

---

## REVIEWS

Reviews are published in alphabetical order according to the name of the author reviewed.

---

Ottmar Ette. *Transarea. A Literary History of Globalization*. Translated by Mark W. Person. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016. 356p.

CAMILO JARAMILLO

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Ottmar Ette's work feels at home within the Hispanic tradition, and most specifically, within Caribbean cultural and literary history. Although it recurrently searches around the world, it does so only to come back and reaffirm the archipelagic region as a point of encounter and intersection of global routes. In this sense, if the Caribbean seems to be Ette's intellectual niche, it is only so to the extent that the Caribbean highlights all too well that which seems to be a persistent motive in his intellectual drive: the idea that spaces are not static, but rather defined by the history of movements that occupy and intersect them. These concerns, which have appeared in some of his previous books, seem to have reached a maturity in his 2012 *Transarea. Eine literarische Globalisierungsgeschichte*. Now, four years later, translated with a smooth and engaging rhythm and clarity by Mark W. Person, *Transarea. A Literary History of Globalization* (2016) is available to English readers and, with them, to the academic fields of global and area studies, world literature, and Latin American academia.

In a moment where nationalisms are being dangerously reaffirmed, and immigration has been turned into the battleground of exclusive politics, Ette's *Transarea* departs by asking about the ways in which literature and art can become privileged forms of knowledge about diversity, plurality, and exchange. The book does this by proposing a study of globalization through literature. It is, in this sense, a historiographic exercise that delivers a history of the ways in which literature, from its early modern stages up to today, has been revealing a world that has developed through its connectedness. The point, though, is not so much to show globalization as a phenomenon always already present, but to highlight this evidence as a form of knowledge that transforms our understanding of the world. As Ette puts it, world literature and its evidence of an ever-connected world "make possible for us a complexity of sensory thinking and experiencing—that is neither reductive nor

---

seeks to mask contradiction- of that which makes up the life of and upon our planet, life that is understandable only by multiple logics” (6). As a study of globalization in literature in a world of tense social and environmental circumstances, *Transarea* enters into a dialogue with other recent publications addressing similar matters, like Ursula K. Heise’s ecocritical *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), Rachel Price’s examination of Cuba in a global post-Fidel era *Planet/ Cuba: Art, Culture, and the Future of the Island* (2015), and Hector Hoyos’ reflection on globalization in Latin American literature *Beyond Bolano: The Global Latin American Novel* (2016), just to name a few.

Grounded in literature, *Transarea* is also successfully *transdisciplinary* as it performs its cultural criticism onto cartography, visual culture, plastic arts, and the electronic archive. Navigating through an incredibly diverse corpus of materials, mostly from the Spanish speaking tradition (hence the importance of this book for Hispanic studies), but also from all around the world, Ette consolidates a 21<sup>st</sup> century field of study centered in the prefix *trans*. Along with the transdisciplinary, Ette’s book highlights the transcultural, translinguistic, transtemporal, transmedia, and transpatial instances that denote movement and transformation. He proposes a shift from area and local studies into a conception of spaces that can only be adequately understood through the movements and dynamics that traverse and occupy them. We are invited to conceive of space as the sum of the movements that its history comprises, and history itself as a sum of movements. As its “Mission Statement” makes clear, *Transarea Studies* “point out mobile conceptions of spaces and places,” “emphasize vectorial dynamisms and perspectives,” and “analyze translocal, transregional, transnational, and transcontinental phenomena” (54). The objective is to generate an understanding of the world in which commonly conceived hierarchies become limiting and obsolete once they are understood through the relativity of their position. As an example, the Caribbean, as a hub of imperial routes, brings together movements from Europe and Africa articulating an image of globalization that is less anchored in Europe than in South-South relations. This, in itself, subverts and transforms the geographical orders that we have come to naturalize.

Ette’s identifies four stages of accelerated globalization. The first is the period of Iberian colonial expansion and, within it, the creation of a new world order. He focuses on the study of maps and texts from a range of names that include, among others, Juan de la Cosa, Benedetto Bordone,

---

Marco Polo, and Jean-Léon l'Africain. He asserts that the maps and the texts of imperial expansion are the first epistemologies of globalization. Ette directs his attention to the emergence of the Tropics and, most importantly, the Caribbean archipelago as a metaphor and formula for interconnectedness and interplanetary relations. This leads him to conceive the Tropics not only as the *transareal* space par excellence, but as one of the first spaces of accelerated globalization.

Ette posits the second phase of accelerated globalization to be the one that developed from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, where England and France lead the imperial control. This is the moment where sciences consolidated and the Enlightenment came to be. With readings of texts by Francisco Javier Clavijero, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, and one of Ette's favorites, Alexander von Humboldt, the book highlights transareal relationships in the fact that Europe's expansion of colonial knowledge brought up none other than the independence of most of its colonies. This, once again, shifts the spatial hierarchies through which Europe positioned itself.

The third phase of accelerated globalization is the one marked by the decline of European powers and the rise of the United States at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter analyzes the Cuban José Martí and the Philippine José Rizal as authors whose texts and politics critique the rise of neocolonial imperialism, and the consolidation of uneven modern development. By focusing on the archipelagic nature of Cuba and the Philippines and its criticism of imperial politics, *Transarea* underlines once again the category of the island and the tropics as archetypes of a type of thought that necessarily defies a single model and single logic in the intersections of a globalized world.

By studying the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, French J. M. G. Le Clézio, Cuban José Lezama Lima, and Japanese Yoko Tawada, Ette examines the fourth phase of accelerated globalization, a stage defined by the military and economic rise of the United States, and the spread and unification of markets and communication systems. As a final chapter that reaches our present and delves into the ways in which we cannot but be connected, *Transarea* makes clear that our current world is not a *creatio ex nihilo* (Ette 29), but the resulting consequence of long processes of exchanges that have the potential of revealing a horizontal and transdependent world.

Ottmar Ette's *Transarea* offers, then, a literary history of globaliza-

---

tion and an analysis of how literature becomes a source of knowledge that alerts us that the spaces we inhabit and the histories that we claim as our own have been dependent on our connectedness. This is not a praise for globalization nor a condemnation. It is, rather, a call to return to literature as the source of polylogical thinking; a return to literature as the primary source and mirror of a plurivocal world that needs to be always in motion to accommodate, peacefully and in the best way possible, all of us.

---

James Franco. *Straight James/Gay James*. East Brunswick: Hanson Publishing Group, 2016. 60p.

DANIEL CURETON

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY

James Franco has tantalized and enthralled the masses as one of Hollywood's heartthrobs since he entered the scene in the late 1990s. Many do not realize that he is a highly educated and literate writer with several master's degrees. One of his recently published works, *Straight James/Gay James*, is a small book of poetry and dialogue that touches on the personal, familiar, and the inner dialogues of James Franco's life.

It opens with a youthful poem in rhyming stanza called "Dumbo," reflecting on how drinking never let him fly away to escape his circumstances and follow his dreams. A simple opening, yet powerful in the way Franco eases the reader into the book for a few pages before offering up deep narratives and moving stanzas. Other poems follow suit, moving back and forth between rhyme and free style, all the while painting a picture of the struggle of his life, relationships, and eventually the discovery of happiness: his art. Pitting his art against the stream of his life, Franco displays a depth of sincerity with the prose and flowing stanzas that allow readers to enter his world, understand the personal, frame the outside narrative, and see the inside workings of the eccentric, laughable, and internal center of his creativity.

The real central display is Franco's postmodern existential discussion interview with himself as interviewer and interviewee. Popular media for years questioned his sexuality, and Franco has finally laid that to bed in this meta comical dialogue, using humor, wit, and saccharin condescension to mock the media, all the while continuing to enshroud in shadow his behavior and motives, yet stroking his ego and showing off his slide between queer

---

and heterosexual intersectionality.

Franco's work shows depth and maturity, bringing in poetic themes that teeter on sacrilegious, obscene, and tender, but still being able to show his mastery of poetry while nodding to the father of free verse, Walt Whitman.

---

Ruth Franklin. *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*. New York: Norton, 2016. 607pp.

