Book Reviews

Eric P. Levy, *Detaining Time: Temporal Resistance in Literature from Shakespeare to McEwan* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); 284 pp; ISBN: 9781474292047.

Eric P. Levy's *Detaining Time: Temporal Resistance in Literature from Shakespeare to McEwan* is a masterful work of scholarship, with its painstaking attention to detail and its close reading of texts. Unlike many works of literary criticism, Levy's book does not rely on vague abstractions or generalities. He guides the reader step by step through each author's reasoning and he makes use of John McTaggart and Charles Taylor to analyze the consciousness of time.

I was captivated by this *tour de force* until I came to the last two chapters on the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, which seem to be tacked on as an afterthought, where I read the offending passage: "Unfortunately, Deleuze's prowess as a philosopher does not extend into literary criticism." In all his modesty, Deleuze would perhaps agree, saying that literary criticism is a very special skill he never developed. But I would reply that Deleuze effectively uses literature to dramatize his concepts. Six of the seven authors Levy analyzes in this book are ones about which Deleuze also wrote. Their readings clearly diverge. Whereas Deleuze talks about unconscious syntheses of time, Levy's approach seems more phenomenological. While I respect what Levy has done here, I feel compelled to point out the differences in this review.

Specifically, what does Deleuze say about time? He writes in his essay, "Occupying without Counting": "We easily and sometimes painfully perceive things in time. We also perceive the forms, units and relationships of chronometry, but not time as a *force*, time itself, 'some time in its purest form'." I contend here that Levy's book only presents the units of chronometry in literature. The difficulty in approaching the subject of "empty time" in literature is that narrative depends on sequential accounts. Deleuze derives his notion of literary time, which occurs outside any narrative structure, from Bernard Groethuysen's essay, "*De quelques aspects du temps*." When Deleuze analyses some of the same authors as Levy, for example, he applies Groethuysen's notion of the "meanwhile"

between recounted events. Here are three instances of the different readings by Deleuze and Levy:

1. Beckett's *The Unnamable*. Levy: instants pile up because the second synthesis of the past is lacking. Deleuze: the instants are just the exhaustion of combinations in pursuit of formless time.

2. Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Levy: life seems empty, therefore we must seek a sense of agency. Deleuze: life is full of impersonal individuations, like taking a walk, so that Mrs. Dalloway can never again say, "I am this, he is this, he is that."

3. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Levy: the struggle to reconstruct time by revenge morality. Deleuze: a dramatization of Kant's empty form of time in which Hamlet cannot act, not because of a mere character flaw, but because the formlessness of time itself intervenes.

In each case, Levy writes about things like "instants," "agency," and "revenge morality," all things, though interesting in themselves, have nothing to do with the truly passive and therefore non-narrative time of which Deleuze writes. I think the crucial difference lies in Levy's presentation of two of Deleuze's syntheses of time, but not much about the third, which Levy sums up with the word "future." Deleuze's third synthesis is complex and somewhat obscure, but as "the form of empty time," which can only be felt as a force, it clearly does not fit easily into a phenomenological analysis of time consciousness, the chronometric approach of Levy. I do not believe, therefore, that Levy applies Deleuze's theory of time to literature better than Deleuze himself.

With all that said, however, Levy's book stands on its own as a work of insightful literary criticism. It constitutes a substantial contribution to literature. It will be of help to students and professors alike. Overall, it is a clear piece of writing, well argued, systematic, and compelling.

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Steve Mentz, *Ocean (Object Lessons)* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020); pp. 192; ISBN 978-1501348631.

Recently published by Bloomsbury Academic in partnership with *The Atlantic*, *Object Lessons* is a series of books by different authors about ordinary things, many of which we encounter on a daily basis, but generally

pass over and often take for granted. The titles of the individual volumes reflect their pedestrian topics, such as *Sock*, *Bookshelf*, *Souvenir*, *Rust*, *Hashtag*, and *Jetlag*. Other books in the series relate to nature, including one about fog, another focusing on trees, one all about Earth, and the first title that I read, *Ocean*.

Considering our volatile world, especially as I am writing this during the global pandemic, these books offer a reassuring reminder that many fundamental and well-established things will continue to endure. The series summons readers to appreciate the mundane and the familiar and invites us to take a closer look and contemplate certain basics and particular facets of the environment that surround us. Bearing in mind our current state that many are referring to as the "the new normal," perhaps we need these books now more than ever.

