



## Book Reviews

**Brian Kiernan, *Studies in Australian Literary History*, Sydney: Sydney Studies, Shoestring Press. (Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture No. 17)**

A collection of the author's own writings makes the best kind of Festschrift and it is fitting that the Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture 17 should bring together in book form a collection of Brian Kiernan's longer essays and articles to coincide with his retirement. Kiernan is probably best known for his pioneering biography of David Williamson, his two exemplary editions of the work of Henry Lawson, and his succinct introduction to the novels of Patrick White. A specialist in American as well as Australian literature, his contribution to Australian literary historiography is widely acknowledged, though his work has not had the full recognition it deserves.

The core of this carefully organised collection is solidly academic, designed to show the range and centrality of Kiernan's interests and commitments. There are two substantial essays on 'Literature, History and Literary History: Perspectives on the Nineteenth Century in Australia', and 'Cultural Transmission and Australian Literature: 1788—1998'; a meticulous 50-page critical account of Henry Lawson which ought to be available as a separate monograph; and there are sections on Frank Moorhouse, David Williamson and Australian Literary Biography. Kiernan is a versed practitioner in the slowly disappearing art of close reading (as his fine account of Patrick White's *The Twyborn Affair* shows) and space should have been found for his early, illuminating study of Lawson's 'Going Blind' as well as for a selection of the reviews and interviews he was producing at one time for various newspapers and journals. Such items can often tell us more about literary developments than later, more sanitised diplomatic pieces. But there are riches enough here and I will simply focus on two salient points.

In 1978 Kiernan edited *Responses: Selected Writings by A. A. Phillips*, a valuable collection of articles, reviews, addresses and reflections by one of the most stimulating of our non academic critics. His accompanying study, 'A. A. Phillips as Critic', is included here. Phillips held no university position but he was Oxford educated and the Senior English Master at Wesley College for many years, so that he was academic in a way that Vance Palmer, Frank Wilmot and Kenneth Slessor were not. He had no pretensions as a creative writer and no need to undertake hackwork and journalism to make a living. Phillips remained a key figure in Melbourne literary life for many decades and he was one of those who pushed quietly but persistently for the wider recognition of Australian writing on its own merits. Phillips was a generous supporter of young talent as I know from my own experience of his warm reviews and letters. He was an influential, pioneering critic, paving the way for the sophisticated appraisals of Lawson and

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Furphy that started to emerge in the 1940s, and a broadcaster for the ABC's *Current Books Worth Reading*, a programme which left its mark on the intellectual life of the time.

Phillips believed in the close connection between a national literature and the national experience. A passionate advocate of the writing of his own country, he never lost touch with the international scene. Phillips is remembered for having coined the expression 'the cultural cringe' as well as for his background role in A. D. Hope's *Dunciad Minor*, and Kiernan's thoroughly documented and compelling portrait—itself a study in society and culture—is a well-judged memorial to one of our most independent figures. It shows Kiernan's strengths and concerns to the full: it is both panoramic and closely focussed on central issues of style and the development of an Australian tradition.

The writing of the literary history of Australia has its own history. Matthew Arnold scorned the idea of histories of American or Australian literature. 'We are all contributors to one great literature—English literature! Imagine the face of Philip or Alexander at hearing of a Primer of Macedonian Literature!' Such an attitude from such an authority did not deter William Walker whose *Australian Literature* (1864) ushered in the substantial number of histories and guides that have appeared since then. Writers as different as Barton, Patchett Martin, Desmond Byrne, Turner, Sutherland, H. M. Green, Nettie Palmer, Morris Miller and Frederick Macartney—to mention some of those of earlier generations whom Kiernan surveys—had no doubt that there was an Australian Literature that needed to be recorded and that was worth reading for its own sake as well as for what it tells us about Australia and Australian experience.

In 1906 Walter Murdoch published his 'Plea for Australian Literature' and there is a sense in which all accounts of writings in English in Australia have been pleas for recognition. While all the books Kiernan discusses had an educational and informational purpose, the definition of the word Australian was a problem for the earliest colonial commentators as was the relationship between English and Australian writing; later, evaluation became another problem. After 1950, the question of establishing a canon of writers seemed particularly urgent as Australian Literature started to find its place in the universities; the questions of national identity and independence which seemed important to figures like H. M. Green and Vance and Nettie Palmer, or the question of national self-definition that preoccupied Miles Franklin and A. A. Phillips, no longer carry much weight with present day critics.

Kiernan shows that most of the literary histories aim to give an outline of the continuities and discontinuities of writing in Australia, with an emphasis on texts and contexts, currents and cross currents, with a strong awareness of Australia as a geographical and historical fact. They are concerned with showing the central riches and interest of Australian writing, and the value of studying it. These days the problems are not so much with such aims as with the best ways of presenting them. Now we are told that the word literature is the problem since there is nothing that is not literature and that we are coming to the end of literary culture as it has been known for centuries. We shall see.

Histories and surveys depend on demarcation lines, boundaries and frameworks. And if you do not like the old frameworks then renovated words like 'melodrama'

and 'pastoral' will have to fill the bill. In 'Cultural Transmission and Australian Literature: 1788-1988,' Kiernan divides the development of Australian Literature into the following phases: Neo-Classicism and Romanticism, Romance and Realism, Realism and Modernism. These are large terms whose usefulness is being more and more questioned, though they still seem to me to be eminently serviceable; they enable Kiernan to cut a smooth path through a huge swathe of material and to show the close relationship between 'international' movements and local literary productions.

Brian Kiernan's essays taken together form in their own way another short history of Australian writing in English. They have little to say about aboriginal writing or the recent development of multi-cultural writing, but they give an excellent account of all that has occurred over the years in the writing of Australian literary history, and anyone wanting to know what all those debates and arguments have been about could hardly do better than to start with this alert and scrupulous book.

Vivian Smith

**Paul Redding, *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996.**

Hegel as a 'live option' for contemporary thought—not so long ago such a proposal would have been met with polite derision in the world of English-speaking academic philosophy. Much has changed, however, in this respect during the last two decades. The 'rehabilitation' of Hegel was at first rather selective: it concerned some parts and aspects of his system, primarily his broadly (and variously) conceived practical philosophy. Hegel, the profound thinker of the contradictions of modernity, was contrasted to the other Hegel, the idealist metaphysician of 'Spirit', who retreated from Kant's Copernican turn and relapsed back into the standpoint of a dogmatic-speculative metaphysics. This view, however, itself became challenged by the 'non-metaphysical' interpretations of his philosophy. The impressive interpretative works of Robert Pippin, Terry Pinkard, Stephen Houlgate and others convincingly disclosed the way Hegel's thought originates in the internal strains of the Kantian project which is not abandoned, but radicalised by him. In general they presented the system itself as an historically situated comprehensive categorial structure in and through which the subjects of modernity can achieve a coherent and self-justifying, theoretical and practical understanding of themselves and their world.

Paul Redding's excellent book on Hegel is situated within the framework of this 'non-metaphysical' approach. It does not, however, simply join the now familiar 'category theoretical' understanding of Hegel's philosophy—it attempts to complement and in a sense to 'ground' it. For it asks about the 'ontological' status of this categorial structure itself, that is, about its conditions of possibility to be disclosed in the character and structure of the practical and theoretical activities of the concerned human individuals themselves. A 'non-metaphysical' understanding of Hegel's philosophy cannot be complete as long as it conceives them only as subjects *to* such a framework; it must be able to demonstrate that they are the subjects *of* it, even though this categorial structure is not reducible to some

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'common essence' of their thought as their shared *Weltanschauung*.