DARRYL HATTENHAUER

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY WEST

Ruth Franklin has credibility as both a literary critic and a journalist. Her first book, *A Thousand Darknenses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (Oxford UP) studies fourteen different writers. She has been an editor and contributor for such prestigious periodicals as *The New Republic*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *Harper's*. Her newest book balances scholarship with journalism and is as thoroughly researched as an academic biography, yet readable. In addition, it deploys Franklin's knowledge of form, feminism, history, and psychology. For some scholars, her biography of Shirley Jackson would be more useful if it theorized those fields. For others, it will be a relief not to read another cliché-monger who is clearing a space for interrogating what is at stake.

Other aspects of this book will frustrate academics. For example, it treats matters of authorial intent as if they are not problematic. Similarly, the handling of narrative point-of-view is simplistic. For example, Franklin states that *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* "is told entirely from the perspective of" Merricat. This passive voice obscures the agent of the action. It implies that a third-person narrator tells the story with Merricat as the focalization character. But Merricat is the narrator. Another problem is that Franklin confuses genre and mode. For example, she treats "suspense" as if it were a genre.

Academics might also be disappointed that there is hardly anything about Hyman and Jackson's road trip to Flannery O'Connor's homes in Milledgeville, Georgia. They drove there to interview O'Connor's mother as research for the essay Hyman was writing about O'Connor. Flannery had just died (and Shirley would follow soon after). The loss of these two fiction writers left a gap in the run-up to postmodernism, an era in which O'Connor and

---

Jackson played an important part. Indeed, it is significant that Jackson's publisher (when considering in the early 1960's who Shirley's next editor should be) assigned her the man who had discovered Thomas Pynchon. On the other hand, Jackson's deservedly unpublished review of Donald Barthelme's first book, a volume of short stories, shows she had little understanding of postmodern absurdism. While Franklin recognizes that the characters in *The Sundial* are "absurd," (380) she does not discuss the absurdism that the post-modernists would retain from the late modernists.

Particularly vexing is the mode of documentation--and often the lack of it. Rather than use scholarly footnotes or endnotes numbered in the main narrative, Franklin uses a journalistic style of excluding such numbers. Instead, the cited passages (gathered at the end of the book) appear by the page number on which those passages appear in the main narrative. As a result, you never know what she is going to document. You have to keep flipping to the back to find out. The publisher's inattention to documentation also emerges. For example, the date of 1915 under a photo of Jackson as a toddler is an error. She wasn't born until 1916. On the whole, the apparatus is cumbersome for academic readers, though unobtrusive for a popular audience. Also bothersome for academics is that the bibliography is severely selected. Most academic sources do not appear. Indeed, when Franklin says "critics," she usually includes only journalists who wrote book reviews for the newspapers of Jackson's era. For instance, Franklin often refers to Orville Prescott, whom James Purdy satirized as "Doyley Pepsout." To find out if a particular scholarly work informs the narrative, you have to look in the index for the author's name.

Jackson's children deserve a medal for providing new details about Jackson and Hyman. They have done a great service for this book's audience, be they scholars looking for raw material or more casual readers seeking an informative biography. Indeed, her children are evidently more interested in establishing the record than they are in whitewashing it, for they make available a lot of revealing information about Jackson and Hyman, not to mention their friends, relatives, and colleagues. A case in point is the account of the possible dalliance between Jackson and Dylan Thomas, but Franklin suggests it was little more than hugging. Similarly, Franklin discusses the possibility that Jackson's Uncle Clifford molested her, but regards the chances as negligible. Yet the *Bird's Nest's* and *Hangsaman* raise the issue of adults molesting minors.

---

Also exculpatory is the selection of many of Jackson's drawings. Most of those reproduced here exhibit the safe humor of Jackson's domestic fiction. Largely excluded are the ones that show her hostility towards Hyman. For example, there is one in her papers at the Library of Congress depicting her creeping up behind Hyman with a hatchet--reminiscent of Lizzie Borden, who figures in *The Sundial* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. In fact, Franklin does not discuss Jackson's diary entry that clearly implies that he forced himself on her.

But all of that is tolerable if you consider the data Franklin brings forth. Her detective work in finding and using newly discovered sources provides raw material that scholars will be using for a long time. Although she does not focus on forming new readings of Jackson's work, there are some impressive new insights. Of special note is the discussion of *The Witchcraft of Salem Village*, Jackson's non-fiction book for adolescents. In the best analysis of this book to date, Franklin investigates the witch trials in terms of not only their causes in the Puritan milieu, but also their impact on the twentieth-century. Although she notes the influence that the Puritan tradition had on "The Lottery" and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, she overlooks its effect on *The Sundial*. Halloran's illusion of a new world that is innocent of the old one extends the Puritans' belief in themselves as a saving remnant. Indeed, the ideology of American exceptionalism originates in seventeenth-century New England. American apocalyptic myths developed centuries before McCarthyism and the advent of the atom bomb.

Nonetheless, this biography is valuable for the attention it brings to Jackson's position in American society in general, and in women's issues in particular. Most of the chapters cover the context around the each book in the order in which they came into print. This arrangement puts the focus less on analyzing each book, but rather on analyzing Jackson's private as well as public situation—on the conditions that influenced their writing, publication, marketing and reception. In so doing, Franklin avoids reducing Jackson to her individual idiosyncrasies. Rather, her interest is in the environment that helped make Jackson's writing what it is. As a result, the book shows almost as much about history as it does about Jackson, her social circle, and her books.

---

Ursula Fricker. *Lügen von gestern und heute*. Munich: Verlagsgesellschaft, 2016, 363p.

ALBRECHT CLASSEN

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Swiss author Ursula Fricker's fourth novel, *Lügen von gestern und heute* ("Lies from Yesterday and Today") follows *Fliehende Wasser* (2004), *Das letzte Bild* (2009) and *Außer sich* (2012). The present novel reflects deeply on the modern refugee crisis and focuses on three major figures—Beba, Otten, and Isa—who enter relationships with each other, apparently in some major German city. First, there is Beba, who might have originated from one of the Balkan countries. She works as a prostitute but really loves music and develops a considerable skill in the course of time, although she refuses to learn how to read notes. This artistic ability connects her with a politician, Otten, who is intrigued by her piano playing in a jazz bar and who heads the interior department as "Innensenator," is responsible for social, economic, and security issues; hence the novel must take place in one of the three German city states with such an officer: Bremen, Hamburg, or Berlin. Beba often reflects on her memories from a war-torn country, which could be Croatia, Bosnia, or the Kosovo, though the specifics do not matter here. The novelist instead conveys the misery and suffering which refugees have to go through, first back home, then in their new home country, where they have to struggle hard to gain economic stability and to overcome the war trauma.

Finally, there is the student Isa who pursues highly idealistic goals and wants to drop out of traditional society, so she joins a leftist terror group, but soon finds herself deeply disappointed after all. Yet, tragically, at the end she assassinates the Senator as a punishment for his decision to expel all refugees from their camp in the factory, which does not, however, solve any issue. Since she belongs to the upper social class and there is no good evidence connecting her with the murder, the police finally refuse to charge her with the deed, which serves as a final catalyst to underscore the author's criticism of the ruling system. Similarly, the politician at first operates harshly against the refugees, but he then remembers his own early years as a radical leftist revolutionary and is about to step down when Isa murders him. This assassination thus proves to be entirely meaningless, being the result of yet another lie.



---

The novel succeeds in conveying the interior and exterior lives of these three protagonists, and makes it possible to recognize how they perceive their own social environment. Often it is not easy to follow their thought patterns, to identify what is going on at specific times, or to distinguish among the various figures and their group context. However, this difficulty might be the very strength of this novel, demonstrating how these three lives are interlaced with each other, and how much the suffering of the refugees who are housed in an empty factory impacts the lives of ordinary people. The terrorist group pretends to be constructive and revolutionary, but realizes soon that they have nothing really to offer, so they fall apart.

The fact that Beba earns her money as a prostitute is brought to full daylight when Otten invites her to his house and when she is later asked to perform for a group of his guests. But she falls in love with a young man and becomes pregnant, both of which make it impossible for her to continue selling her body. The theme of music matters deeply insofar as it connects Beba with her childhood back home and with her new existence in Germany. Fricker systematically probes how traditional society reacts to external challenges, both by the terrorist group and the refugees, and then also by the dissatisfied student. Beba's work as a prostitute also shocks the establishment, but this never undermines her existence, especially because she finally terminates that job. Not much really changes, and the book's title might convey this quite well, since the lies from yesterday continue to today.