This series brings to mind philosophies about everyday aesthetics and the many publications that explore this topic, including John Dewey's classic, *Art as Experience* (1934), in which he describes how aesthetic experience is possible in every aspect of daily life. Dewey's book has since inspired many advocates of everyday aesthetics to expound on the topic. Within the past fifteen years there has especially been great interest in this area with two monographs published that have the same title, *Everyday Aesthetics*; one by Katya Mandoki (2007) and the other by Yuriko Saito (2007). Thomas Leddy's *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life* (2012) has also been influential in this field. The development of these philosophies over time have brought us to the place where books, such as those that are part of the *Object Lessons* series, are possible.

Ocean was written by Steve Mentz, a professor of English at St John's University in New York who teaches Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature. His research centers on early modern maritime culture and one of his books, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (2009) brings together his interests. *Ocean* also combines a variety of disciplines, including history, literature, poetry, and theories into a unified collection that considers the subject from a variety of perspectives. The book takes a look at how humans have conceptualized and interacted with the ocean through time, including religious doctrines and scientific theories that attempt to explain the "Ocean's arrival," the many literary and poetical references to the sea, "wet globalization" involving slave ships, spice trading, and shipping containers, a discussion about current environmentalist issues relating to the ocean, and one chapter solely dedicated to swimming. The

author's personal experiences with the sea are also incorporated into the writing, including his recounts of walks along Short Beach in Long Island and on the High Line in New York.

Ocean is well-designed and neatly organized into twelve chapters. Adding to the appeal of this title are round delicately drawn images of the ocean and swimmers that appear in each chapter. Created especially for the book by Vanessa Daws, an artist based in Ireland, the drawings are derived from photographs she captured over the years. Perhaps what is most striking about these illustrations is the way she plays with perspective, referencing both the ocean and the world above it, as well as creating a metaphor for the way the author views the topic of the ocean from multiple angles.

Considering the specific branches of knowledge that the author covers in the book, *Ocean* will appeal to classic literature and poetry enthusiasts, mythology aficionados, history buffs, and science whizzes, as well as proponents of everyday aesthetics. The style of writing will also attract romanticists, dreamers, ocean lovers, and basically anyone who has ever gazed out on the water and felt a sense of peace and conflict at the same time. Diving into *Ocean* is the perfect starting point in getting to know this series, but if you are like me, this will certainly not be the last *Object Lessons* book you will want to read.

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Robert Macfarlane, *ness*, illustrations by Stanley Donwood (Hamish Hamilton: Harmondsworth, 2018); 96 pp. ISBN: 978-0-241-39656-8.

In *ness*, Macfarlane does fiction and Donwood illustrates. The illustrations capture in black and white cross-hatch the dynamism of an environment surging on with an altered and limited human presence. Donwood is an author in his own right, and has worked with Macfarlane before on *Holloway* (2012) yet is most famous for his visual collaborations for the albums of Radiohead. His collaboration here with Macfarlane is seamless and adds to the evocative dimensions of this small volume.

The writing is technically prose but comes with deep poetic intensity. This puts this book into the genre of nature poetry, but if so, this is a unique take on this form of writing and its forms are shockingly original and

compelling. The work has a plot that pits human personalities against natural forces, such as Ness, but in doing so questions what personality, personification, and character could and should be when our species ceases to fully exist.

Although a rare fictional exploration by the author, *ness* plugs seamlessly into what I would call 'Macfarlanism'. Though the author might not appreciate such a term, there is a spirituality that appends to this man's work despite the hefty scholarly approach he brings to his non-fiction. It started in 2003 with the publication of *Mountains of the Mind*. This was scholarship in pursuit of the author's (and the West's) fascination with mountains and the climbing of them. This book traced those watershed moments in the recent history of ideas where we see a 5000-year-old planet (as Biblically proposed) transmute through the development of geological studies into something estimably older. Where mountains had just seemed left over material from a recent creation event, suddenly to Westerners they became evidence of the long, tumultuous struggle by geothermal forces to surge forth under great pressure and then abide for millions of years. *Mountains of the Mind* was followed by *Wild Places* (2007) and *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (2013). These established Macfarlane as a man capable of unveiling those depths of connection to environment and place that few of us had hitherto fully conceptualised.