This book on Hegel's hermeneutics itself represents a considerable hermeneutical accomplishment. For it succeeds—not a frequent achievement today—to be *both* an informative and eminently readable introduction to Hegel's thought for the philosophically literate 'common reader' and simultaneously a highly challenging and innovative analysis for the professional philosopher with a specific interest in German Classical Idealism. It succeeds in being both by offering an overview of some fundamental constituents of the system explicating the relevant texts, but consistently doing it from the viewpoint of the question upon which the whole book concentrates: how do these particular theoretical constructions express and realise Hegel's conception of the task of a post-Kantian philosophy? It presents some large areas of the system as to their content, but a content formed and informed by the 'idea', Hegel's own idea of philosophy as the radical hermeneutics of embodied, finite human subjectivity.

Hegel as hermeneut—at first glance this does not seem to be a particularly plausible proposal of interpretation. Well known is his sharply negative attitude to Schleiermacher, the main representative of hermeneutics in his own time. And while, later on, some signal figures of a hermeneutical philosophy, like Dilthey or Gadamer, explicitly recognised that Hegel's system is rich in insights explorable or directly acceptable from such a position, their global evaluation of his philosophy remained negative. The metaphysical conception of Absolute Spirit negates the openness of history and human experience, retrospectively revokes all his ideas concerning the dialectical/historical constitution of knowledge by reinstating the claim of rational-conceptual thought to the achievement of a final and total perspective, embodied in his own philosophy.

In fact it may seem that Redding's initial characterisation of that problem-complex the centrality of which in Hegel's thought makes him the hermeneutical philosopher par excellence—an adequate conceptualisation of human beings as subject-objects—is too broad, rather removed from the traditional concerns of hermeneutics. He, however, convincingly argues throughout his whole monograph that these concerns with the possibility of mutual understanding, with the conditions of an openness towards alien experiences, with the perspectival and dialogic character and the uneliminable linguistic constitution of knowledge, all these grand themes of a hermeneutical philosophy demand a grounding. These hermeneutical characteristics are the consequence of the constitution of finite human subjectivity itself. A hermeneutically oriented philosophy must first ask the question: how can the finite subject conceive itself both as the centre of conscious intentionality *for whom* there is a world primarily structured by its own 'interests' and simultaneously as an 'object' *in this world* existing independently of its intentions and 'interests'? This 'doubled perspective' upon oneself (and one's world) is, however, possible only if, in the world of 'objects' seen from its own perspective, it can both practically and cognitively recognise an other self, an other centre of intentionality whose generalised perspective it can interiorise, because the actions of this other are intentionally directed at its intentional acts, i.e., because it is equally recognised by the other as a 'subject-object'. The circular structure of a dialogic-hermeneutical intersubjectivity is both the precondition and the accomplishment of the conscious

activities of finite subjects.

In the opening chapters of his book Redding, following Gadamer, succinctly outlines the historical path through which the more narrowly conceived problematics of hermeneutics emerged in the development of those immanentist and pantheist philosophies which could no longer conceptualise human finitude in terms of the opposition between man the creature and a transcendent Creator. He shows how Hegel in his early development—through the mediation of Schelling—critically appropriated this tradition, to radicalise in its light the Copernican perspectivism of the philosophies of Kant and Fichte, thereby overcoming the subjectivism and dualism of these latter. The first mature result of this newly acquired standpoint was the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, with its theory of the intersubjective, social-historical constitution of the modes of experience.

Redding's interpretation of the *Phenomenology* is essentially restricted to its first four chapters, to Hegel's theory of consciousness and self-consciousness. He shows how definite hermeneutical themes actually emerge already in Hegel's analyses of the seemingly monological forms of Consciousness, pointing not only to the well-known role of language in the critique of Sense-Certainty, but also to the consensual aspect of Perception and the necessity of the opposed world-perspectives (the 'inverted worlds') constituting the final outcome of the dialectic of Understanding which sets the task of reconciliation achieved by Self-Consciousness. Understandably, however, it is the Hegelian theory of this latter, with its conception of recognition, to which the greatest attention is paid.

The analysis of the structure of recognition, which follows, is one of the most subtle and convincing in the now vast literature of this topic. Redding makes in this context two basic points. Firstly, recognition is both a practical-performative and a cognitive-epistemic accomplishment, in fact these two aspects are undivorceable from each other. To acknowledge the other as a self requires it to comprehend its actions as realising a particular, but in its meaningfulness shareable, intention. But such a comprehension, in its turn, means to treat practically the action of the other as binding upon me at least in the sense that it determines the scope of my meaningful reactions as intentional answers to it. (And, of course, the same holds for the other too.) Secondly, this two-dimensional circularity of recognitive relations is irreconcilable either with the reduction of the concerned individuals to some abstract identity, their absorption into some common consciousness, or with the simple assimilation of the other to my view of it, mirroring my own intentions. Recognition in fact first allows both Egos to become aware both of themselves and of each other in their irreducible singularity, in their difference. This difference, however, can subsist only in the context of common understandability, within the framework of a consciousness of the 'We', a historical-cultural community. 'Spirit' in Hegel does not designate any substantive supra-individual entity, but that system of partly institutionalised, partly culturally articulated and legitimated, historically changing and evolving recognitive relations which constitutes the living context and ground of conscious and self-conscious subjectivities, the precondition, but also the outcome of their intentional activities, even though in its dynamic totality it escapes the comprehension of any of them.

Such a non-metaphysical and hermeneutical understanding of Hegel's idealism may, however, seem to be particularly adapted to his *Phenomenology* alone,

usually regarded as the work of the 'good' Hegel. The great stumbling block for such an interpretation would appear to be his *Logic*, with its strange conception of a thought without subject or object, since it thinks solely itself. Redding deals with this problem in a single chapter, which, in spite of its relative brevity, constitutes the most challenging and interesting part of his book. To demonstrate that his approach opens a path also to the understanding—to an essentially new way of understanding—of the *Logic* itself, he chooses a particularly daunting and baffling fragment of it: the concluding part of the 'Logic of Concept', primarily Hegel's theory of syllogism. The particularities of this impressive interpretative attempt cannot be discussed in a short review. In the most general way: Redding understands Hegel's radical, anti-formalist reconceptualisation of the Aristotelean theory of the figures of syllogism as the critical disclosure of that impersonal logical schematism which underlies the most developed practices of recognition and owing to which thinking can account for, and move rationally within, that untranscendable circle of mutual presupposing in the context of which each individual thought is always already situated.

The last large segment of the monograph deals with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Redding emphasises the way Hegel's theory of modern society represents the reconciliatory overcoming of the 'inverted' views of Adam Smith and Rousseau, and more generally offers itself as the 'third' to the false alternative of an atomistic-individualistic liberalism and collectivist communitarianism. The exposition, however, is directed not so much at the socio-political content and consequences of Hegel's theory, but it deals rather with his conceptual construction in so far as it discloses the different institutional forms in which the various modalities of recognitive relations become socially-normatively fixed, regulated and reproduced in contemporaneity. Particularly rewarding in this interpretation is the richly and convincingly illustrated connection Hegel establishes between the objective structure of the concerned institutions and the character of the social roles associated with them, with their particular modes of life, ethical and cognitive styles of subjectivity.