Overall, this is a well-written novel, compact, though somewhat confusing, just as confusing as contemporary life easily proves to be. It might be worth comparing this book with the German film *The Educators* (2004), directed by Hans Weingartner, where the three young protagonists also try to rebel against society and quickly realize, once they have kidnapped a rich banker, that they are basically just as bourgeois as their own parents. However, in Fricker's novel there is a significant change, a suggestion that the future might be different, because Beba is an expectant mother. Despite all frustrations that permeate the novel, there is hope.

---

Grant Kaplan. *René Girard, Unlikely Apologist: Mimetic Theory and Fundamental Theology*. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2016. 282p.

JOHN HERDA  
LYON COLLEGE

While René Girard (1923-2015) was known primarily as a literary critic and philosopher, he was not considered a theologian, even though his work is profoundly influenced by Christianity. However, in *Unlikely Apologist*, Grant Kaplan makes a convincing case for Girard being viewed as a Christian apologist, given Girard's pioneering writings on mimetic desire, violence, scapegoating, and his exegesis of the Gospels. Through Kaplan's straightforward prose, he compellingly demonstrates how Girard explains belief anthropologically rather than ideologically, and in doing so engages in an effective dialogue with believers and nonbelievers alike. *Unlikely Apologist* reveals how Girard views culture as a result of religion, instead of religion being a result of culture. For Girard, culture is explained by religion. As a result, Kaplan's work provides academics with a useful resource for understanding Christianity through a Girardian lens.

Appropriately, the author spends a considerable amount of time explaining Girardian mimetic theory, which contends that desire is not original but imitative, and therefore is triangular (subject-model-object), often leading to violent rivalry. Thus, Kaplan gives those who are unfamiliar with Girard's work a comprehensive overview of mimetic desire, which is the cornerstone of understanding Girardian philosophy. In addition, Kaplan ably explains scapegoating by using entertaining examples of recent events in American culture, effectively showing how we still turn our enmity outwards and find a scapegoat, notwithstanding our supposed sophisticated worldviews. The author persuasively explains the innovative insight of Girardian theory through practical examples, rather than abstract jargon. This strategy proves useful, as Kaplan's humorous personality shines through pleasantly in his work, resulting in something that is far from a prosaic theology book intended only for a coterie of Catholic theologians. After all, one of the roles of fundamental theology is to explain belief and engage nonbelievers. By using seemingly pedestrian things like the Cubs-Cardinals rivalry to illustrate the utility of Girardian theory, Kaplan makes the reader want to continue reading. *Unlikely Apologist* is useful because it shows how Girard's work is germane to the times in which we live.

---

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of *Unlikely Apologist* is the confrontation with modern atheism, championed by the late Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and others who regard religion as nothing more than a racket. Kaplan explains the Bible through a Girardian prism, emphasizing how the hermeneutical revelation of Christ being an innocent scapegoat makes Christianity not just another religion, but remarkably unique. Ever the professor of theology, Kaplan demonstrates through Girard how the Gospels reveal the scapegoat mechanism by virtue of Christ's innocence on the Cross. Unlike previous ones, this time the scapegoat is innocent. Thus, the author challenges the New Atheists by underscoring how Christianity is not similar to other religions, but is significantly dissimilar. Kaplan effectively demonstrates the danger of regarding all religions as the same. Indeed, according to Kaplan and others of his ilk, Girard's contention that Christ ends violence by not resisting it has been overlooked by the New Atheists. They miss Girard's point that Christ wants to end sacrifice by his death, rather than perpetuate it. Consequently, Kaplan's aplomb in directly taking on atheism is impressive, regardless of one's belief system. The author's spirited, pugilistic prose in Chapter 7, governed by Girardian philosophy and more importantly, his sincere Christianity, is most engaging, even to the skeptic. Kaplan's argument that society would be even more violent without Christianity is a compelling one, though it is sure to offend some.

Notwithstanding the superb explanation of Girardian theory, the book does have some flaws. When the author discusses how mimetic theory applies to fundamental ecclesiology in Chapter 5, the result is too much Catholic inside baseball and too little René Girard. While interesting, this section is arcane and somewhat inconsistent with the other clear chapters, where Girard's writings are specifically used to support the author's arguments. However, overall, *Unlikely Apologist* is clever, charming, and profound. Kaplan's tome is an excellent resource for understanding the basic tenets of Girardian philosophy, and is specifically useful for religion and philosophy courses. This welcoming, accessible work is sure to make scholars eager to learn more about Girard's important contributions to literary criticism, anthropology, history, and now, thanks to Kaplan, theology.

---

Evangelia Kindinger. *Homebound: Diaspora Spaces and Selves in Greek American Return Narratives*. Editors Alfred Hornung, Anke Ortlepp, and Heike Paul. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2012. 223p.

SENAIDA NAVAR

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Kindinger's *Homebound: Diaspora Spaces and Selves in Greek American Return Narratives* provides many insightful and thorough principles for understanding what home signifies for Greek immigrants. Through her analysis of several travel narratives, Kindinger demonstrates the complexity of what it means to return. From first generation immigrants to subsequent generations, Kindinger depicts the impact of return upon Greek individuals' identities. She lays the foundation for exploring these ideas by providing background on the terminology and concepts, particularly given that many of them are more abstract than they would seem (e.g. home, identity, etc.). Through the use of various scholars, many of whose works function to provide a point of contrast, Kindinger establishes her particular definitions. The author argues for a different way of understanding what it means for Greek diasporic individuals to go back to the "homeland." She proposes a more pluralistic and constructive way of framing the outcomes of these returns beyond the failure/success dichotomy and illustrates how this can work through the careful selection of return narratives that all go beyond the homeland's failure or success at meeting the expectations of returnees.

The book contains five main chapters with subsections that detail specific ideas. The first chapter, along with the book's introduction, ably organizes the framework for the rest of the book. Her intelligent, careful selection of travel narratives portrays a gamut of emotions, from disillusionment to desire for full inclusion into Greek society. Kindinger provides a substantive picture of the divergent ways immigrants can view going home. Her second chapter focuses on what return narratives are and how, while they are a subcategory of travel narratives, they do something that goes beyond travel narratives, for these are not written by cultural outsiders but by immigrants of the culture. Her third chapter concentrates on reconstructing the female diasporic space through previously untold narratives of Greek women. Through the rebuilding of the grandmother's home in *North of Ithaka*, Kindinger highlights how for this particular individual the desire was more about reconstructing her grandmother's home history than it was about her

---

own identity. Conversely, Kindinger's fourth chapter examines the portrayal and perpetuation of Greek masculinity through Greek immigrants. Her final chapter studies two different narratives that highlight the difference in expectations between immigrants. Here Kindinger shows the inseparability between the "homeland" and America for the immigrant. One of these narrators is unable to view Greece through Greek eyes and instead judges it by his American understanding of inclusion along with his nostalgic expectations of the past. The second writer rejects her Americanness in order to be accepted by Greek society. Thus, Kindinger shows that it is important to talk about what America signifies for the diasporic community. Moreover, Kindinger organizes her book in a very deductive geographical format. She begins by looking at the concept of home in its general form then narrows this down with every new chapter until ending with the city of Athens. In doing so, she creates a multilayered work that incorporates spatial, geographical and social concerns while providing a very concise but informative and comprehensive view of what returning to the "homeland" can do for the immigrant, ultimately revealing its function as a sort of coming-of-age for the immigrant.

---

Alicia Kozameh. *Bruno regresa descalzo*. Córdoba, Argentina: Alción, 2016. 399p.

JANIS BRECKENRIDGE

WHITMAN COLLEGE

Alicia Kozameh's most recent fictional work, *Bruno regresa descalzo*, takes the reader on an unusual journey, delving deep into the eponymous character's tumultuous mind. Written almost entirely as stream of consciousness, the novel does not readily conform to a traditional narrative arc. Instead, the carefully crafted plot holds two seemingly disparate but deeply intertwined storylines in unremitting narrative tension. On the one hand, *Bruno regresa descalzo* describes, in exacting detail, the minimalist existence of a sixty-five-year-old man who remains alone in his room staring at a stain on the curtain while lying motionless on the hardwood floor. On the other hand, it presents the chaotic and obsessive ruminations of this former leftist militant, who suffers acute Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, while facilitating the narration of experiences shared by a generation of idealistic Argentines. Consistent

---

throughout is the profound *compañerismo* forged between two revolutionaries, Bruno and his childhood friend, Gustavo. This affective bond proves to be not just unshakable and lifelong, but in fact salvational and lifesaving.