In one way he uses all the high arts of Modernity to ask us to un-Modernise ourselves some when it comes to our ownership and exploitation attitudes. In this unveiling, Macfarlane has always appreciated the potency of both good scholarship and words. *Landmarks* (2015) revels in the language we have for nature and despairs that it is being lost to us – a sentiment that turned into a nation-wide movement in the UK after the editors of the *Oxford Junior Dictionary* started dropping words such as 'acorn' and 'wren' because of their lack of use. After all this, Macfarlane begins an apotheosis of sorts—becoming the most compelling nature writer of our age with multiple outputs and collaborations spilling forth—thus we end up with Macfarlanism. This term may at first seem depreciatory, but I use it here to refer to a number of phenomena that swirl about this writer.

At heart Macfarlanism is scholarly and considered, it is crafty and evocative, it looks back to aspects of pre-Industrial Britain and celebrates other approaches and conceptualisations of site. In the end it reasonably asks its readers to transform their worldview. There is a mysticism here, but it is not written for environmental mystics, rather it inhabits a middle ground that has ensured Macfarlane himself is much more widely read than

many of his fellow nature writers. The quintessence of this (dare I call it) 'movement' can be found in his exceptionally well-researched introduction to Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*. This book, written by Shepherd in 1940, was hidden in a drawer until 1977. Macfarlane promotes a new edition of the book by framing her as a being who at one with the Cairngorms—the Scottish mountain range she spent her life exploring. She stands in Macfarlane's eyes as both the ancestor of, and the great example for, the new nature-human relationship that he suggests needs to develop amongst us.

Then to *ness*: this extended poem in prose form is, as one would expect, alive with the words of nature. It is still delightful and revealing to find here a vocabulary of the natural world that is both inside us and somehow also new—we know the words Macfarlane uses and yet it has been a long time since we have read them. This adds to the pleasure of reading the book, and also to its argument.

The plot rests on the dramatic tension that is established between natural force and personified intent. There is a human presence here—an idealised set of persons conspire—an Armourer, a Botanist, an Engineer and others. They plan a test detonation. They sing a 'firing song' to prepare the bomb. They work in the Green Chapel where a missile lay in wait. There are other human things about—we read of domes, laboratories and also of old fishing nets and other human detritus. There is a human existence inferred here, but it is a ghostly one. Against these, a *He*, a *She*, and a *They* join the plot. We know them through their accumulation of natural attributes,

> *They* are stone-deaf & sea-eyed & their calm is the deep calm of deep time, the cold calm of cold time, & their closeness is as old as rock & ocean & their motion as ancient as wave & shore & their rhythm is that of growth & erosion & you could not say of them that they are several or single & they have flint in their being & they send stones through time to foretell their seeing & their speech is shingle.
>
> & they have the patience of granite & the ardour of lava & the speed of starlight (p. 59).

But it is the process of movement that is key here, and the poet returns regularly to the force of Drift who takes on his/her/its own glorious existence…

> Drift is the wood out of which humans were first carved. Drift dislikes being made to represent anything, because Drift disapproves strongly of symbolism, allegory & indeed all systems of fungibility

> which devalue the glittering particularity of all the Drift makes. Drift is matter plus motion & that is the end of it.
>
> Listening to Drift is one of the most beautiful sounds in the world, as beautiful as listening to your child breathe in the darkness.
>
> Drift is an avocet skull writhing with maggots. Drift is a Colgate-Palmolive Teeth-Whitening Toothpaste tube, no top. Drift is a seal corpse with a zither-rig jaw & off-planet fur. Drift is kelp & bladderwrack. Drift is long-line hooks & seine net. Drift is jerrycan & doll's head, & Drift is beached sperm whale, sheer-sided as a battleship, downwind of which you cannot stand, leaking red into the rocks, watching the world grey out through one tiny upwards eye (p. 19).