It is, however, here, especially in the treatment of the Hegelian theory of the state, that questions emerge that, though themselves quite specific, may have some relevance in respect of the proposed interpretation in general. Redding succeeds in presenting Hegel's conception of the modern state without even mentioning the role, the philosopher ascribed to the 'universal' estate, i.e., to the rational bureaucracy of the civil service—overall his presentation here amounts to a sympathising rewriting rather than a strict interpretation. For Hegel's explicit view according to which the 'profound and comprehensive insight' of such a bureaucracy makes it 'able to do what is best even without the Estates' (cf. § 301 Remark) makes rather questionable the strictly hermeneutical understanding of the 'general will' (the common intentionality realised by the state) as it is proposed in the book.

The principles of constitution of the modern state, as the ground of its (not merely functional) rationality are, however, in Hegel directly related to the way he understands the place of modernity in the progress of history. This short monograph, understandably, does not deal explicitly with the Hegelian philosophy of history. But this latter question, the fated idea of the 'end of history', is in fact unevadable

for any presentation of his idea of philosophy. *Prima facie*, a hermeneutical approach would seem to be particularly well suited to offer here a plausible interpretation: every epoch can only understand its own past from its own perspective, which therefore inevitably appears to it as the telos of the whole preceding development. This pat answer, however (which, I must add, in its rather simple-minded relativism is hardly reconcilable with Hegel's texts), seems to belong to that 'deflationary' intention characterising the usual variants of hermeneutic philosophy against which Redding actually wishes to mobilise Hegel's rich conception of *Vernunft*. And in fact he repeatedly (e.g., pp. 139, 169, 237)—following Hegel—characterises the institutional structure of modernity as the (in principle) adequate instantiation of the relations of reciprocal recognition needed for the existence and reproduction of free and rational forms of life. This, however, seems to raise some uncomfortable questions for the interpretation as a whole. For in what does the so much underlined principle of openness of this philosophy consist, if the conditions of rational freedom are, at least in their essential outline, realised in the present? History is certainly open for Hegel, and not only in the sense that the course of future events determining the fate of entire states and nations is unforeseeable, but also because modernity, with its immanent dynamism, just as much presupposes the constant adjustment of its socio-political arrangements in the form of rational reform as the on-going enrichment of that conceptual structure through which it can be understood. But what, *principally (and progressively) new*, can history—progress in the recognition and realisation of freedom—offer from now on, beyond constant change as modification which alone can conserve what has been achieved?

The finalism of Hegel's philosophy seems to be that aspect of his thought which its 'non-metaphysical' interpretations tend to neglect or explain away. There is, no doubt, a sense in which the dispute between the 'metaphysical' and 'non-metaphysical' views of Hegel is one over words. If one identifies 'metaphysics' (as Redding explicitly does) with the pre-Kantian dogmatic metaphysics of supersensuous entities, then Hegel is definitely not a 'metaphysician'. Spirit certainly is not a supra-individual entity existing somehow apart and above human individuals as 'spiritual', that is, self-conscious, knowing and intentionally acting beings. And one can fully accept its characterisation as the evolving system of those relations of recognition which are both the precondition and the outcome of the practical and cognitive activities of such finite, therefore always historically situated, human subjects. But in Hegel's understanding such a system possesses—both in its totality and in its dynamism—an irreducible objective intentionality and rationality of its own, has its own logic which in its generality can ultimately be recognised and disclosed by philosophy. This is a fundamental aspect why it must be conceived not only as substance, but equally as subject. Redding interprets (cf. p. 76) this formulation (upon which, according to Hegel, 'everything turns' in philosophy) in somewhat enigmatic manner as the continuing reliance of Hegel upon the Schellingian idea of an indifferent Absolute underlying the seemingly polar opposition between subjectivity and objectivity—not a very convincing hint since Hegel's doctrine is partly, but unambiguously, directed precisely against Schelling.

Redding's book in important respects represents a new approach to Hegel's

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philosophy and to the understanding of its place in the development of German Idealism. It does not—in its concentrated brevity it cannot—answer all the questions one can perhaps legitimately ask from such an interpretation. It is yet to be seen whether the view of Hegel as hermeneut can be extended—without undue modernisations—to the explication of all the pertinent parts and aspects of his system, not the least whether the principles of the genuinely innovative and enlightening analysis of a fragment of *The Science of Logic* can be applied to its whole. This is, however, a most stimulating beginning—one truly desires it to be continued.

*Gyorgy Markus*

**Mark Elvin, *Another History: Essays on China from a European Perspective*, Sydney: Wild Peony, 1996. (The University of Sydney East Asian Series No.10)**

The selected essays offer glimpses of Mark Elvin's remarkable explorations into Chinese economics, history, politics and traditional culture. They demonstrate his bold undertaking, creative approach, persistent and punctilious investigation, and originality in interpretation which he understates as merely 'modest' (p.iv). The papers are placed under sections of economics, politics and ideas. The first three economics papers bravely take on perhaps the most inviting but intimidating puzzle in China's unique millennia of human experience—why 'modernity' began in Europe rather than in China which had allegedly led the world for all but the last five centuries of its very long history (p.i). Elvin discusses such issues as land tenure, technological stagnation, and resource scarcity in his search for answers. In 'Changing Patterns in Land Tenure' in China's last thousand years, Elvin notes that absentee land-lordism had actually put most farm land in the hands of those who tilled it. The Chinese Communist revolution was, therefore, unlike what scholars have usually assumed, 'more about power than about land [distribution]' (p.13). More importantly, the paper concludes by asking whether the prolonged separation of landowners from both the land and the production process had, after the seventeenth century, 'blunted their appreciation of technology' (p.19). The paper on 'the high-level equilibrium trap' continues to study the decline of Chinese invention, moving from the agricultural sector to textiles. Elvin notes that the 'Medieval Chinese Economic Revolution' from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries was also a period which produced 'an astonishing series' of scientific discoveries (pp.2–25). This did not continue, however, to create the technology China needed to 'break through into some form of modern economic growth' (p.iii). As with absentee land-lordism in agriculture, Elvin observes that 'commerce substituted management' as the chief undertaking of Chinese industrialists/entrepreneurs after the fourteenth century (p.43). Production was left to craftsmen and artisans and the entrepreneurs busied themselves only with marketing, purchase and money matters. This 'divorce of market and technique' meant that little if any money was devoted to the inventions and improvement of skills (p.49). In addition, Elvin offers the theory of 'the high-level equilibrium trap' to explain Chinese technological stagnation. Briefly, the theory suggests that the enormous size of the Chinese economy made it possible to make 'merely



marginal adjustment' to relieve pressure building up in small localities without seeking innovative solutions in technological, organisational, political or even military terms (p.57). In 'Skills and Resources in Late Traditional China', Elvin examines Chinese technological refinement from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries to see why China lagged behind Europe though both had been able to employ 'inanimate power' by the Later Middle Ages. He examines Chinese agricultural, naval and mine-related technologies, besides others, and concludes that though China had remained 'active in technology' its efforts added up to so little in terms of qualitative change' (p.65). This was because the efforts 'consciously aimed' only at 'a more effective adaptation to the natural environment'—to expand the range of useful resources and to 'squeeze the most' out of them, such as to increase yields per acre (p.87). The changes saved effort but not costs of production. Again, Elvin attributes this to the dissociation of the merchants from the production process and their consequent lack of interest in technological innovations (p.88). Also, the pressure of a huge population on limited resources bred an extreme form of pragmatism and a disdain towards 'impractical' experiments. Elvin's findings here need not be conclusive or final. They succeed, as he wished, however, in 'opening doors' for those interested in approaching the very difficult question of why China fell behind Europe in modern times (p.ii).