The protagonist—simultaneously trapped in his disordered thoughts, aging body and austere bedroom—remains plagued by survivor guilt despite having endured long-term incarceration and brutal torture without divulging information regarding his *compañeros* or the *Partido*. Throughout the novel he grapples incessantly with the troubling question he directs at himself: “Cómo hace, uno. Cómo se hace para aliviar . . . esa especie de convicción de no merecer la vida” (How does one do this? What does one do to alleviate . . . this kind of conviction of not deserving to be alive, 53). Through a relentless onslaught of personal recollections and erratic musings, he relives and reexamines moments of extreme joy even as he attempts to understand and accept unbearable loss, unimaginable pain and intolerable disillusionment following the movement’s seeming defeat at the hands of the military Junta. The book maintains a kaleidoscopic temporality (a certain timelessness or “atemporalidad” 43) as past and present repeatedly intersect and collide, eventually coalescing into a coherent whole. Time remains fluid for the protagonist who, haunted by an unresolved past, remains overwhelmed by this flood of unassimilated traumatic memories some forty years later: “Que no me venga con que el pasado queda atrás” (Don’t tell me that the past is left behind, 167). Although related in disjointed fashion, the interrelated intrigues of his impassioned political activism, complicated romantic entanglements, imprisonment, exile, and eventual return to Buenos Aires gradually become discernable.

Frequent slippage between his *nom de guerre*, Bruno (as referenced in the title) and his given name, Martín Pietelli, effectively captures the main character’s fractured identity. Likewise, fluid and recurrent shifts between first, third, and occasionally second person narrative voicing suggest the difficulty of coming to terms with profound self-recrimination. In similar fashion, albeit less directly, *Bruno regresa descalzo* further explores the classic mind-body connection. Martín remains cognizant not only of the outwardly erratic yet strangely logical flow of his own thoughts but also of his own physical corporeality. His ever-shifting deliberations alternate between quasi-paranoid assessments of the minutiae of his immediate surroundings (the texture of the flooring, the nature of the stain that can be understood to be observing him rather than he examining it, the precise whereabouts and

---

activities of his wife within the apartment) and deeper reflections regarding his personal involvement and responsibilities in the political struggle that culminated with the atrocities committed during Argentina's last military dictatorship (recalling Party meetings and memos, meditating on the nature of their so-called *derrota* or defeat, and deliberating the inaccuracies of existing terminology including the words *víctimas*, *desaparecidos*, and *sobrevivientes*). At the same time, Martín's thought processes show him to be highly aware both of the positionality of his body and of a discernable lack of control over certain body parts—particularly his trembling knees, hands, and elbows. It remains unclear whether this loss of motor control is the sequelae of physical and psychological torture, a result of alcohol deprivation, the deleterious effect of lying tensely on a hard floor for hours, or merely symptomatic of the natural aging process.

Together, the meticulous structure and assiduous style of *Bruno regresa descalzó* aptly reflect the complexity of the novel's intense emotional and narrative content whereby the frenzied interior state-of-mind sharply contrasts with the exaggerated inactivity and immobility of the main character who literally does not move for well over a hundred pages. The unrelenting series of displaced memories and obsessive concerns which persistently come together, bifurcate, and ultimately converge necessarily result in disjointed, non-chronological storytelling. Moreover, page layouts effectively control the pace of reading. The systematic density of the text as it appears on the page visually reinforces the frantic workings of a hyperactive mind even as Kozameh's intense writing style effectively captures "tanta actividad mental obsesiva" (so much obsessive mental activity, 394). Paragraphs lack indentation and often fail to provide clarifying transitions, appropriately signaling the ways in which obsessive new thoughts enter Martín's mind uncontrollably, abruptly replacing the previous idea under scrutiny. A concomitant lack of dialogue leaves virtually no white space visible on the page, creating a densely compact narrative that offers little pause or respite for the reader. These narrative strategies foster a sense of immediacy while creating a rather demanding, immersive reading experience, arguably functioning to simulate the very processes of traumatic memory itself. The reader, together with the unreliable narrator-protagonist, experiences only the gradual revelation of past events as made accessible through incomplete and often somewhat disconnected narrative fragments. In the end, however, Martín attains a measure of functionality and learns to cope with, if not temporarily escape from, his

---

agonizing internal struggles. At the same time, the novel's dénouement gradually incorporates interactive dialogue (with a noticeable increase in white space) and intensifying narrative action; faster pacing provides the reader with a parallel reprieve and sense of relief. In short, as insinuated in the novel's poetic title (referencing the vulnerability of the very few who escaped from clandestine torture centers during Argentina's so-called dirty war), the extensive novel chronicles an arduous and ongoing recovery process.

And, to be sure, I do not use this term casually, for *Bruno regresa descalzó* carefully sets up the protagonist's relationship to wine and whisky, in addition to his desired isolation and his relentless interior monologue, as symptomatic of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The representation of alcoholism, while at first subtle and somewhat restrained, becomes increasingly manifest and obsessive. The novel's climactic scene reveals the depths of both his guilt-ridden despondency and his chemical dependency; without revealing too much, suffice it to say that the confession of his most haunting traumatic memory coincides with a rock-bottom scenario typical of an addiction narrative. Not coincidentally, Martín's subsequent abstinence from drinking corresponds to affirming (albeit still rather tenuous) reconnections with his best friend and fellow comrades in addition to thoughtful interactions with inquisitive and well-informed students who represent the next generation. Sobriety, companionship, and a renewed call to political activism enable Bruno's return.

*Bruno regresa descalzó* is neither an easy nor a quick read; it is, however, deeply compelling and highly rewarding. The fitful, sporadic, almost convulsive delivery of Bruno's frenetic thoughts coupled with the density of the text itself require a particularly engaged readership. Those who have encountered Alicia Kozameh's prior literary production know that political repression and the legacy of Argentina's last dictatorship inform much of her work. Her first published novel, the semi-autobiographical and highly metafictional *Pasos bajo el agua* (1987) fictionalizes political imprisonment while *259 Saltos, Uno inmortal* (2001) narrates political exile; *Mano en vuelo* (2009), a free-verse extended poem, denounces political violence in a more abstract and lyrical fashion. *Patatas de avestruz* (1988, translated by David E. Davis as *Ostrich Legs*, 2013) and *Eni Furtado no ha dejado de correr* (2013) chronicle repression and violence in the childhood home, a fitting metaphor for state oppression. Much as *Patatas* inspired the creation of *Eni*, so too can the sparse punctuation, unmarked paragraphs and fluid cast of characters of *Natatio*



---

*aeterna* (2011) be understood to have generated *Bruno*. Readers familiar with these earlier works will detect many recurring themes in *Bruno regresa descalzo*, especially the compulsive yet emotionally distressing need to work through past traumas. Old and new readers alike will appreciate Kozameh's masterful command of stream of consciousness as a particularly well-suited literary mode for conveying the inner turmoil characteristic of PTSD. *Bruno regresa descalzo* will undoubtedly assume a unique place within the evolving trajectory of Alicia Kozameh's experimental writing.

---

Mary K. Long, editor. *Language for Specific Purposes: Trends in Curriculum Development*. Washington, DC: Georgetown UP, 2017. 199p.

JOY LANDEIRA  
UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Rather than select proceedings of the Second International Symposium on Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) hosted by the University of Colorado Boulder in 2014, Mary Long's edited volume collects foundational essays that evaluate the current state of LSP studies and define new directions in LSP research in US Higher Education, with a special emphasis on curriculum development.

While the study of world languages always includes the general goals of translingual and transcultural competence, these practical concepts are central to LSP's focus on discipline-specific functional vocabulary and cultural competencies. Be it business, engineering, financial, industrial, legal, mathematic, medical, technological or translation skills, curriculum can be developed that introduces language and cultural proficiencies at early ages, and reinforces them with real world practice.