The poetry here comes in the repetition and the evocative listing of things elemental to each scene described. An ampersand is used over and over throughout the work to build these elements into emotive images. The whale is battleship, but the drama here is in the dying of the beast, the concept of "battleship" merely a ghostly comparison that will also drift away. This fading away of the human is emphasised by noting what is left here of civilization. Amidst the seaweed and animal corpses—the cycle of life—we find disconnected traces: the doll's head, the jerry can, the fishing line.

But most important of all (for its taxonomy is so lengthily described) is the topless tube of toothpaste, brand-name given, and specific function recorded. The durability of these human traces amounts to another force, another character present here. In one way a human audience is addressed—we are told that Drift is like listening to your sleeping child—but it is also clear that Drift has its own world of meaning beyond not only symbolism and allegory, but well *beyond* the human and how we order the world—it is its own order and it will prevail. Throughout this small book Macfarlane is seeking to discover what non-human agents can tell this story. It is in this quest for non-human 'personas' that *ness* pushes us into consideration of an apocalyptic post-humanness.

To further understand what is taking place, we should consider the term 'Ness'. Retained in elements of place names, in Middle English the word stood for a promontory, cape, or headland. It refers to that which juts out, is prominent or leads. Ness has some redolence of the truncation of a woman's name (Vanessa?) so has a warmth to it, but as a suffix traces out the essence of a phenomenon—putting human'ness' up against natural'ness.' This poem thus asks us to consider deep qualities, and essences—the biggest of which is 'is human essence essential to the

planet'? This makes *ness* an intense little rumination on existence. Indeed, the book opens by asking the reader to quieten themselves and listen instead to Ness:

> Listen. Listen now. Listen to Ness.
> Ness speaks. Ness speaks gull, speaks wave, speaks bracken & lapwing, speaks bullet, ruin, gale, deception.
> Ness speaks pagoda, transmission, reception, Ness speaks pure mercury, utmost secret, swift current, rapid-fire… (p. 5).

As a new move for Macfarlane, this fictional rendering brings potent imagery and a range of emotions that are ghostly, sad, and confronting to the reader. From the perspective of modern poetry, *ness* shows very little concern with a (human) persona's perception of the natural world – rather it seeks to voice nature directly. It is a voice that is foreboding and relentless, but one that remains, nevertheless, more noble than any human perception. Thus as poetry *ness* is novel and exciting and if it has poetic antecedents I can only think of Ted Hughes' *Crow* or much more distantly Pablo Neruda's *Odas elementales*. As nature writing, *ness* opens a whole new speculative realm for Macfarlane and a new field for his dexterity with language. At this level, *ness* is welcome. It adds a new and fascinating dimension to the ongoing development of Macfarlanism.

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Thomas M. Alexander, *The Human Eros: Eco-Ontology the Aesthetics of Existence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 438, ISBN 978082325121 (Pbk).

The Human Eros issues from two decades of the author's essays contemplating philosophies of the "aesthetics of existence." Alexander's approach to art and aesthetics is structured into quadrants incorporating philosophical provocations relating to Dewey's "humanistic empiricism" or "cultural naturalism," and includes among many—Emerson, Santayana, Buddhism, and Native American cultures. For Alexander, aesthetics is an "existential phenomenology" or with the "need to experience meaning and value," and sees the "cultural anthropologists'" symbolism as critical to the philosopher. This view has a heightened relevance when consumers now know the price of everything and the value of nothing. *The Human Eros* considers Dewey's lifelong frustrations "contextualised within the

fundamentally noncognitive enterprise of experience" not as "an epistemology of *knowledge*," but, in Alexander's opinion, as "the nature of an aesthetics of *learning*." This accompanies an integration of Asian and Indigenous traditions within his analysis as "eco-ontology." While Alexander's text is biographical in referencing Dewey's [r]evolution in light of his peers and the ideologies of the time (Hegel, James, Morris, Pierce, Royce, and so on), these essays would be lost on readers unfamiliar with Dewey and his peers. Rather, *The Human Eros* produces the impulse and momentum to introduce or reencounter these figures and texts in parallel.