The fourth chapter, 'Market Towns and Waterways', was placed in the section of economics. This study of the development of trade on rivers from the mid-fifteenth century till the twentieth, however, would fit equally well into the section on Chinese politics as it elaborates on how river trade led to the development of local self-management by the 'gentry' in Shanghai. Note that both the fifth and sixth chapters also deal with the development of 'gentry democracy' in the same city before the 1911 Republican Revolution. 'The Gentry Democracy in Chinese Shanghai, 1905-1914' proves that, given adequate circumstances and stimulus, Chinese culture was not necessarily 'intrinsicly antipathetic' to democratisation as many scholars have previously assumed (p.v). 'The Administration of Shanghai' reveals how the examples of the French and International settlements in Shanghai had stimulated the 'modernization' of management in the municipal council of this Chinese city (pp.176-180). In 'Reflections on the Boxer Uprising', Elvin makes an interesting analysis of the first mass movement in twentieth-century China.

In the 'Ideas' section, Elvin examines the 'Conceptions of the Self' in China and points out that the conception of the self had not always been dictated by Confucian definitions and had had many varied meanings from ancient times to present. Elvin observes that, in contrast to Europeans, the Chinese were in general less 'obsessed with the personal fate of the soul' in the after-life (p.260). In chapter 10, 'Was there a Transcendental Breakthrough in China?', the author briefly surveys the main currents of Chinese religious and philosophical ideas before Buddhism was imported around the first millennium B.C. Elvin believes that, unlike Westerners who believed in the existence of pairs of 'uncompromising oppositions' such as good versus evil, 'other' world versus 'this' world, etc., the Chinese believed everything was an integral part of the universe—a single interacting system (p.263). He also concludes that, unlike in the Western intellectual tradition, ethics in China developed on a path separate from religion (p.300). The

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chapter on 'Female Virtue and the State in China' rose from a computer-based study using large quantities of local historical records. Elvin notes that the promotion of women's virtues in China distinguished itself from other civilisations in that the state took an active sanctioning role. It also implicitly supported women's 'passive disobedience' and protest against their superiors if only to guard their 'purity' (p.350). In the final chapter, 'The Collapse of Scriptural Confucianism', Elvin examines why, of all the great pre-modern systems of belief, Confucianism became 'the only [one that] vanished' (p.352). He considers the advocacy and writings of Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong and Liang Qichao, leading thinkers at the turn of the century, instrumental in bringing it down in their scrutiny of traditional culture and search for modernity.

Elvin's essays cover a relatively wide spectrum of topics in Chinese studies. He diligently and creatively exploits Chinese sources to almost their fullest extent, scrutinising a wide range of materials including memorials, local gazettes and even poems, to leave no stone unturned in his investigation. The 'European' perspective the author claims to adopt suggests neither 'Euro-centrism' nor an inclination to see all things Chinese through a biased prism. To examine 'China as a Counterfactual' to Europe (p.i), the author has sought to point out and explain the unique circumstances whenever Chinese history turned 'the other way'. In this he has been highly successful, as the sound, relevant and useful comparative angles could help both Chinese and Europeans to better understand the issues under examination. In short, Elvin has been creative, brave and masterful in methodology. One would wish, however, that Chinese characters could accompany the many translated terms in the book as many Chinese words or phrases used in earlier times differ significantly in meaning and usage in later times. In tabulated sources, in particular, this need is sorely felt (pp.145, 148, 150, etc.). Readers would appreciate, though, that whenever possible, when a Chinese source is referred to, the author would also take the pains to provide reference to a translation into a European language (p.261).

To all the questions Elvin has examined he offers some very plausible answers or suggestions. Not all scholars, to be sure, would accept all his arguments. Intellectual historians could argue, for example, that before Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, Yen Fu had already pointed to the need to rejuvenate the Chinese, their culture and national character. Also, others might consider iconoclastic thinkers in the New Cultural Movement in the 1910s such as Lu Xun, Chen Duxiu or Wu Yu (who called upon his countrymen to 'throw Confucian teaching into the toilet') more responsible for the demise of the traditional teachings. Yet Elvin's ambitious undertaking to seek explanations for China's 'falling behind' or 'failure to attain modernity' in contrast to Europe's comparatively recent rise to supremacy would, in my view, interest and impress many today, even though they were first published in the 1970s. For example, a number of works have been published in the Chinese mainland in recent years. These are usually mammoth compilations but often they provide weak arguments, few revelations and even less innovation. Such works reveal diligence but little creative approach or methodology. The authors might find Elvin's essays enlightening and inspiring. As China is more opened up and Chinese scholars become more and more concerned about their country's place in the modern world, they need to re-examine their march (or

failure to do so) towards modernity through other perspectives. Mark Elvin's collection of essays is one they should welcome.

Danny S.L.Paau

**Xu Xing, *Variations Without a Theme' and Other Stories*, translated with an introduction by Maria Galikowski and Lin Min, Sydney: Wild Peony, 1997.**

Xu Xing, a waiter-turned writer, rose to prominence in Chinese literary circles almost overnight when his short story entitled 'Variations Without a Theme' appeared in 1985 in *The People's Literature*, one of the most authoritative literary journals in China. The story, together with Liu Suola's 'You Have No Other Choice', was hailed as the debut of Modernist fiction in the People's Republic of China. Xu Xing has since been frequently mentioned in the publications concerning contemporary Chinese fiction. His stories have been labelled by some influential Chinese literary critics as Chinese-brand Modernist fiction or Post-Modernist narratives.

However, criticism on Xu Xing has never been so thorough and so illuminating as is now illustrated in the 24-page study included in the new anthology of Xu Xing's selected stories translated into English. The slim anthology, published by Wild Peony, contains four most representative short stories written by Xu Xing between 1981 and 1986. His best-known piece, 'Variations Without a Theme', signals that Chinese literature in the 1980s came to a turning point, that is, Chinese new fiction opened its door to a diversity of themes and subjects and to a multiplicity of narrative perspectives and plurality of expressions.

Xu Xing's earlier stories are, more often than not, autobiographical in a limited space, and artistically not very sophisticated. However, these stories with a new mode of storytelling are the earliest among the so-called 'New-Wave' fiction which emerged after Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) focusing upon urban youth, the youth culture, the psychology of the young wanderers of the Chinese 'lost generation' in the '80s. The new writings broke away from the established tradition of socialist-realism which had dominated Chinese literature since the '50s, when literature had been used as a means for political missions and writers had been required to place more weight upon the subject matter than the form. The new types of fiction, whatever they were labelled by the critics, are more concerned with aesthetic effects, experiments with new form, and narrative strategies combining the traditional Chinese, and the Western modernist techniques so as to represent the self, subjectivity and individualist expressions and visions.

The most interesting story in the collection, probably the best he has written, 'Story of a City', is a realistic story of present-day life told in an easy and continuous flow involving a presentation of a multiplicity of details within a somewhat symbolic structure. The story depicts a couple who live in a seven-square-metre room, struggling to obtain a larger space. The conflicts between the protagonist and his wife derive from their obsessive behaviour of breaking into each other's attempts to achieve transcendence, and of pursuing freedom in a wider physical space. In the restricted physical space, the wife gradually 'took her

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dancing steps, moving and weaving, pushing objects out of her way, all in an unusually nimble fashion' (p.96). In quite an opposite way, the male character took another kind of dancing step, dancing through the psychological space, the memories of the past, individual experience and the collective consciousness of the tradition of the Chinese literati. This practice leads him down the road to further alienation from the crowds around, and from the real world.

Xu's story oscillates between two kinds of landscapes, one in real life in the present, the other in the memories which connect one's past and future. The wife who walks with dancing steps in the restricted space dreams of obtaining a little more space. In the end when her goal is achieved, she finds herself unable to move beyond her old self to the new freedom; she remains part of the dancing step in the narrow space, and she remains part of the convention. 'I can't stand it, I can't stand it. Let's just move back to our old place as soon as possible.'