True to its subtitle, several essays posit trends in curriculum. Not just for college level consideration, the development and implementation of LSP curriculum for K-12 programs promotes job skills at an early age. Perhaps the "K" (for kindergarten) is an exaggeration, since the language curricula for specific application to business or medicine is generally not adapted until high school, as the featured course models show. Yet, even kindergartners and elementary students study numbers and math manipulations and can get an early start on buying, selling, transacting, and making change—both monetary and cultural change! What seem to be simple language exercises set the

---

stage for future job skills and global communication. The study of languages can prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. Curriculum development examples in K-12 settings show that it is possible to integrate business terminology, health care, law, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and translation practices into early classroom settings by connecting language and cultural study to professional contexts with workplace applications and early career experiences.

As a discipline, Language for Specific Purposes often implies that the aim of acquisition and practice of languages is to attain certain professional goals and prepare students for specific careers. In a more over-arching sense, a wider category of “Language for Leadership” may be a better place to start by combining basic literacy with critical thinking and cultural knowledge, then channeling students towards more specific entrepreneurial internships. LSP does challenge the traditional approach to teaching language and culture through literature. Textual analysis still inspires critical thinking, but the texts and situations being analyzed are different. These learning situations are often not limited to classroom practice, but extend to experiential community internships and project-based learning, which may offer a wider range of experiences, particularly for heritage speakers.

After dedicating the bulk of the essays to new directions in LSP curriculum, attention turns to instructor roles and workplace realities. Teachers who develop LSP courses often are retraining themselves and composing their own materials to raise awareness of entrepreneurial skills, career interests, leadership qualities, and business and cultural etiquette. Such transferable life skills may go beyond typical textbook contents and require refinement of all three modes of interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive communication skills. They also require deeply invested educators who may be cast into time- and energy-consuming roles that go far beyond classroom walls and schedules, serving as informal and involved career counselors and developing community-based learning environments and business relationships outside typical school settings. Similarly, students are called upon to be responsible, active, and self-evaluative learners, often stepping out of the confines of the school room to enter real-world workplace settings like courtrooms or labs where language is learned simultaneously with issues of workload, professionalism and comportment.

Well illustrated and bolstered with useful appendices that explain methodologies and analyze data, *Language for Specific Purposes: Trends in Cur-*

---

*riculum Development* is a well-chosen and organized collection of essays that illustrates how interdisciplinary academic knowledge can be coupled with real world contexts and how the classroom can be connected to practical workplace environments in order to apply and improve language skills.

---

Alfonso Martín Jiménez. *Literatura y ficción. La ruptura de la lógica ficcional*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2015. 324p.

LUCÍA HELLÍN NISTAL

UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID

La inquietud por establecer una clasificación de las creaciones literarias surge casi como necesidad ya en el comienzo de la reflexión teórica sobre la literatura o, como fue denominada en sus inicios por Aristóteles, poética. Desde la primera sistematización de los géneros literarios en el libro III de la *República* de Platón hasta hoy son incontables las propuestas que tratan de dar cuenta de la totalidad de textos literarios en el marco de la cultura occidental. Alfonso Martín Jiménez, catedrático de Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada en la Universidad de Valladolid, comienza su obra *Literatura y ficción. La ruptura de la lógica ficcional* con un recorrido por algunas de las propuestas fundamentales al respecto desde una perspectiva crítica y exhaustiva que le permite recoger o reformular aquellos elementos conceptuales que irá incorporando en la elaboración de un nuevo modelo textual literario.

Martín Jiménez se propone desarrollar un modelo del texto literario que permita incluir las categorías genéricas básicas y comprenda la necesidad humana de representar la identidad y la alteridad, pero que dé cabida a una teoría sobre la ficcionalidad que explique la existencia de géneros literarios no ficcionales. Así, busca su base en categorías universales ahistóricas que integren toda forma literaria, existente o meramente posible, tratando de liberarse de criterios relativos y cambiantes para poner el foco en los elementos temáticos. Estas categorías básicas serían el *mundo del autor* y el *mundo de los personajes*, contemplando la posibilidad de la aparición de ambos en una misma obra.

En el *mundo del autor* estarían comprendidas las frases del enunciador, frases no miméticas y que por tanto no tienen carácter ficcional y pueden identificarse con el autor real efectivo. Las frases miméticas del enunciador, así como las frases de los personajes pertenecientes al *mundo de los personajes*,

---

no son identificables con el autor extratextual y pueden considerarse ficcionales. Al cruzar estas categorías con la teoría de los mundos posibles tal como la ha planteado Tomás Albaladejo y los tres tipos de modelo de mundo que comprende –I de lo verdadero, II de lo ficcional verosímil y III de lo ficcional no verosímil–, el autor profundiza en la naturaleza de ambos mundos: el *mundo de los personajes* puede construirse sobre uno de estos tres tipos de modelo de mundo, mientras que el *mundo del autor*, por su parte, estaría compuesto por los submundos imaginarios. De esta manera, un texto sustentado por un modelo de mundo de tipo I y/o submundos del autor no tendría carácter ficcional. Además, Martín Jiménez hace referencia a la posibilidad de introducir un texto inserto en el *mundo de los personajes* del texto primario, regido por las mismas normas y con las mismas categorías que este, lo cual abre una ventana de gran interés para la explicación de los narradores homodieéticos o los textos híbridos.

Desde nuestro punto de vista, la riqueza de esta obra reside en su diálogo con las principales clasificaciones genéricas y la inclusión de aportaciones teóricas fundamentales como el concepto de metalepsis de Genette o la mencionada teoría de los mundos posibles para construir una propuesta inédita con una base teórica sólida que es capaz de responder a todo tipo de texto literario, incluidas aquellas desviaciones o excepciones que hasta ahora quedaban fuera de toda clasificación.

Tal vez el mayor aporte del libro es la inclusión sin fisuras del género argumentativo en el modelo textual propuesto desde el concepto del *mundo del autor*, siguiendo un criterio temático-referencial y no puramente estilístico condicional, así como la sistematización de las diferencias entre las distintas formas literarias que se suelen incluir bajo epígrafes como el de prosa no ficcional.

Una segunda aportación que supone una importante contribución en el ámbito de la Teoría de la Literatura es la ampliación de la teoría de los mundos posibles con la categoría de los mundos imposibles. Este nuevo concepto daría respuesta a aquellas obras que presentan una construcción ilógica, cuyo universo interno es incoherente y, en definitiva, imposible, en tanto que se da una ruptura de la lógica ficcional al ponerse en contacto elementos del modelo textual que siguiendo un criterio lógico no podrían conectarse.

Por otra parte y como Martín Jiménez bosqueja, el modelo propuesto posibilita su futura aplicación a otras manifestaciones artísticas como lo son el cine, la pintura o incluso la publicidad. Pero el ensayo también deja

---

abierta una senda que va desde la comprensión de aquellos textos que utilizan mecanismos que tensan o rompen los límites de la verosimilitud o incluso de la lógica ficcional hasta la función que dichos procedimientos pueden ejercer, así como a los efectos de los mismos en el proceso de recepción. Imaginemos, por ejemplo, el análisis del teatro brechtiano a la luz de las categorías propuestas llevando el estudio hasta el efecto último de cada ruptura o metalepsis en el receptor.

A. Gabriel Meléndez. *Hidden Chicano Cinema: Film Dramas in the Borderlands*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2013. 271p.

SHELLI ROTTSCHAFFER

AQUINAS COLLEGE / THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

*Hidden Chicano Cinema* addresses a series of ‘film moments’ that are cultural encounters between filmmakers who use film as a technology and the people of the communities that became the subjects for the film depictions. These film encounters often found Borderlands residents and filmmakers eyeing each other from opposite sides of the camera lens, thereby learning from, critiquing and/or categorizing each other.

The first chapters are dedicated to the advent of still photography and early film in New Mexico, which at the time was considered a “foreign locale” despite the fact that it is within the boundaries of the United States. During this early period, “segmented and mutually exclusive images of the Southwest lived in the public imagination” (1). These stereotypes left little room for representation of the ‘triculturalism’ that makes up this region.

Film Scholar Carlos Cortes explains that popular images were enculturated because we constantly receive information from a “societal curriculum” instilled by family, peers, and media that teaches a myriad of topics including race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality. Movies organize information about these very notions, influence values, help shape expectations of viewers, and provide models for action.