Recollection is too dim to appreciate these essays' fresh perspectives as philosophical journeys contextualised by Alexander within four sections: 'Nature and Experience'; 'Eros and Imagination'; 'Aesthetics of Existence'; and 'Spirit and Philosophy'. His theories on Dewey are considerably more opaque than those on Santayana as respresented in his essays 'Santayana's Sage: The Disciplines of Aesthetic Enlightenment' and 'Beauty and the Labyrinth of Evil: Santayana and the Possibility of Naturalistic Mysticism' whereby Alexander sees Santayana's "philosophical allegiances [as] nothing less that the realization of a "lay religion" that provided for spiritual liberation through a systematic discipline, and his work deserves to be read this way," and as "tools, like Buddhist sutras." This is not to suggest Alexander fails to give an essential framing for all essays, he does by using the Greeks, and modern and postmodern, as well as classical, philosophical tropes, as in 'Between Being and Emptiness: Toward an Eco-ontology of Inhabitation'. In this sense, as a guide to the exploration of aesthetics, *The Human Eros* provides a foundational reference source for committed undergraduates of Philosophy and Studies in Religion, as well as being thought provoking for specialist scholars.

'The Spirituality of the Possible in John Dewey's *A Common Faith*' is a more pronounced call for the necessity of texts read in collaboration, which Alexander argues "stresses the importance of a type of spirituality primarily oriented toward possibility rather than actuality." Alexander's insights offer what is routinely overlooked in the prevalent understandings of each philosopher's premises. A Native American wisdom tradition is considered in 'Creating with Coyote: Toward a Native American Aesthetics' by looking at "four points of contrast Native American 'creation' models offer to the Western." This is prefaced by "Hebrew,

Hellenic, and Romantic origination tropes [and, again] Greek concerns," revealing their "oddities" and prevalent characteristics.

The fruits of these decades lead this volume to meet what Alexander writes is "Beyond the inquiry into the ideals of wisdom and the ecology of nature, philosophy has a critical, reconstructive role in the present…diagnos[ing] the deeper underlying problems of civilizations so these problems may be intelligently overcome." *The Human Eros*' awareness, contemplation and reframing of ancient, modern and postmodern philosophical wisdom and tropes is essential, given one's future can only be a projection that is envisioned by one's knowledge of the past, and past experience. To imagine otherwise is impossible. Or as Alexander states "'being' (or 'existence', for Dewey) is not grounded in *fixed identity* but in *dynamic continuity.*"

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Susan Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); 378 pp. ISBN 978022663275-9.

"A meditation on the story of the Tower of Babel" is how Susan Stewart describes her most recent book, taking Genesis 11:1-9 as her unexpected reference point for understanding ruins in art, history, and literature (p. xiv). In the Tower of Babel story, Stewart sees an allegory of human building and its opposites: scattering, abandonment, ephemerality. According to Stewart, ruins evoke powerful reactions because they speak to the human inclination to build, to create meaning through marking the earth, as well as anxiety about losing meaning through exposure to time. Considered as such, her book presents the compelling argument that ruins remain central to the ontology and theology of the West, in addition to its architectural and social history.

Stewart's emphasis on the Tower of Babel story instead of, say, Shelley's "Ozymandias," is typical of her book's chronological breadth and intellectual ingenuity. Her book begins in ancient Egypt with Sarenput's restoration of fallen tombs, taking in, among other topics: Babel's affinities with the Mesopotamian ziggurat and city lament; Sodom, Gomorrah, and Tyre's divine destruction; the Roman practice of erasing inscriptions of

disgraced persons (*damnatio memoriae*); Anglo-Saxon ruins elegy; Renaissance Nativity painting's appropriation of pagan ruins; the importance of ruins images to the development of printmaking; William Blake's iconoclastic enthusiasm for Greek and Roman antiquity; and Eliot's fragmentary allusions in "The Waste Land." By expanding her enquiry beyond Romanticism and the long nineteenth century, Stewart contextualises familiar debates about ruins representation in new and suggestive ways. For example, rather than offer another rejoinder to Marjorie Levinson's New Historicist contention that Wordsworth excludes the poor and working-class from "Tintern Abbey," Stewart shows that the question of human figures in Romantic ruins has a parallel tradition in Piranesi's engravings and Goethe's travel diaries.

