes Césaire to task convincingly for reproducing the same ideas he criticizes in his depiction of Louverture: in the essay, the Martiniquan writer links the abstract ideals of emancipation to the French Revolution rather than situating them within the insurrection in Haiti. Even as Césaire stresses in other texts the foundational significance of Africa for the Caribbean, in *Toussaint Louverture,* he privileges France within his vision of liberation (98, 99).

Figueroa associates this inconsistency with Césaire's rejection of political independence for the French colonies (he supported full equality through departmentalization within France, and at times alluded to the creation of a confederation). This argument could have been developed more forcefully alongside the recent work of John Patrick Walsh, Gary Wilder, and Charles Forsdick (Walsh is briefly discussed, but Wilder and Forsdick go unmentioned). The latter two in particular have read Césaire's apparent contradictions as parts of an active, self-conscious process of strategizing that sought to provincialize France and imagined what Wilder calls "nonnnational colonial emancipation" (109). Figueroa's critique of Césaire's politics—and, in other chapters, of similar political positions—seems to suggest that state sovereignty is equivalent to full decolonization. Unfortunately, Figueroa does not address the different meanings that statehood and sovereignty have acquired in the Caribbean imaginary.

In the next chapter, Figueroa examines the role of colonial anxiety in the St. Lucian writer Derek Walcott's trilogy of plays about the Haitian Revolution, focusing mostly on *Drums and Colours* (1958) and *The Haitian Earth* (1984). The most suggestive analysis in this chapter centers on Walcott's unflinching tragic portrayal of the violent excesses of Haiti's so-called founding fathers. According to Figueroa, Walcott's critique of Dessalines and Christophe (and, to a lesser extent, Louverture) serves to deconstruct those imaginaries of liberation that see "violent and masculine heroism as the only solution to the region's historical problems" (134). Figueroa also underscores the significance of Anton, an important figure in *Drums and Colours* and *The Haitian Earth*. A conflicted, racially mixed character, Anton decries the horrors of slavery but lives in his father's plantation, where his former slaves kill him after the insurrection erupts. For Figueroa, Anton's inner conflict—he cannot identify with Africa nor Europe—"is similar" (158) to Walcott's own "indecision and anxiety" (157) about his European and African ancestors, which he also links to the writer's dismissal of black nationalism.

A fuller engagement with the cultural and political ideas of Walcott would have helped to refine the analysis in this chapter, which sometimes tends to psychologize the writer. Much of Walcott's oeuvre is relentlessly self-reflexive, but this does not entail that he was necessarily indecisive or anxious about his literary and aesthetic vision, nor about his Afro-Caribbean identity. For instance, in his classic 1970 essay "What the Twilight Says," Walcott affirms his identity as a positive value—he sees himself as "this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian"—looking back to both Africa and Europe as sources of inspiration for what he calls the "faith of using the old names anew" (9). The chapter ends with an examination of Walcott's "politics of inclusion" (163) through Jacques Derrida's ideas of forgiveness in *On Cosmopolitanism*, a comparison that is not unreasonable. Yet it detracts attention from the particularities of Walcott's vision, which could have been explored in terms of his heterodox Christianity and the relationship between spiritual values and decolonization in the Caribbean.

The significance of the book's title is finally made explicit in the fifth chapter, which looks at the Martiniquan intellectual Édouard Glissant's *Monsieur Toussaint* (1961; a shorter version was published in 1978). As Glissant states in the prologue, the drama's "poetic endeavor" is to express "a prophetic vision of the past." Since this endeavor is central to the works studied throughout the book, it would have been helpful to discuss Glissant's ideas directly in the introduction, or even have this as the first chapter of the book. Even though all the chapters are ordered chronologically, temporal progression is not altogether relevant to the book's general argument. In fact, the temporality of decolonization proposed by Figueroa undermines the teleology of progress one associates typically with Eurocentric modernity.

In the case of *Monsieur Toussaint*, Figueroa highlights the portrayal of Louverture as a figure of violence and power who reproduces the abstract universals of Eurocentric modernity (much like Césaire's *Toussaint Louverture*). Throughout the play, Glissant brings attention to revolutionary actors who challenged the Haitian general's authoritarian ways and defended the freedoms of the colony's African and Afro-descendant communities. Figueroa argues convincingly that while *Monsieur Toussaint* does not pretend to offer a concrete solution to the contradictions of the Haitian Revolution and its aftermath, the different words and acts of rebellion against Louverture symbolize the promise of decolonization. As Figueroa notes, Glissant will reimagine this promise as an ideal of interrelatedness in later texts such as *Poetics of Relation*, where he proposes a vision of freedom "around a fundamental relationship with the Other" (14).