Cortes explains that films have several purposes which leave impressions on the audience. For example, films that use ethnic images examine national character. Films influence societal attitudes toward ethnic groups and take advantage of existing audience predispositions about them. Thus, filming the Borderlands has been a vast proposition that crafts images of Natives, Mexicans, and Anglos. It presents interethnic relationships these

---

communities create, all within a mythic and wild Southwestern landscapes.

At times, this type of lens created a “tourist gaze” which highlighted the ‘exotic other’ and established a dominant Anglo-American view based on Manifest Destiny. The problem with early photography (Edward Curtis, Carl Taylor, and Russell Lee) and cinema representing Native ‘others’ was that it was seen as part entertainment, part science, and part anthropology, in which documentarians swooped down over the Southwest in search of exotic prey.

Eventually a shift occurred in the representation of the New Mexico Borderland in film. These “Social Realism” representations demonstrated the lives of Chicanos in the United States during the Cold War period. One such example is the film *Salt of the Earth* (1954). It focused upon a Mexican-American worker labor struggle in a New Mexican mining district (Zinc Town, USA). This was a major rotation in the choice of subjects for filmmakers because the lens added needed criticism to social and economic relationships that were the product of centuries of exploitation and inequality; as well as drawing attention to women’s emerging rights.

*Salt of the Earth* is also unique because it can be considered a seminal Chicano film. “On the basis of its significance to [and collaboration with] the Chicano communities... it is obvious that its very creation was meant to ameliorate the conditions faced by Chicano workers and their families... [As such], the Chicano/a community of the Southwest embraced *Salt of the Earth* as an expression of Mexican American cultural resilience and strength” (95).

*Hidden Chicano Cinema’s* final chapters look at several film encounters produced once Chican@s took hold of the camera, returned their gaze, and gave expression to their own creative voices. One such representative film is based on the 1974 ‘cult novel’ *The Milagro Beanfield War*. “The story of this Chicano-themed film begins with the author, John Treadwell Nichols, and his thirty-plus years of identification with New Mexico, in particular with the rural Indo-Chicano population of northern New Mexico” (167). The novel, and the subsequent film directed by Robert Redford addressed a resistance politics of Native American and Chicano communities against globalization and domination by world capitalism. Yet, it did so through the use of satire, irony, and humor within the genre of Magical Realism. Specifically, *Milagro* is effective in sending a message about New Mexico to its audience. It is a poor place, but in the face of this poverty its Indo-Hispano population is able to laugh at and with their condition.

Overall, the films analyzed in *Hidden Chicano Cinema* re-present *mexicano*,

---

Chican@, and Indo-Hispanic stories. Each shares “a common denominator, since... they are infused with the historical, cultural, racial, gender, socio-economic, religious, and ethnic complexity of the Borderlands” (242). These Borderland films are important because they allow those ‘things inside’ that have long been unvoiced to be experienced.

---

Emmanuel Ngwang and Kenneth Usongo. *Art and Political Thought in Bole Butake*. London: Lexington, 2016. 130p.

JEFFERY MOSER

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Emmanuel Ngwang and Kenneth Usongo’s new book, *Art and Political Thought in Bole Butake*, reinforces the disparate history of Cameroon’s co-mingled French and Anglophone heritage, the country’s flamboyant history of colonial and postcolonial political rhetoric, struggle, and official misconduct, and the dichotomies between Cameroon’s politics and art. Both authors are originally from Cameroon and currently teach English in the U.S. at Texas College in Tyler, TX. Relevant to the RMMLA and the organization’s regional influence on language and literature is the note that Usongo earned his doctorate in Literary Studies from the University of Denver in 2010.

In *Art and Political Thought in Bole Butake*, Ngwang and Usongo review and analyze the creative works by the famous, late-Cameroon and Anglophone playwright, poet, and professor, Bole Butake (1947-2016). However, in order for readers to thoroughly comprehend and appreciate the literary significance of Ngwang and Usongo’s groundbreaking text, an overview of political and social history that created and hindered the development of modern Africa, and in particular, the nation of Cameroon, would certainly be helpful. This is because Butake’s most famous works are his plays, which parallel the corruption, tyranny, and abuses of power that have pervaded all levels of colonial and postcolonial Cameroon society,

Butake’s brazen, true-to-life plots are fulfilled against the backdrop of aggressive, greedy and inhumane oppressors of the seemingly silent and marginalized masses of fictionalized communities in the real North-West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. The modern republic, while formerly called Southern Cameroons, includes the northwestern region of Cameroon that encompasses Butake’s birthplace and early upbringing. Because Cam-

---

eroon society remains deeply entrenched in patriarchal nature, what most marks Butake's genius is his bold, anti-patriarchal plot development that is repeated in his plays and in which local, silent suffering non-elites come to rely solely on female characters who take the leading responsibility for their liberation.

Surrounding independence in October 1961, Cameroon's nationalism was affected by a series of raucous and mesmerizing socio-political, pre-nationhood and postcolonial events. Political incongruities and cultural differences between its two former colonies British Cameroons in the west and south and French Cameroons in the north resulted in armed struggles carried out by political resisters who waged war on French and militant forces for another decade. After 1961 the southern part of British Cameroons, in spite of unification, was kept aloof from the inner-workings and benefits of the pro-national programs and services offered by the new liberal government of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. What is especially relevant to writers and artists from Cameroon's political history is that during these socio-political developments, and for all practical purposes, the inhabitants of British Cameroons were regarded somewhat as second-class citizens, economically and socially. Contributing to this discord, in part, is the fact that resulting from the unification of the two colonies for independence, Cameroon's legal system was, and remains, largely based on French civil law with common law influences.

Further, even though both English and French are official languages, French by far remains the most understood language by more than 80 percent of the population. Still, in spite of the history of European colonization, Cameroon has managed to maintain a high level of religious freedom and cultural diversity. Traditional arts and crafts are practiced throughout the country for commercial, decorative, and religious purposes, and traditional dance, music, and storytelling from its oral heritage remain prominent.

Collectively, Cameroonian literature has concentrated on both European and African themes. Pre-independence writers such as controversial journalist and pioneer poet Louis-Marie Pouka (1910-1991) and playwright Sankie Maimo (1930-2013) advocated for assimilation into European culture as the means to bring Cameroon into the modern world. Although, John Mukum Mbaku chronicles in *Culture and Customs of Cameroon* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2005) that both writers were educated by European missionary societies. Pouka wrote consistently in French, seeing



---

French culture and lifestyle as superior to his own. His 1943 poem, “Pleurs sincères,” chastises the Germans for their treatment of the French during occupation but ignores the imprisonment, torture, and forced labor of his native people by the French colonialists in Cameroon. However, two years before Cameroon’s independence, Maimo published a play that was not in French. *I am Vindicated*, released by Ibadan University Press in 1959, is a drama that infuses conversations and arguments with anecdotes, mythology, and poetry in a mix of Pidgin English, indigenous languages, local proverbs, and the names of classical gods and tribal deities. This work became the first literary book to be published by an Anglophone Cameroonian. It paved the way for more works in English. Maimo’s play was followed with works by other Anglophone Cameroon writers such as Mbella Sonne Dipoko, Jedida Asheri, Kenjo Jumbam, and Nsanda Eba. After World War II, Cameroon novelists writing in French, Mongo Beti (1932-2001) and Ferdinand Oyono (1929-2010), analyzed and criticized colonialism and rejected assimilation. Oyono’s novels are marked with criticism about the morality of colonialization; the writer failed to express any vocal misgivings about the rampant corruption by various officials, including embezzlement, lack of transparency, and constitutional irregularities of the Biya government.

Launched from his University of Yaoundé Drama Troup in the early 1980s, Butake’s Anglophone plays take into account extremes of corruption, abuses of power, and marginalization that have characterized Cameroon’s political scene since independence. Butake is best known for his most famous play, *Lake God* (first performed in 1986), which is an allegory of the deadly Lake Nyos gas leak in 1986. The incident was possibly the result of a landslide, although government investigators and geologists never concluded what triggered the emission of a large, lethal cloud of carbon dioxide that suffocated 1,700 people and 3,500 livestock in nearby towns and villages. Though not completely unprecedented, it was the first known large-scale asphyxiation in the world caused by a natural event and the disaster made international headlines.