While Stewart's book is not confined to architecture, several chapters make noteworthy contributions to aesthetic theory. "Works of art tell us a great deal about our attitudes toward materiality," Stewart writes, suggesting that ruins representations give ruins an existence beyond their decaying material forms, even as they remind audiences of that materiality (p. xiii). Art in this doubled formulation is the attempt to contrive meaning out of what Stewart calls the "mortality of intended forms," both its own finite artistic materials and the mutable physical world (p. xiv). A version of this argument informs the book's best chapter, "The Unfinished: On the Nonfinality of Certain Works of Art." Here Stewart's focus is unfinished artworks, artworks that, owing to circumstance or design, lack "finality of form" (p. 230). In Wordsworth's continual revisions to *The Prelude,* Stewart locates art's meaning-making potential in the very absence of a finished form, going on to account for the appeal of unfinished artworks, from sketches and poetic fragments to modernist collage and earthworks, in the same terms. Observations such as these, theoretically informed and tied to specific artistic practices, are the highlight of Stewart's uncommonly wide-ranging study, which also considers more traditional aesthetic definitions of the ruin as sublime (terror from a safe distance) and picturesque (rough textures and irregularity as pleasurable).

It is appropriate that a book about building should itself be a model of scrupulous construction. Each of the book's eight chapters is an unhurried succession of primary sources, intuitively fitted together and extensively quoted from. Stewart is an accomplished poet and her criticism is read as much for its conceptual elegance as its topical focus, though some readers may find her Wittkowerian erudition more akin to an annotated bibliography or reference work than an academic monograph.

Stewart's use of the aphorism is notable here, condensing pages of exegesis into an unexpectedly vivid turn of phrase: "the pathos of shipwrecks, the most ephemeral and untraceable of ruins" (p. 10); "Ruins, like trees, live beyond us and raise the haunting thought that what we have made may outlive us, even as a species" (p. 15); "It is not ruin, but preservation, that is the exception" (p. 33). The book is superbly illustrated, with 11 color plates and 80 halftones. These images depict many of the ruins discussed by Stewart in the chapters, while adding to her claim that still images of ruins create special challenges for interpretation because they cannot easily represent the causes of ruination.

"Resisting Ruin" is the title of Stewart's final chapter, which considers the question: "What can escape the oblivion of time passing?" (p. 264). Nothing, according to *What Good Are the Arts?* by John Carey, because our experience of time is negligible on the scale of geological time, wherein no human culture will endure. Carey's contrarianism stems from his antipathy to art's worship as secular religion in Clive Bell and others, offering instead that art has no inherent value compared to any other human activity. Stewart, lacking any commensurate scores to settle, understands her question considerably less starkly than does Carey. Stewart would say that as long as there is a concept of human culture that is knowable and experienceable by human beings, it is possible and worthwhile to enquire into which of its varied forms may be able to survive across time. On these more modest terms, Stewart proposes that language alone is capable of resisting ruin, even more than art: "Actual speech may be degraded, incoherent, or used to lie or harm, but our human capacity for language cannot be irreparably damaged so long as human life endures with an intent to be understood" (pp. 269-270). Language allows for the "meaning and material" that is culture, to rephrase Stewart's thesis in the words of her book's subtitle, since it is through language that experiences of shared value can be preserved and communicated. Stewart concludes by returning to where the book began, the Tower of Babel story, reminding us that it was through a common language that building first became possible: though language, the builders are able to "start over, beginning again to build structures of intelligibility, to work and re-form from the ground up" (p. 50).

Stewart's appeal to language as the founding material of shared human making may not appease the contrarians among us, but for readers

wanting some measure of optimism about our common future in these uncertain times, her book offers a salutary lesson.

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John Kaag, *Hiking With Nietzsche: Becoming Who You Are* (London: Granta, 2018); 272 pp. ISBN 9781783784943