The episodes in these stories may be considered 'variations without a theme' because of the defiance against linear narrative and a lack of tightly organised plots in terms of the realistic mode of storytelling. However, with regard to the whole structure, these stories actually contain a leitmotif that is the self, the individuality, and the conflict and transcendence of individuals in their situations. Furthermore, this leitmotif, as a salient characteristic of Modernist fiction, tends to be recurring and repetitive.

In these stories the narrator often merges with the protagonist 'I', who (a boyfriend or husband) takes a female character (a girlfriend or wife) as an Other. The conflicts and relationship between the two characters form the frame of the story, and provide a communicative situation, within which more related characters and their stories are embedded. While some plots seem fragmentary from the point of view of the narrator, they are coherent and continuous in the development of the characters and their emotions. If the 'I' as a narrator employs a more subjective strategy in his storytelling, the 'I' as the protagonist dramatises the situations, and further brings in the memories and other relevant characters of the past, yielding an endless regress in the story. The narrative design is largely based on continuous shifting between the flashbacks and flashforwards and between the tangle of the narrator's narrating and the protagonist's satirical commentaries and fleeting memories.

The editors of the anthology have offered an insightful and stimulating study on the philosophy, the form and the language of Xu Xing's fiction. It also contains some biographical information about the author. The introduction demonstrates two different approaches in analysing and interpreting the stories, namely the existentialist and the postmodernist. In the first part, it argues that the central theme of Xu's stories is 'the constant pursuit of the authentic expression of the individual self' (p.3). It points out that the characters in Xu's works are basically 'superfluous men', in alienation, albeit Xu's 'superfluous men' are fundamentally different from their kin appearing in earlier modern Chinese fiction during the '30s. That is, 'Xu Xing regards the absurd world and individual's meaningless existence as the norm or the reality one must unavoidably face, and he adopts an attitude of Daoist indifference to pursue the "real self" and individual subjectivity at a spiritual level, by transcending internal and external constraints' (p.4).

However, in my view, the protagonist, the male 'I', has never appeared as

really 'superfluous' in the alienated world. He is a romantic, if not the last one. The protagonist in 'Variations Without a Theme' and his female Other each strives to be a successful artist in their own right. Q, his girlfriend, a music student, who pursues a career in music following conventional values and goals, insists that her boyfriend do the same. On the contrary, the protagonist, like the author himself, wants to be an unconventional writer who will write something different from others and say things that others have not said, as the male character tells his girlfriend in 'Variations Without a Theme' about his attempts to produce a fiction aleatorically: 'Every day I think of something and write it down. There is no theme and no coherence. When I have written a whole lot of pages, I just put them together and, hey presto, it's done. It's called a pack-of-cards novel. It's just like life. You can look at it however you want, but you can't explain it' (p.67).

This is a serious character, no matter how off-centre he is. The character's frustration, estrangement and alienation derive from his conflicts with the conventional establishment, and from his singled-minded pursuit of writing another type of fiction and from his striving to avoid the fate of being 'one of them' (such as his girlfriend Q in 'Variations' wants him to be, p.67). Therefore the character is actually a tragic hero (no matter how aloof or narcissistic he is) and a modern Quixote who is confronting the hostile and stifling environment, challenging the windmills in his dream-like missions, and pursuing his knighthood in a new literature.

The translators, Maria Galikowski and Lin Min, have, in a concerted effort, produced a smooth and well-crafted work of translation which has benefited from their profound research on the original works. In addition, the translators have on many occasions provided carefully worded notes. The anthology is important for researchers on contemporary literature in China, on narrative theory, and on the Chinese modernist and post-modernist writings of the '80s and '90s. It also offers glimpses of the psychology of Chinese urban youth, and of the phantom of the Chinese literati tradition lingering in contemporary society.

*Songping Jin*

**Mabel Lee and Meng Hua, eds, *Cultural Dialogue and Misreading*, Sydney: Wild Peony, 1997. (University of Sydney World Literature Series, No 1)**

This collection assembles fifty papers delivered at an international conference held in October 1995 at Beijing University. Written in English and French, these papers, collected under three headings, 'Dialogue', 'Misreading', and 'Identity', deal with a wide range of issues in recent critical developments such as cultural relativism/universalism, cross-cultural interactions, globalisation, third-world literary practices, cultural communication, cultural representation, postmodernism, and problems in literary historiography, literary hermeneutics, and literary translation.

A theme prominent in a large number of the papers in the book is cultural relativism/multiculturalism, a subject that has recently been a focus of attention in the American academy. With the process of globalisation gathering speed, the issue of multiculturalism invites us to rethink the complexities involved in the

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discursive formation of the self/other binarism, and to what extent indigenous cultural practice can be protected and renewed in the global context. Earl Miner, in his *Comparative Politics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (1990), argues that there are no monolithic and universal aesthetic values, and that all cultural practices must be valorised in terms of individual historical/social experience. Gerald Gillespie believes that Miner's view in effect suggests a new direction for research in the domain of literary and cultural studies. Precisely because the Western institutionalisation of literary studies has failed to provide a value system that is universally applicable, there is an urgent need to expand research spheres and explore new areas of study including those that hitherto have been considered as insignificant and marginal. Gillespie's article is therefore an argument for the importance of cultural relativism.

Fully conscious of the complex relation between indigenous knowledge systems and different cultural practices, other papers in this volume, however, explore the possibilities of cross-cultural communication and commonalities of different cultural traditions. Ersu Ding claims that difficulties involved in cross-cultural exchanges tend to be over-exaggerated. Productive interactions between cultural traditions are not only necessary but also possible. He argues that there are commonly shared human concerns and conditions, which can provide a generally acceptable framework for such cross-cultural exchanges. The Indian scholar Amiya Dev argues that cultural relativism is not an historical conception and that, although there are recognisable differences among cultural practices, we need to identify a common basis on which different cultures can be brought into significant dialogical relationship. He says: 'no doubt all cultures are structured by their own laws, but all cultures move in the same direction' (p.26). Of course, this desire for the identification of a common ground on which discrete cultural traditions may engage productively with one another should not be taken as a deliberate disregard for actual discrepancies among different regions in terms of economic development and conflicts of interest arising from these discrepancies. Our cultural experiences are defined and determined by our social and economic conditions. Therefore, cultural universalism is often a manifestation of colonialism and hegemonism, and cultural relativism or multiculturalism is frequently associated with nationalism and localism. Drawing upon Habermas' theory of communication, Paul Cornea's paper deals with paradoxes of cultural relativism and universalism.

Studies of inter-cultural exchanges cannot remain on the abstract theoretical level; and a close examination of specific cases of cross-cultural interactions is an essential aspect of comparative studies. A number of papers in this volume are concerned with the reading and representation of the exotic cultural Other. Both Bèatrice Didier and Jean-Marc Moura examine the popularised image of China in French discursive formations of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. For Bèatrice Didier, the idealisation of China in Senancour and Voltaire as a country of virtue originated from the Enlightenment critique of Western religious practices. The French image of China between the 'sixties and 'seventies is, Jean-Marc Moura argues, a utopian expression of a desire for dislocating the self, which is, really, a critique of Western industrialism in its historical and social context. The formation of the image of the Other is, in the final analysis, a product of the social and political conditions that the Self has experienced. And this reconfirms what

Said has said about the self-referential nature of orientalism: 'Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West'.<sup>1</sup> Starting from the same theoretical premises, Meng Hu contextualises and historicises the image of the West in China since the Opium War, in particular the formation, development, and transformation of the stereotypical image of Westerners as 'foreign devils'.