Ngwang and Usongo’s text is a solicitous undertaking that compares Cameroon’s colonial legacy and postcolonial events and corruption in Butake’s *Lake God and Other Plays* (written between 1982 and 1996; pub. 1999) and in another of his plays, *The Rape of Michelle* (1984). In both dramas, male rulers or local leaders do whatever is possible to maintain their grip on power. As the authors identify, Butake focuses on how far these men “will go in an

---

attempt onto hold to power as a form of self-preservation and legitimacy: they expend their energies devising and perfecting their newfound culture of corruption while ignoring the suffering of the marginalized masses” (57).

As the setting for *Lake God* is rural and that for *The Rape of Michelle*, urban, Ngwang and Usongo identify in the rural *Lake God* that, “Butake calls for the overthrow of the corrupt dictators, but in the urban centers such an appeal is nonexistent because of the machinery of the powerful and sometimes, willing accomplices of the corrupt judiciary, who are now using bribery as a form of lifestyle, and investment of sorts” (57). Hence, the co-authors dissect Butake’s preferred themes of corruption, tyranny, nepotism and the rampant abuse of power. The two scholars reiterate the dominant agreement among several critics that Butake’s approach uniquely shifts the traditional responsibility of the fight for political liberation, which, at least for Cameroon’s history and art, has hitherto been the preserve of the men, to the women. Even though Butake’s plays are agitprop, his most mature narratives advance these distinct themes of female empowerment and political change, and hence, overall, his plays call for the rethinking of morality, equality, fairness, and power in Cameroon’s lopsided, masculine gendering of politics and art. These topics not only prevail in Butake’s *Lake God* (1986), but especially also in two other plays by him: *The Survivors* (1989), and *And Palmwine Will Flow* (1990).

Ngwang and Usongo’s text is a spectacular three-fold treasure. First is the introductory chapter which contextualizes Butake’s life and art. The chapter is of fitting length and holds a degree of scholarship that properly foregrounds the dramatist and begins to locate Butake’s ultimate place in the literary canon of Cameroon’s well-known Anglophone writers. Second, what follows the introductory chapter is a historic transcription of a jeweled interview that Butake granted Ngwang in 2003, which preserves an understanding of Butake’s thought process and inspiration in creating substantial drama. In this splendid conversation, Butake explains his focus on writing drama in terms of his intent to dialogue directly with his audience, together with a resolve to conscientize the marginalized. Butake states, that in spite of his completed works, he possesses more ideas for plays, which, regretfully, the famous Cameroonian dramatist admits that he may never write. The reader must read this sense of loss between the lines in Ngwang’s recording of the interview. Still, Butake affirms that, while he could – and will -- never quit writing plays, he wants to deal with “a lot of other themes” if political issues

---

following decolonization and the contemporary political malaise in Cameroon are finally resolved (20).

Third and final, Ngwang and Usongo's compilation is a first for scholarship in Anglophone Cameroon literature. Its focus on one important African writer counters the traditional corpus of literary studies which are general and set on the presentation of an analysis of creative works of major writers but without focusing on one main author to showcase his or her literary aesthetics and motifs. Therefore, and not unlike Shakespeare, the singular focus on Butake enhances the merits of his dramatization of a range of themes and tropes, including the following: psychology and the human condition; political and social order, disorder, and change; conflict; mental and spiritual disorder; family; nation; appearance and reality (especially in terms of sex and gender); myth and tradition; and modernity. Butake's rich repertoire and legacy of plays also include *Shoes and Four Men in Arms* (1993), *Dance of the Vampires* (1995), *Zintgraff and the Battle of Mankon* (2003), *Family Saga* (2005), and *Betrothal without Libation* (2005).

Thus, by focusing on Cameroon's foremost playwright, Ngwang and Usongo offer a resource that interrogates Bole Butake's drama and places his plays within the matrices of Cameroon and Africa's politics, society, nature, and the individual. Hence, this work could effectively serve as a required text for instructors to introduce the study of modern African society and literature of twentieth- and twenty-first-century African drama. In 2010, Langaa Research and Publishing Common Initiative Group published *Cameroon Anthology of Poetry*, a rich collection of poems that Butake arranged and gathered from poets with diverse backgrounds and from different countries around the globe. Butake's anthology stands as an additional testament to Bole Butake's literary range and universal talent. This late work reinforces the universality of poetry by celebrating poetry's ability to inspire the precarious human spirit that is ever surrounded by change and clouded by life's unrelenting challenges and inevitabilities. Butake's writings isolate the university professor, poet, and playwright's ultimate desire and search for the right kind of social change, change that would be about equality and the liberation of women in politics and art, and change that should recognize the necessary and significant contributions that women make to them.

---

Geoff Rips: *The Calculus of Falling Bodies: Poems*. San Antonio, Texas: WingsPress, 2015. 96p.

INGO R. STOEHR  
KILGORE COLLEGE

If it *is* poetry, we should feel physically as if the tops of our heads were taken off. At least, that is the standard that Emily Dickinson proposed. And measured by this standard, Geoff Rips's *The Calculus of Falling Bodies* is poetry. With the process of how they grow to completion from the first line, the use of metaphors and similes, and their thematic scope, the poems in this collection will take the top of your head off.

These poems, which Geoff Rips wrote over the course of about four decades, as he mentions in his preface, "Poetry, Journalism, Writing, the World," are a pleasure to get into. Some have zinger first lines: "So much of the world is floating" (5), "There are cracks in the body of love" (17), "Tonight the world started over" (32), "War is a cure for loneliness ..." (63). Some first lines expand into the next lines, such as in "Halitosis," where all eleven lines of the poem keep the same intensity: "When we kissed / death blew from your mouth / like a warm wind over Gettysburg" (12).

Most of these poems, however, start on a more low-key note and grow into completion. A perfect example of this, the first poem, "Compost" (2), not only introduces the collection's themes but also embodies its message in its own form. As an ecological poem about the interconnectedness of all living things, or "our community of amino acids," it observes what all poetry is really about—life and death—in the most basic processes in a compost pile: "death churning itself to life." The setting is a simple scene at home. One of the poet's daughters takes kitchen scraps out to the family's compost heap—while the poet-father wants to teach her about this generative process and its heat; on that occasion, he also reminisces about his daughter's birth. The long lines of this poem contain life—life in its circular repetitions. The flow approximates life's circular flow. Its first three lines list the items ready to be taken out to the compost with its "darkening moist leaves" (line 4), and its last lines echo the beginning lines with "Orange rind, elm leaf" and the "generating heat at the heart of it all." In this manner, the poem functions as a metaphor of life—or, perhaps, it is not a trope at all but part of life itself.

In general, the manner in which Rips uses metaphor and simile adds to his work's poeticity. In my thinking about metaphor and simile, I follow

---

to some extent Donald Davidson's approach in "What Metaphors Mean." A metaphor is not simply saying that x equals y, that is, implying that two unlike things are the same; rather, it is jumping from one frame x to another frame y to "see" one thing in a different and surprising context. Perhaps I have lived in Texas long enough to appreciate "[b]rown fingernails of shame" as an appropriate metaphor for a cockroach in "Ode to the Lesser and Greater Cockroach" (29-30). There is a clarity (and shock value) in metaphors like this or the one of "death" for "breath" in "Halitosis."

Similes seem more pliable and flexible (and, therefore, less shocking) than metaphors; after all, Davidson's argument goes, everything is "like" something else. This flexibility plays out in various ways in Rips's poems. In "Halitosis," the simile suggests one of many possible meanings of breath as death; and the remainder of this poem expands on this one meaning with metaphors: "I tasted blue- and gray-capped / bodies ..." (lines 4-5). In the cockroach ode, similes are also used in another way. As a result of their flexibility, similes do not fix meaning but explore meanings; here, they suggest what a cockroach could possibly be like: "... like a fat grape of despair, / like a gaping mouth of nothingness, / like the insides of the drainpipes."