It may sound dismissive to describe this book as a kind of Nietzsche 101. But in one sense that's what it is—a great way to connect with, or reconnect with, this mountain-striding proto-father of the postmodern. The book ends with a timeline of the philosopher's life, a selected bibliography, and suggested further reading, so, it does indeed function as an introductory textbook (although, a few of the suggested translations into English of Nietzsche's works are by Walter Kaufmann from the 1960s and 1970s—is this nostalgia by Kaag? or are these still the best translations available in English?) The author covers his subject's life and work in a roughly chronological manner moving through the philosopher's major works and putting them into cultural, philosophical, temporal, and locative contexts. But this book is also Kaag's personal story and this brings in an additional narrative element that makes this prose compelling. In the first half of the book we meet the author as a nineteen-year-old American student, bank account charged with a generous stipend, roaming at will the alpine paths of Zarathustra and staying at the Nietzsche-*haus* itself (Kaag's room was on the other side of a hallway from the sparsely-furnished chamber where so much of the philosopher's works were composed). But we also meet the adult Kaag, the academic returning to the area, this time with his child and Kant-espousing wife in tow, and seemingly on the edge of a mid-life crisis. During this second visit, the family Kaag takes up residence in the Hotel Waldhaus, an imposing alpine establishment built soon after Nietzsche's death. Here the mature author begins to contemplate how his travel companions seem to be killing the lone wolf, *Übermensch* buzz that the teen Kaag so luxuriantly revelled in. With the author making such a comparison, *Hiking With Nietzsche* becomes a meditation on the author's own life of responsibility and the deadening that comes with routine.

Kaag is very good at linking life themes to the philosopher's biography and his own; perhaps the most significant of these is fatherhood.

The way the author weaves stories of his own (mostly absent) father, with his own experiences of being a father, and compares these to Nietzsche's relationship both to his own pastor-father and, later in life, his surrogate cultural father—Richard Wagner—makes for delightful, harrowing, insightful reading. At times, Kaag is honest enough to highlight where he errs on the side of the self-obsessed philosopher-arsehole within when it comes to the treatment of his own wife and daughter on the trip—he is happy to get lost in the high hills behind the hotel rather than meet appointments with his family—and there is a modicum of blame and unease he directs towards their existence. Somewhere in all this, he also confesses that he never really wanted to be a father, a confession that no parent should be eager to commit to writing. Ironically, this revelation comes amidst discussions on Nietzsche's ideas of the eternal return and of making bold and sure commitments in life, lest you have to live with the consequences in repeat mode for all eternity. Again, ironically, Kaag emphasises the surefootedness one must exhibit when walking these mountainous paths. This alpine atmosphere seems precisely not the place to be unsure on a whole range of different levels. Nevertheless, the dynamic exchange between biography, autobiography, and Kaag's interpretation of Nietzsche's writings climax in the following passage, which is directed to one specific book of the philosopher's, but addresses much more:

> There is much that is incisive and much that is wrong-headed about *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Its four parts, composed between 1882 and 1885, are the most hotly contested writings in Nietzsche's corpus. Some say they are brilliant. Others, many others, say they are nonsense. But I think that one thing is true. Even those who disprove them cannot disprove the person behind the scenes. The contradiction and paradox that one sees in Zarathustra is, to some faint extent, Nietzsche himself. And this, I believe, is no paradox. There is, in the midst of the inconsistency, a brave degree of fidelity between the book and its author, but also, if we're honest, the book and its reader. It maps the divided nature of the modern mind (p. 96).

Perhaps this is what subsequent Nietzsche-phile philosophers sought to grasp when they built their own systems of thought upon the deeply-poetic influence of the Alpine-dweller, and by so doing ensured that Nietzsche's heroic declarations would be canonised in Western philosophy despite his critics. We are also, here, close to the book's main theme: Nietzsche may be many things to many people, but he was, if nothing else, himself and should be studied in the first instance from this biographical position if his works are to make the most complete sense. Kaag develops

this line of approach very well, but such a discussion nevertheless has its limitations. Perhaps one thing that Kaag, the American in Switzerland, helped me grasp myself was the way in which Nietzsche's project could be understood as an extension of the project of the New England transcendentalists and in particular Emerson. In each, the heroic hyper-autonomy of the individual is a main concern. Kaag the family man has to negotiate away a great deal of this hyper-autonomy and mourns that he must.