The last chapter develops a fascinating analysis of the uses of myth and history in the novel *Changó el gran putas* (1984), by the Afro-Colombian writer Manuel Zapata Olivella, whose thought-provoking literature deserves more critical attention. Figueroa concentrates on how this challenging text weaves together the "experience[s] of the African diaspora in the Americas" (204-05), as it shifts back and forth through key historical episodes of liberation such as the US civil rights struggle, enslavement, the Haitian Revolution, and the Latin American War of Independence. As Figueroa explains, these spatial and temporal shifts are linked through a "mythical framework" of Yoruba origin where deities and spirits regularly intervene. At the center of this framework we find the war deity Changó, who curses his people to enslavement when they turn their backs on him. Figueroa questions Orihuela's creative license in this regard, indicating not only that the episode is unfaithful to Yoruba myths but also that it subsumes the history of Afro-descendants to this foundational moment, creating the sense that they "have to carry the weight of their own enslavement" (229). At the same time, it is important that the novel depicts Changó as a vengeful, authoritarian figure who made war on his brothers; in fact, this is the reason why his followers abandon him. By not offering an idealized vision of African origins, the story of Changó can be read too as a sober allegory of the power struggles experienced by the ancestors of the African diaspora, many of whom were enslaved and sold off by enemy tribes.

In *Prophetic Visions of the Past*, the reader will not find much detail about the different publics and institutional spaces from where these intellectuals produced their ideas, nor about how their works circulated and were received in the region. Also, historically-minded scholars might find issues with Figueroa's focus on "ontocolonialism" (6), which speaks to a transhistorical Caribbean essence that unites all the writers studied in the book, beyond their particular differences. The question of genre is for the most part left aside, particularly in the case of theatre: the plays of Césaire, Glissant, and Walcott are treated solely as literary texts, without any consideration of key dramatic aspects such as staging, performance, and spectatorship. Another matter of concern is the book's lack of engagement with female or queer perspectives. Since the writers analyzed throughout constitute a male-dominated canon, the discussion of at least one non-male or anti-heteronormative voice would have offered significant insights on the role of gender and sexuality in visions of decolonization in the Caribbean. Notwithstanding these limitations, *Prophetic Visions of the Past* represents a valuable contribution to Caribbean literary criticism, the region's intellectual history, and studies of the global south. In reflecting on the literary afterlives of the Haitian Revolution, Figueroa points to different paths for imagining not only the racialized history of Caribbean coloniality, but also the possibility of a decolonized future for all.

Work Cited

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Timothy Morton. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. New York: Columbia UP, 2016. Pp. 191.

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Timothy Morton's latest project, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, argues that our present environmental crisis is indebted to more than just capitalism, fossil fuels, and modernity. "Dark ecology," a form of awareness first introduced in Morton's *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), offers a method for attuning oneself to the complexities of ecological reality in order to combat the simplified logics that have led, Morton argues, to the Anthropocene. While Morton's 'weird' and playful style might frustrate some (in this book, the beginning is the end and the end is the beginning, recalling T.S. Eliot), this formal experimentation reflects the loop-like eco-logic that must be cultivated if we care at all about the future of humans and nonhumans

on this earth.

Dark Ecology broadens ecocritical scholarship by shifting the focus from the Anthropocene to *agrilogistics*, Morton's designation for the past 12,000 years. Agrilogistics denotes both the period beginning with Mesopotamia and agriculture in the Fertile Crescent and the logic produced by this shift from nomadic to place-based living. Morton refutes short-term explanations of how and why humans caused the Anthropocene, claiming that they are merely symptomatic of a deeper, older, set of assumptions that are based on a faulty ontology. According to Morton, the "logistics" behind this agricultural venture are what eventually determined and required the invention of the steam engine. It is agrilogistics, not merely capitalism, that is "the smoking gun behind the smoking chimneys responsible for the Sixth Mass Extinction Event" (43). Morton seeks to replace the anthropocentric logic of the past 12,000 years with *ecognosis*, a type of knowing akin to ecological awareness. Morton describes ecognosis as "Knowing in a loop—a weird knowing," the antithesis of an agrilogistical knowledge that is based on linearity, boundaries, and consistency (5). Ecognosis seems more like the type of knowledge produced by poetry, which allows for and even thrives on contradictions.