Direct comparisons between Eastern literary practices and Western literary practices constitute another important thematic part of the volume. Mabel Lee identifies the commonalities between Paz's and Yang Lian's poetics, in particular their 'shared sense of cyclical time' and 'their reference to ancient calendars' (p.97). Raoul David Findeisen finds the notion of 'flying' a good point of entry into a comparison between Gabriele d'Annunzio and Xu Zhimo and identifies an innate connection between their desire for 'flying' and their futurism.

Covering a wide range of topics in comparative literary/cultural studies, this volume is itself a product of a joint effort made by scholars from across the world and is a welcome contribution to the discussion of some of the pressing issues we are faced with today in comparative studies.

Xiaoyi Zhou

#### Note

- 1 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p.22.

#### **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *The Poison Tree: Three Novellas*, translated by Marion Maddern and S. N. Mukherjee, Penguin Books, 1996.**

The volume under review consists of translations of three novellas by the Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838–1894). The novellas' translated titles are: *The Poison Tree* (translated by Marion Maddern), *Krishnakanta's Will* (translated by S. N. Mukherjee) and *Indira* (translated by Marion Maddern). In a translator's preface the translators explain their desire to 'translate, as far as it is possible, every word in the original work, but in the idiom understood by English speaking readers' (p.xiii). This preface is followed by an excellent introduction (by S. N. Mukherjee) to fiction in general, and Bengali literature and Bankim in particular.

The detailed introduction gives readers not only an historical and literary context into which to place the novellas, but also provides a linguistic context as well. Mukherjee argues that 'Bankim Chandra held strong views on the ideology of separate space and separate language for women [which] is realised in the text of his social novels' (p.lii). Mukherjee shows how Bankim Chandra incorporates his moral views into his fiction by punishing women who transgress those rules. We may add to this that punishment inevitably occurs when love is thwarted and made subordinate to lust. For Bankim Chandra is very much of his time, as the individual novellas reveal.

Before describing each novella, I should note that all three stories have been translated into English before. Unfortunately, I am unable to comment upon the translations *per se* as I have no Bengali. Thus, I will limit my remarks, in the main,

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to thematic concerns.

*The Poison Tree* (*Bishabriksha*, 1873) concerns the intrusion of a thirteen-year old beauty called Kunda into the lives of the happily married couple, Nagendra and Suryamukhi Datta. Nagendra takes pity on Kunda after the death of her father and so she comes into his household where he arranges a marriage for her. Three years after the marriage, Kunda is widowed. She then falls victim to the wiles of the evil maid Hira who uses Kunda—who has fallen in love with Nagendra, and he in lust with her—to break up the marriage for her own ends. After Nagendra takes Kunda as his co-wife, and Suryamukhi leaves him, he comes to realise the difference between love and lust, and when he is finally reunited with Suryamukhi, their love is rekindled. Hira gives poison to Kunda, bereft at being abandoned by Nagendra, and finally, after Kunda's death, Hira herself goes mad, as much from the realisation of her own evil, as anything else.

The ideology of connubial bliss, and the evil of adultery, create the pivot on which the novella turns. Thus we recognise the story as belonging firmly to the nineteenth century. However, the struggle between love and lust reminds me strongly of the Naturalist debate (itself, in part, a product of the response to Darwin's thesis of natural selection), especially the Zolaesque version of the debate which argued strongly for instinct as the chief motivating force in human emotions. This debate was all the rage at the time in Europe; I wonder if Bankim Chandra had read of it or knew of it? His discussion of love and lust in p.114 reminds me of Plato's discussion of the same in the *Phaedrus*, and certainly Bankim Chandra's analysis is no less exhaustive. But it is in the characterisation of Kunda and the other figures in the story that we see these abstract ideas realised. And realised they are. The fiery passions which burn so prominently in the hearts of Kunda, Nagendra Suryamukhi and the others are powerfully and practically portrayed. They endow the novelist's creations with life and energy and make reading this novella a rewarding experience which lifts it above the fixed ideological frame of virtue rewarded and vice punished to speak to us directly in the universal language of the human heart.

This comment is no less true of *Krishnakanta's Will* (1878), which is the most tragic of the three tales. Here, Govindalal, faithful nephew of a rich businessman, falls in love with the maid-servant Rohini, who is persuaded by the merchant's evil son Haralal to substitute a fake will for the merchant's real one which rewards Govindalal but not Haralal. Bhramar, Govindalal's wife, is deceived by Rohini and turns away from her besotted husband (besotted with Rohini but still in love with his wife). Govindalal is forced to flee to a secret hideaway where he lives with Rohini until he can stand her no longer and murders her. Bhramar, betrayed and shamed, dies of illness. Finally, Govindalal, after twelve years of serving as a mendicant in propitiation for his sins, departs.

As with the earlier novella, love is defeated by lust and all ends tragically. S. N. Mukherjee in his introduction comments on the violation of taboos by Rohini which leads to the tragedy (p.xliv). These taboos relate to maintaining a separate space for men and women with the purpose of, above all, maintaining the integrity of the family unit by strictly regulating contacts between the sexes. However, in this work, the novelist proves that sexual desire or 'passion' is stronger than any rules society may erect. The danger for Govindalal is that once he has sacrificed



love for lust, he cannot unmake his decision. The novella creates a strong sense of verisimilitude because of the power of the novelist's portrayal of passion, and his minute analysis of the mental anguish this brings to those in thrall to it.

The third novella, *Indira* (1873), I find the least convincing. The tale of the young beauty Indira, who, chosen to be a bride but kidnapped on her way to her bridegroom's residence, eventually finds her husband, and, in disgust, attempts to seduce him but in such a chaste way that he will himself realise that she is his faithful bride returned to him, simply strains credibility in a way that the previous two stories, for all their clichés and melodrama, do not. Perhaps it is because, as S. N. Mukherjee notes, the love interest is not really Indira's husband but her collaborator and protector, the wealthy Subhashini, who persuades her husband to assist Indira. In this story, the struggle between love and lust is gone, replaced by the gentle comedy of wise women dumping innocent men, and by the erotic duet danced by Indira and Subhashini, who teach each other how to kiss, and fall in love as a result. But this theme is hardly developed, and, given the time and place, this is no surprise.

These stories provide clear evidence that Bankim Chandra is undoubtedly a fine and important novelist. The novellas revealed to me a fascinating and complex society where women were, in some respects, the equal of their men. The novelist's eye for detail entertains readers with a variety of intricate and careful miniatures of life in nineteenth-century Bengal as it was idealised, mused upon and dissected in these three works. Like many a significant writer, Bankim Chandra does not apologise for his didacticism or his moral code, which ultimately determines the fates of his characters. But, equally, his poetic and passionate portrayals of the many varieties of love he creates allow readers to contemplate and lament at their leisure the complexities of love's burdens, and to explore and imagine the unending conundrum of love's delights.

*Leith Morton*

***The Journals of George Eliot*, eds Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.**

Margaret Harris' and Judith Johnston's edition is an important addition to Victorian studies and to George Eliot and George Henry Lewes scholarship. As they indicate in their 'Preface', their 'edition provides the complete text of George Eliot's surviving journals and diaries, which run from the time of her union with G. H. Lewes in 1854 to her death in 1880'. J. W. Cross, in his *George Eliot's Life as related in her letters and journals* (3 vols, 1885), and Gordon S. Haight in his *The George Eliot Letters* (9 vols, 1954-78), and biography, *George Eliot* (1968), and other biographers, have cited the journals and diaries. Eliot's 'Recollections of Ilfracombe' and 'How I came to write Fiction' are found in collections of her non-fiction prose writings. However, this is the first time that 'the journals appear entire: about one-quarter of the text has not been published previously'.