On p. 107 we read that in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) the author had "two primary targets: Kant and women." This again brings home the great battle between the Nietzschean idea of free spirit and the ethical obligations of Kant (and, no doubt, of Kaag's wife, who sees this journey not as a plunge into a quest for the romantic autonomy of the self, but as a family holiday). Through it all, Kaag remains inside his Nietzschean conundrum and is unwilling or unable to problematise the radical construction of the individual as it has grown in the twentieth century from Emerson and Thoreau, through Nietzsche and onto Margaret Thatcher's infamous declaration that there is no such thing as society. The idea of the hyper-autonomous individual is a particular social construction that can only be resolved by understanding that we are by our very nature intensely social beings. But Kaag has problems completely seeing this. Moreover, the only way to ignore the fact of our social-enmeshment is by removing ourselves from society through some brand or form of asceticism. Nietzsche stands out as one of the first great anti-religious ascetics of the modern period; a monk who must fashion his own morality. But because of this Western cultural baggage, we cannot see either Nietzsche's works nor Kaag's view of Nietzsche as universally applicable, nor in most instances desirable.

Kaag shows us how an idea of absolute self-autonomy mutates through *Genealogy of Morals* (1887) to a discussion of master and slave mentalities. The author gives us a delightful symbol in Augustus. Here is a potent model of a 'master' who, whilst on excursion in Rome, Kaag presents to his students. When he asks these students what they think of the mighty Roman "a jerk" is the reply (p. 124). In explaining both this reaction and Nietzsche's explanation of it, Kaag writes:

> The ruler is deemed 'a jerk' when slave mentality makes him accountable, makes him guilty—for his strength, that is—makes him blameworthy for not humbling himself or feigning weakness. The master is always free to give up his powers, to make himself as a

> lamb, to submit to the docility of the herd. That he is unwilling to do so is a symbol of his moral depravity—an arrogance bordering on hubris—which the society of slaves can never forgive (pp. 125-126).

As an explanation of Nietzsche's concept of 'slave thinking' this is well put, but Kaag leaves this explanation and moves on without considering that Christianity and other systems of faith (including nationalisms) present a *communitas* that will always threaten the Western cult of hyper-autonomous self. And perhaps an idea such as this is better assessed by a Durkheim than the self-fashioned monk of Sils Maria.

There are two very good reasons why this book is useful. The first, as mentioned, is the way Kaag provides a chronological development to Nietzsche's œuvre. The early works under the influence of Wagner are dealt with in part I. This section closes with *Ecce Homo* and the pyramidal rock in the Engadine where Nietzsche was hit with the idea of the eternal return. An idea that Nietzsche makes his own even though it relates back strongly to the thinking of Schopenhauer. The other useful aspect of this book is how, in its own charming way, it develops a kind of philosophical field research. Which is to say, when we consider the output of philosophers we must remain aware of *where* they worked, and, with family in tow, Kaag provides us with a frank insight into how one pursues a philosophical being-in-the-field while also dealing with so many other life pressures. It is this *locative* dimension of the book that informed me most.

On his second visit to Sils Maria, Kaag turns the Waldhaus itself into a kind-of staging area to display the growth of Nietzsche's influence after his death. In concluding the book, Kaag shows how this hotel becomes an incubation space for the likes of Adorno, Marcuse, and Horkenheimer (leaders of the Frankfurt School), and it is a realm where literary greats such as Thomas Mann, and Herman Hesse hid and wrote while Nietzsche's ghost lingered near-by. Each of these writers in their own way, carried forward the legacy of Nietzsche into popular, philosophical, and high literary culture, and perhaps all of them connected with an attitude inherent in the place, Kaag explains:

> When one spends time alone in the mountains, where the air is thin and pure and the ground is cold and sharp, there is an inclination to make oneself equally perfect: thin pure cold and sharp. And this perfectionism—measuring oneself against the grandeur of the mountains—can make the return to the lowlands, and life with others, difficult. It can also feed the ascetic ideal (p. 127).

This is backed up by the following quote which for any reader of Nietzsche must be the most sensible way to think oneself into his works: "When he

walked this trail, skirting the water, Nietzsche wrote that he frequently wept "not sentimental tears, but tears of exultation." When you read Nietzsche in a library or a coffee shop, it is possible to misinterpret this as hyperbole or the ravings of a madman. But not here… The intensities of my feeling," he claimed, "make me shudder and laugh aloud" (p. 71).

Kaag could have gone further in discussing Nietzsche's project as a reaction to and an amplification of a very Western ideal of self—so that if there is a criticism of this book it would be the inability of Kaag, emotionally and intellectually, to step clear of the shadow of his subject. The sense of place that Kaag conveys here and the influence it had on the philosopher, however, provides the key point of this charming and very readable work.

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