The aim of this project is thus precisely what the subtitle states: to replace agrilogistics with a logic of coexistence. Agrilogistics consists of three axioms that must be addressed in order to counteract the ecological threats of the Anthropocene:

(1) The Law of Noncontradiction is inviolable.
(2) Existing means being constantly present.
(3) Existing is always better than any quality of existing. (47)

According to Morton, this first axiom—that opposites cannot be true at the same time—has resulted in a system of thought based on harmful and rigid boundaries: humans vs. nonhumans, 'productive' life forms vs. pests. This system requires and perpetuates an essentialism based on the second axiom: "a metaphysics of presence" (48) that transforms dynamic relationships and beings into static, quantifiable data. The third axiom describes the focus on accumulating quantities without regard for the resulting quality of existence. To find alternatives to such narrow and anti-ecological thinking, Morton argues: "We are going to have to rethink what a thing is. We require a Difficult Think Thing […] the weird might be a helpful ontological category" (65). Drawing on the work of French philosopher and feminist Luce Irigaray, Morton proposes a *weird* essentialism: "while beings are what they are (essentialism) *they are not constantly present*" (65). Constancy and consistency, Morton shows, are the enemies of ecology: "If you want ecological things to exist—ecological things like humans, meadows, frogs, and the biosphere—you have to allow them to violate the logical 'Law' of Noncontradiction" (73).

Morton, who identifies as a correlationalist, accepts "Kant's basic argument that when I try to find the thing in itself, what I find are thing data, not the thing in itself" (16), though he modifies Kant's position to include nonhumans. That nonhu-

man beings can experience the inaccessibility of things is critical for Morton's vision of co-existence. This nonanthropocentric *weird* correlationalism contends that while things may only exist in meaningful ways in certain contexts, this does not mean that things do *not* exist just because humans cannot access them. Things merely exist differently, contrary to the agrilogistical belief that to exist means to exist at all times in the same way. This agrilogistical brand of correlationalism produces what Morton calls the "Easy Think Substance," which positions humanity as the "George-Bush-like-Decider who calls the shots on what exists" (64). Weird correlationism forms the basis of the "hyperobject" (introduced in Morton's 2013 book of the same name), in which things can be "real yet inaccessible" (25). Agrilogistics is "the granddaddy hyperobject, the first one made by humans, and one that has sired many more" (42).

Morton demonstrates the toxicity of the metaphysics of presence and the Law of Noncontradiction by revisiting the logic of Zeno's paradoxes, which arise from a 'logical' concept of boundaries and limits. Morton begins with a thought experiment in a meadow, removing one blade of grass at a time, asking at each stage whether the meadow still exists. The answer continues to be yes, even when only a patch of dirt remains. Due to the law of noncontradiction, even when the grass is gone, there is still a meadow, and so: "there is no such thing as an *actual* meadow—because it might as well just be a huge patch of dirt" (73). He then reverses the experiment, planting one blade at a time while asking if the meadow exists, each time answering 'no.' Even with acres of grass, no meadow logically exists. "Why?" Morton explains, "Because if there were a real meadow I would have contradicted myself when I concluded [...] that there was not a meadow" (73). For Morton, this experiment demonstrates one way that the 'logic' of the Law of Noncontradiction allows us to destroy "ecological beings both in thought and actual physical reality" (74). In order for the meadow to exist, we must be able to say, "*A meadow is a meadow and is not a meadow*" (74). The Law of Noncontradiction, combined with the "metaphysics of presence," produces the absolutely *logical* basis for destroying the environment, whether it is a blade of grass or the entire earth. Upholding constancy as the defining feature of existence is harmful to ecological thinking and coexistence because it makes "things appear consistent and solid, to make them easier to colonize, enslave, and plunder" (10). If one were to blindly follow agrilogistics for thousands of years, clinging to the rationality that supposedly separates humans from nonhumans, it would come as no surprise to end up precisely where we are today: the Anthropocene.