Chronologically arranged in thirteen sections, *The Journals of George Eliot* publishes the 'contents of six manuscripts' (p.vii). Five of these are housed at that great repository of Eliot and Lewes materials, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. George Eliot's Diary for 1879 is today part

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of the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. The first section consists of her 'Diary 1854–1861', the second her 'Diary 1861–1877', the third her 'Diary 1879', the fourth her 'Diary 1880'. There then follow George Eliot's 'Recollections of Weimar 1854', her 'Recollections of Berlin 1854–1855', 'Recollections of Ilfracombe' [misspelt 'Ilfracombe' on the 'Contents' listing of the edition], 'Recollections of the Scilly Isles and Jersey 1857'. The ninth section entitled by Harris and Johnston 'The Making of George Eliot 1857–1859' republishes 'How I came to write Fiction' and the 'History of Adam Bede'. The tenth section 'Germany' contains Eliot's record of her 7 April–7 July 1858 journey to Munich with Lewes and her 'Recollections of our journey from Munich to Dresden'. Section 11 'Recollections of Italy 1860'. Section 12 'Italy 1864' contains material which has not appeared before, as does most of section 13: 'Journey to Normandy in 1865'.

Each of these sections contains detailed clearly written prefatory commentary to the George Eliot texts which follow. For instance, in their six page introduction to the ninth section 'The making of George Eliot 1857–1859' containing the already published material 'How I came to write Fiction' (found in Haight) and the 'History of Adam Bede' (in cross) Harris and Johnston indicate 'the ways in which these essays and memoranda have a particular integrity' (p.298). In addition, drawing in extensive footnotes upon recent biographical, gender and deconstruction literary theory, they at times brilliantly comment on the significance of George Eliot's preoccupation in 1857 'with names and forms of address' (p.283) and her 'decision to adopt a pseudonym' (p.258). Again, highly commendable is their sense of indebtedness to past scholarship and criticism. Previous labourers in the vineyard of George Eliot and George Henry Lewes studies are given full credit: refreshingly there is no attempt to score points or to attack others. Harris and Johnston tell their readers upfront so to speak that the passages they are reproducing have or have not been previous published and they draw upon the wisdom, or not, as the case may be, of their predecessors.

In their 'Preface' Harris and Johnston outline the problems which confronted them in undertaking such a mammoth task as editing a genius's journals and diaries. The first problem they encountered was that of the sceptics: 'whether a complete edition of the journals would provide more than a dutiful exercise in scholarship'. Although they are perhaps too diplomatic to say so, there is a history behind such a question. In their introduction to *George Eliot's 'Middlemarch' Notebooks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), John Clark Pratt and Victor A. Neufeldt observe 'In deciding to do a work of this sort, one must inevitably confront the question Professor Barbara Hardy [a brilliant and powerful new critic of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s] asked while one of the editors was vainly attempting to keep pace with her on a morning walk: "Of what real value is all this incessant source hunting to an understanding of George Eliot?"' Pratt and Neufeldt answer that the notebooks 'add to our knowledge and understanding of George Eliot's intellectual and creative development' (p.xiii). Harris and Johnston's 'Introduction', drawing upon recent post new criticism critical theory, provides some additional answers to the question: 'the publication of the journals entire restores George Eliot to the speaking subject. They are as much acts of self-representation in writing as her letters and fiction' (p.xxv). They do not point out

that the new critical question is of course self-justifying and interestingly was not asked of authors such as Coleridge, Shakespeare, Keats, Dickens or Thackeray, to name but five in random order. Harris' and Johnston's observations on the undoubted importance of Eliot's journals and notebooks should have been extended much further.

Other problems encountered by the editors of *The Journals of George Eliot* include 'the order in which the separate journals were to be presented', and the 'challenge' of 'how traditional an edition this should be'. Their 'principal concern has been to provide an accurate and readable text with minimal editorial'. The text as written by its author has been tinkered with: Eliot's use of the ampersand '&' and other contractions such as 'wh'; and 'art.' have become 'and', 'which' and 'article'. Some 'obvious errors of spelling (including such matters as errors of case in German) have been silently corrected' and so on. As a more conservative editor than Harris and Johnston, the previous reviewer would have retained what Eliot wrote. However, sensibly, they do not lay themselves open to erroneous accusations of mistakes in transcription of her French and German. Footnotes have been kept to a minimum, and the weight of annotation carried by the explanatory index which is designed as a glossary as well as a guide to contents. It included substantive references for example, to people George Eliot met, books she read, and music she heard' (pp.viii-ix). A random checking of their transcriptions with copies of George Eliot's holograph reveals that nothing has escaped their eagle eyes. They are fortunate that the manuscripts they are transcribing differ from some of Eliot's notebooks in containing little if any Greek or her attempt to reproduce classical Hebrew letters.

Curious omissions from Harris' and Johnston's transcriptions are financial accounts. In the introductory section to the 'Diary 1879', they write 'While information about [George Eliot's] investment income and various expenditures has a certain interest, these extensive financial memoranda have not been reproduced in the text of this journal, nor have shorter records of dividend income and the like been annotated' (p.148). There are practical publishing and editorial problems with reproducing numbers, although some investment and dividends are reproduced in the initial entry for the 'Diary 1879' on page 154 of the printed text. The financial accounts, which George Eliot took over responsibility for following the death of George Henry Lewes, reveal much about his and her financial well-being, and where they invested and in what. Often their letters and notebooks reveal a preoccupation with earnings: they both wrote for money. Complete publication of the accounts will reveal which far-flung corners of the world they had a personal financial interest in. No doubt post-colonial critics will then have a field day!

The fifty-six page 'Explanatory index', which concludes the volume, contains many riches and includes information on George Henry Lewes as well. Thus, for instance, in her Diary for Thursday 8 January 1880 George Eliot writes 'Wrote to Mr. Cycles, thanking him for his letter and volume' (p.195). In the 'Explanatory index' we learn that William Cycles (1831-82) is the 'author of *Permutation of Ideas* (1868) and *An Inquiry into the process of Human Experience* (1880), the preface of which refers to 'Lewes' 'encouragement of Cycles' work'. This information is followed by the page number on which the reference to Cycles occurs (p.195). The 1880 volume with Cycles' inscription 'To George Eliot, With

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the author's best compliments Jan 2 1880' is now amongst George Eliot's and George Henry Lewes' books found at the Dr Williams' Library in Gordon Square at the back of University College, London. In the tradition of the finest scholarship, Harris' and Johnston's note raises other questions such as 'there must be correspondence between Eliot and Lewes and Cycles and where is it today—assuming of course that it survives?'

There are four illustrations, one of which reproduces a folio leaf from George Eliot's 1854–1861 Diary. There seems to be no indication whether the reproduction is actual size or reduced. The holograph is certainly difficult to read and the reproduction is slightly murky. There is an interesting jacket, which no doubt will unfortunately be thrown away when this volume enters into libraries. The front jacket contains an 1860 entry from the same Diary. Again the majority of George Eliot's holograph is difficult to discern, being presented on a dark green background. In spite of such caveats, Cambridge University Press has produced a sturdy bound volume clearly 'Typeset in 9pt Lexicon (from the *Enschedé Font Foundry*), in QuarkXPress ... [SE]' with wide margins making the volume a pleasure to read.

Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston have produced an important work of scholarship which adds to our understanding of one of the greatest of English nineteenth-century writers/. By placing published and unpublished materials in their appropriate context, by allowing us to examine hitherto unpublished George Eliot writings, and through judicious scholarship and commentary, they have earned our gratitude.

William Baker

**Tom Gibbons. *Snowfire: Three Centuries of Sonnets: 'Snowfire', 'Searchlight' & 'Ashfall'*, Joondanna, Western Australia: The Waterloo Press, 1998.**

Tom Gibbons is an expert on early Modernism,<sup>1</sup> and these totally, deliberately minimal—Post-Modern?—sonnets owe something to Imagism, although it is a kind of poetry about which Gibbons himself has reservations. Reading Peter Jones' invaluable selection, *Imagist Poetry* (Penguin, 1972), one finds the first person pronoun, the lyricist's 'I', occurring with Romantic frequency. Pound's *In a Station of the Metro* is in this exceptional: '*The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black, bough.*' No 'I'. Gibbons has followed Pound's *Metro* in two ways: he omits the 'I', and he also omits, like Pound, verbs. The first thing pulls against the iterated-*I* which lies behind the title *Snowfire* and at the ground of the *Centuries*. Gibbons tells us in his 'Preface', 'The paradoxical compound noun "snowfire", which triggered the whole sequence ... was the name of a kind of solidified vaseline much used by little boys like myself in ... the North of England to soothe hands reddened and chapped by many hours of snow-ball fighting' (p.vi a-b). Adroitly, Gibbons gets two elements out of the ointment's name: 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' and a pair of primal terms. There is no poetic persona or voice in the sonnets: and the 'voice' of the audiotapes is computer-generated: WinSpeech.

A-propositional, because verbless like the Pound *Metro* poem, the sonnets play with a limited number of word-pairs, *snowfire light/night* for example which

# SNOW FIRE

[1]

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Brake-marks in the snow  
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brake-marks in the snow

Brake-marks in the snow  
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brake-marks in the snow

[2]

Skid-marks on the sand  
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skid-marks in the sand

[3]

Brake-marks on the ice  
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Brake-marks on the ice  
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brake-marks on the ice  
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Brake-marks in the fire  
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Brake-marks in the fire  
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brake-marks in the fire

[4]

Fire-marks on the ice  
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fire-marks on the ice

Fire-marks on the ice  
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fire-marks on the ice  
fire-marks on the ice

Skid-marks in the fire  
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Skid-marks in the fire  
skid-marks in the fire  
skid-marks in the fire

[5]

Snow-fire in the sky  
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snow-fire in the sky

Snow-fire in the sky  
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snow-fire in the sky  
snow-fire in the sky

Snow-fire on the dark  
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snow-fire on the dark

Snow-fire on the dark  
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snow-fire on the dark

[6]

Brake-marks in the snow  
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[7]

Skid-marks in the sand  
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skid-marks on the sand

[8]

Brake-marks in the fire  
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Brake-marks in the fire  
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[9]

Skid-marks in the fire  
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skid-marks in the fire

Fire-marks on the ice  
fire-marks on the ice  
fire-marks on the ice

Fire-marks on the ice  
fire-marks on the ice  
fire-marks on the ice

[10]

Snow-fire on the dark  
snow-fire on the dark  
snow-fire on the dark  
snow-fire on the dark

Snow-fire on the dark  
snow-fire on the dark  
snow-fire on the dark  
snow-fire on the dark

Snow-fire in the sky  
snow-fire in the sky  
snow-fire in the sky

Snow-fire in the sky  
snow-fire in the sky  
snow-fire in the sky

refer to primal things, and *skid-marks* and *gas-light*, which have artifactual reference. The set of referents is not large enough to furnish a narrative, were there

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verbs which there are not. The curious might use a computer to measure the size of the vocabulary against the total word-count of the 35 pages. The sonnets go in for repetition in a large way.

The natural rhythm of the pair of primals *light/night* punctuates the non-natural—Duchampian-virtual—rhyme scheme of the Gibbons' Petrarchan sonnets, in which the octet consists of eight *identical* lines and a sestet of six identicals. Semantic content is so damped down that one takes the piece of language transforming itself into a percussion-work for prosodists; one relishes the occasional 'wows' of the synthetic voice, and the audible ambiguities *fire/fear?* as positive elements in the music. Gibbons alternates his metres on Anglo-Saxon verse, and the rhythms of G. M. Hopkins and of W. H. Auden. These beat, hyper-absolutely, behind the computer-generated and repetitive octet-sestet pairs. Gibbons takes as his precedents for constructing the *Centuries* Duchampian randomness, John Cage's random-matrices—and one might venture, too, Philip Glass' minimalism. Gibbons own analogy is bell-ringing, 'Plain Hunting'.

Semantics suspended by sparse vocabulary and by the slimness of grammatical resources, intelligibility yet haunts the text. but is as lost as the lost childhood our os which comes *snow-fire*.

Gibbons is an ironist,<sup>2</sup> and these computer-generated-and-'vocalised' texts might be taken as reductive in intent: 'post-Modernism we will look/listen for meaning long after it has departed'.<sup>3</sup> But Gibbons' 'Preface' with its strategically-placed references to G. M. Hopkins and to Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*, invites us to read-and-hear *Snowfire* in another way: 'possibly mystical' ('Preface', p.vi a). The 'mysticism' does not rely on any religious referents—there are none; there are only primal pairs, *light/night* and human artifactuals *skid-marks, search-light* which are at most mundanely ominous. This is no *Dies Irae* but Gibbons has aimed—and he cites as precedents the music of Steve Reich as the paintings of Agnes Martin—'[to] produce distinct and highly complicated effects of a mystical nature *by suspending everyday notions of time and space*', ('Preface', v b, *italic added*). You can be either bored by the percussive repetition of *Snowfire*, or enraptured—or *both*.

The work has very much the feel of a sublime of 'boredom', a sublime of the sparse vehicle. Time and space suspended, so is consciousness left up in the air, and suddenly there is a 'place' for a flash of transcending light. There is no guarantee of this: only the possibility. As ever was so, even with the Litanies themselves. Or with the Catholic Rosary, spoken aloud by a congregation.

After listening to three hours of Gibbons' tapes I put on some Buddhist chant, not a word of which I understand. I fancy I may fancy an analogy: feel, for both sets of tapes, similarly.

Or: one might read Gibbons' sonnets in the —remembered—light of F. S. Flint's *Searchlight*, which ends in the sublime/Quixotic aspirations of:

... that great beam thrusting back into heaven  
the light taken from it.

Patrick Hutchings

## Notes

- 1 See Phillip McNamara, *Time and Machine: Tom Gibbons: Art Works & Words, 1995–1998*, The O.K. Image Factory in conjunction with the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery and the School of Architecture & Fine Arts, The University of Western Australia, 1998; and Tom Gibbons, *Rooms in the Darwin Hotel: Studies in English Literary History, 1880–1920*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1973.
- 2 See Phillip McNamara, 'Tom Gibbons: The Spiritual in Pop Art', *Art & Australia* 36.2 (1988): 228–35.
- 3 Some Imagist poetry, James Joyce's *I Hear an Army* for example, or D. H. Lawrence's *Illicit*, seem, faintly but characteristically, haunted by Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*. Arnold's compression of value into a present of present-love—absolute Humanism—is suspended in Post-Modernist quotational but non-referential, ego-less minimalism. This may, by way of paradox, let the spiritual back in. The Spirit—like Nature—probably abhors a vacuum.