A system of logic that eschews contradiction, upholds consistency at all costs, and promotes quantity over quality is dangerous for many reasons. For example, Morton claims that our concept of 'Nature,' which is based on consistency, is both untrue and responsible for global warming. Arising when fluctuations in our earth system stabilized, 'Nature' was the product of the "accidental collaboration between the Holocene and agrilogistics" (58). "We Mesopotamians" (58) considered this relative stability to be a fact, and the logics of consistency and noncontradiction arose in part from this assumption. Nature as we know it is thus as old as agrilogistics, and participates in

the faulty ontology that has produced the Anthropocene. The deeply entrenched illusion of a stable, harmonious cycle called 'Nature' in an epoch marked by instability and acceleration thwarts both imaginative and material efforts at addressing global warming. As Morton writes, "Nature is the latent form of the Anthropocene waiting to emerge as catastrophe" (59). While Morton does not address the fact that some of the patterns we consider as part of Nature *are* 'stable' (the length of a day, the movement of planets, gravity), his argument helpfully demonstrates how agrilogistics tries to halt and flatten feedback loops of matter and discourse. Rather than letting each inform the other and undergo continual redefinition, we have let agrilogistics constrain a dynamically shifting, evolving world with a couple of philosophical axioms that ignore the shifting ground beneath our feet.

In order to embrace this dynamism, Morton proposes the concept of the "arche-lithic," a temporality that upholds the ongoingness of geological catastrophes. This "fuzzy" and "concentric" view of time empowers us humans to actually *do* something about past events. To "weirdly" rethink time, Morton writes, is "to see history as a nested series of catastrophes that are still playing out rather than as a sequence of events based on a conception of time as a succession of atomic instants" (69). A measure of agency is thus returned to the human in the 21st century who, though not individually responsible for the invention of the steam engine, for example, can locate herself within the ongoing effects of that event and imagine ecological alternatives to its agrilogistical origin. Just because something occurred 12,000 years ago does not mean we no longer participate in that event; it is still happening. Morton explains that "the Anthropocene is a small region of the Bacteriocene, which is a small region of the Cyanidocene, and so on" (70). Eras do not end just because we decide that we have proceeded from the Holocene to the Anthropocene; rather, these periods extend forward via their effects to dynamically produce our present and future. This transitional and ongoing arrangement allows one to consider ecological change as a loop rather than a well-defined stratigraphic record in which periods rigidly end and begin.

Dark Ecology is a project that blends poetic and philosophical discourses, literary tropes and logical proofs, in order to demonstrate in both form and content how the agrilogistical structure that has blindly led our thinking and actions for these past 12,000 years need not necessarily continue. If we loosen our commitment to noncontradiction and existence for existence's sake, we might imagine a new way of coexisting. The book 'ends' with a section titled "Ending Before the Beginning," which reads more like an introduction than a conclusion. This structure undermines the assumption of progress that one typically brings to a text, which we might now characterize as agrilogistical. This un-ending propels the reader back inside this wickedly weird and looping ouroborus, a formal strategy that demonstrates the type of logic that might serve us well in the Anthropocene.

Michael Bérubé. *The Secret Life of Stories: From Don Quixote to Harry Potter, How Understanding Intellectual Disability Transforms the Way We Read*. New York: NYU P, 2016. Pp. 240. $25.00 hardcover.

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In *The Secret Life of Stories*, Michael Bérubé makes a major contribution to disability studies by shifting the focus in literary studies of disability away from the diagnosis of fictional characters and towards an analysis of the ways in which disability in narrative fiction can be deployed as a means for exploring important questions about human experience and thought. "Disability studies," he writes in the introduction, "need not and should not predicate its existence as a practice of criticism by reading a literary text in one hand and the DSM-5 in the other" (20). Anyone who has taught books involving "disabled" characters (broadly defined) will inevitably cheer at Bérubé's intervention. I have myself despaired at trying to convince students that diagnosing Kurt Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim as a sufferer of PTSD does not ultimately tell us anything useful about the ways in which *Slaughterhouse-Five* functions as a narrative that disables normative temporality and thereby teaches us something about time itself and the human relationship to it. Even though the Vonnegut example is not mentioned by Bérubé, it is a sign of his book's effectiveness that it immediately provided me with a framework and theoretical foundation to articulate what I always knew Vonnegut's text had been doing through the means of what I would now call a "disabled" narrative practice.

In resisting the temptation to narrowly constrain the field of disability in fiction to representations of diagnosable disabilities in fictional characters, Bérubé productively broadens the scope of what counts as disability in fiction. Who would have thought to discuss *Don Quixote* in terms of disability, or the Disney film *Dumbo*? Yet *The Secret Life of Stories* is full of such paradigm-shifting revelations that only now seem obvious because of the force of Bérubé's argument. Part of what Bérubé accomplishes in this shift is to turn the focus away from a discussion of whether or not fictional disability is being represented "accurately." The problem with trying to preserve or protect a "real" disability or actual disabled persons from their (mis)representation in fiction is that such an endeavor can be a slippery slope that leads to a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (45) that ultimately distrusts the very endeavors of fictional representation and interpretation. Protecting disabled people from being reified, mystified, or immiserated by the narrative enterprise is a laudable goal, but as Bérubé demonstrates through close reading of a range of texts, including Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time Slip*, J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, and Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*, among many others, disability in fiction can generate productive and ethically urgent questions about how and why we read and what it means to be human.

These are big topics indeed for what Bérubé himself acknowledges is a "short and

sharp book" (21). He therefore helpfully separates the book into three main categories (Motive, Time, and Self-Awareness), and while he acknowledges the fluidity of these categories, generally this division into three key themes works well at allowing Bérubé to illustrate the ways in which disability can be provocatively situated right at the core of narrative practice. In the "Motive" chapter, for instance, he discusses narratives that derive their motive force by positioning themselves in relationship to disability. The *Harry Potter* series' Albus Dumbledore is motivated by his sense of responsibility and guilt towards a disabled sister, while the narrative of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* treats its various forms of "madness" as a kind of barometer for "the very possibility of narrative representation" (64). The "Time" chapter explains how disabled forms of narrative temporality can provoke an examination of time scales that extend beyond the human, while the chapter on "Self-Awareness" explores the ways in which intellectually disabled characters (whether "accurately" represented or not) can generate important questions about what can and should be narrated and by whom—Bérubé's reading of Mark Haddon's *Curious Incident* in this chapter is especially compelling.

To be sure, narratives do not need to engage with disability in order to raise provocative questions about motive, temporality, or self-awareness. For Bérubé, though, when narratives approach these topics through the lens of disability, they raise the stakes considerably on what might otherwise be merely "fun-house" metafictional games. There is an "ethical core" and "degree of moral seriousness" (160) that distinguishes disabled narrative practice from other types of narrative self-reflexivity. While generally this is a compelling argument, it might have been more effectively demonstrated had Bérubé made more central to the book's organizational strategy a comparison of "abled" (if that is a reasonable term) and disabled narratives. This is particularly necessary, in my view, in the "Time" chapter, for I could think of many other examples of texts that similarly broaden the scope and scale of human temporality without any engagement with disability and yet without sacrificing "moral seriousness." The work of David Mitchell, for example, plays metafictional games with narrative temporality in the scope of environmental catastrophe and ecological unsustainability, yet I am hard pressed to find engagement with disability at the core of his work.

I am also unconvinced by Bérubé's separation of intellectual from physical disability. He brackets the physical in part as a reaction to a "hierarchy" in disability studies "whereby physical disability stands in for disability *in toto*" (27). Yet I think this counter-privileging of intellectual disability unnecessarily restricts Bérubé's focus and prevents him from exploring the ways in which physical disability can very effectively be mobilized in narrative for similar ends. Returning to the "Time" chapter, again, one wonders what Bérubé would make of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, a text populated with physically disabled hyper-intellectuals. *The Magic Mountain* famously deploys physical disability to interrogate narrative's use and abuse of temporality, the relationship between human time and the time of the

natural world, temporal foundations for the definition of humanism and humanity, among other things. Indeed, if one were to introduce the physically disabled Marcel Proust to this discussion, it might not be that controversial to say that the very tradition of the great European Time Novel is founded on an engagement with physical, rather than intellectual, disability.

Not having read one of Bérubé's books before, I was a bit taken aback at first by how chattily colloquial his style can be, although this may be a sign of NYU Press's attempt to market *The Secret Life of Stories* for a general readership. When was the last time a literary critic told us he "could have plotzed" (17) during a Facebook conversation with an old acquaintance, or hawked the tools of his trade with the flourish of a stage magician with nothing up his sleeves: "I will argue—no, I will show […] with nothing more than the tools of close reading" (2-3)? Yet by the end of the book, I confess that Bérubé's style had won me over: refreshingly honest, warm, and unpretentious without any sacrifice of intellectual acumen or critical complexity. *The Secret Life of Stories* is certainly a landmark text in literary studies of disability and in literary criticism more generally. It will change the way you think about disability in narratives.