The poems in this collection span the full range of poetic experience from the personal and quirky to the political and existential; and the grand themes of poetry—life and death—are always front and center. What is more, Rips's poems multitask; a personal poem may be quirky or serious, and it may also be political and/or existential, such as "Halitosis." The collection's first poem on the interconnectedness life and death, "Compost" is probably the collection's most life-affirming poem and provides a welcome contrast to other poems that evoke the sadness of loss or that focus on the downside of life.

Rips shares his experience of heart-wrenching loss when he contemplates his father's death in a car accident in "Things Are Gonna Break" (67-8) and the duties of mourning in "For My Father" (69-70). These two poems are among the last poems; therefore, they help to complete the mood of the collection: at once somber and coming to terms with life. Throughout the collection, the poet shares other glimpses of his family, such as in "Losing Uncle Ed" (58-9) and in several poems about his "beautiful" daughters. The latter poems often have a wonderful liminal quality as they evoke the daughters at or close to the threshold between innocence and experience (in the sense in which William Blake would use these terms). Of course, the

---

poet writes about these experiences from the position of experience. Yet in these brief moments of liminality, there is a tremendous sense of hope that everything is still possible: “Even the setting sun seems to pause / before it drops” (65).

As much as family provides the center of Rips’s life, he—as a poet and journalist—also succeeds in reporting on life at large. In his preface to the collection, Rips calls the poetry of world literature (he mentions Dante and Chaucer) as “the best reporting we have on the customs, politics, and social mores of their worlds” and specifically mentions “newspaper editor Walt Whitman’s reporting on mid-19th century America in his epic poem, ‘Song of Myself’” (xiv). Whitman’s influence is obvious in Rips’s use of the long lines in many poems. Their tone, however, is different. Whitman sounds celebratory and embraces life; Rips sounds somber and ponders life.

The collection’s penultimate poem, “What Is It?,” is such a reflection on what life is or, more specifically, what keeps us going. This poem is divided into four stanzas—each one a case study about people at the end of their lives; each person puts up a fight in his or her own way. In the poem with the long title “Faced with a Stalled Economy, / They Try to Bring an End to What We Know,” the innocent view of the “clear, untroubled waters of America” gives way to a much murkier and trouble reality: “... Bombs / for Afghanis. Guns to Iraq. Boys grown up / in deep Georgia. Loaded with purpose. / They make ready for war” (38). “Dreams,” the poem on the next page and one of two poems that refer to hurricane Katrina, acknowledges the fact that it is becoming increasingly harder keep up with the American dream: “... ‘The world is complex.’ Not what the crowd at Hooter’s / wants to hear. Keep it simple. ...” (40). At the same time, the poem ends with the poet’s daughter at a liminal moment: “And when we sang to her, Life is but a dream, did she believe us? / When our dog barked at nothing, she asked, Is it barking at a dream?”

This slender volume of poems is an important book. It is about grand themes and human-sized experiences; it is about life in our times, and it gives this life a close and honest look. The tone is somber, but there seems to be a different undercurrent in these poems’ timbre. There is an undercurrent of hope that comes from many sources, such as family. Hope also comes in the form of realizations, such as the one the poet had about “what’s important / about living in this city” in the poem “Resuscitation” (23): “It’s the way / every time I breathe I take in air / that someone else has just let go.” We

---

usually do not know that “someone else,” and if we did, we may like that person—or not, for example, if it is the crowd at Hooter’s, which Rips evoked in the poem “Dreams.” But we still share this space—this city, this country, this planet—with everybody else. So “this peopled air,” as Rips calls it and which connects people in such a weird way, must be something good from which we can learn; “Resuscitation” is a love poem, after all.

---

Val Rosenfeld and Florence Fortunati, eds. *Voices of the Undocumented*. Sarasota: First Edition Design Publishing, 2015. 145p.

DANIEL C. VILLANUEVA  
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO

The volume discussed here is a useful contribution to contemporary research, education, and action regarding current local and national discussions surrounding undocumented persons of Hispanic origin in the United States. The two editor-translators of *Voices* volunteer as English as a Second Language instructors at the Worker Day Center in affluent Mountain View, California. The personal stories shared are translated interviews from undocumented clients of the Center, one of some 70 Centers across the country which serve as community-based organizations to help workers find day jobs as well as partake in ESL classes. As the authors note, and as is so often the case with such institutions, the Center in Mountain View also functions as an extended community resource for document translation, sharing a meal, apartment and medical care referrals, and workshops on consumer, tenant, and civil rights. The implicit security provided by the Center for the undocumented to ask such questions in a safe environment also allowed the interviewers to develop trust with the workers whose stories appear in the book, and made their responses an even richer source of information.

The nine interviewees range in age from 64 to 26, hail from three different countries (Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru), and all but two (a mother and daughter from Oaxaca, MX) come from a different region in their respective countries. What is also interesting about the choice of stories is that, including the daughter mentioned above who graduated from Columbia University, all were interviewed in Spanish. Maps of the region each interviewee comes from are also provided, which are a particularly useful resource given that most interviewees come from smaller towns not necessarily known to

---

most. Some interview subjects allowed their picture to be printed along with their stories, while others did not. The editors also state that some names needed to be changed, either of the interviewees or of persons to whom they make reference. That in itself is an unfortunate but quite obvious commentary on the fear and concern even older, seasoned immigrants face knowing that they have no official legal status to permit them to work or reside in the USA and who could be deported if their status was discovered.

Stylistically and structurally, there is very little to criticize in the flow or organization of the volume. It is especially admirable that the translations, assumed to be a shared project of both editors, permit each interviewee to retain his or her unique style of expression in the English renderings. Whether it be Ernesto from Peru who talks about his adventures in Japan prior to coming to the USA, Ruben from Guatemala sharing the deep roots of his faith, or Laura, also from Guatemala, relating the struggles of being an immigrant with a small child, one has the feeling of listening to a uniquely expressive voice each time. It is also positive that the editors chose – one assumes – to publish a variety of stories of people who arrived with very different educational backgrounds, work histories prior to emigration, and current career and social trajectories. The reader is left with the unmistakable impression that if not for the simple fact of citizenship status, the stories related could be similar to those of individuals in one's own extended family or friendship circles.

One can offer three suggestions that would benefit the book in any future edition. First, it would have been helpful to have the questionnaire, the basic questions each person was asked, or the leading topic areas reproduced in an appendix. Because each story not only has unique elements, but also shares few common narrative trajectories, knowing what questions were asked would be of great benefit to those who would like to engage the book on a more scholarly level. In addition, more unified editing of the text would certainly benefit future editions. Some stories are told strictly in the first person, whereas others include not only the protagonist's voice but also one or more paragraphs of context provided – again, one assumes – by one or both editors. The final story also incorporates a brief contribution from a high school counselor who knows the interviewee in that chapter. This provides useful enrichment but also seems vaguely out of place among the other first-person narratives. Finally, though the introduction both to the authors and the work of the Center provides the basic context in which the



---

project was generated, finding discussion questions at the end of the volume engenders an initially ambiguous reaction. While useful for the educational and advocacy effects to which the authors most likely wish to have their work contribute, the presence of these questions at the end of the book could more effectively be foreshadowed and integrated into the introduction, perhaps with additional pedagogical suggestions.

Particularly given the current state of political and social discourse in the USA, *Voices of the Undocumented* and oral history collections like it lend needed freedom of expression to those invisibly present in our society who cannot currently exercise fully such freedom on their own behalf. The work breaks little new ground on its own in terms of new approaches to humanizing and positively depicting the lives of those who can often be ignored or mistreated by both the legal system and members of the communities in which they reside. At the same time, the work's origin and subjects enlarge the spectrum of individual perspectives valuably through a diverse set of regions, ages, and occupations represented, and a balanced gender selection. "You must know the stories to know the people," the authors state in their introduction. Both stories and the people retelling them are indeed quite present in this work.

---

Joseph Roth. *The Hotel Years*. Translated by Michael Hofmann. New York: New Directions, 2015. 269p.

DANIEL C. VILLANUEVA  
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO

This lively, masterfully translated volume of sixty-four short pieces by the Austria-Jewish journalist and novelist Joseph Roth (1894-1939) will be of interest to literary scholars and theorists, historians, and translation scholars alike. Roth, perhaps best known to the English-speaking world as the author of novels and essays chronicling a nostalgia for the last days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (*Radetzky March*, 1932) or of continental European Jewish life after 1900 (*Job*, 1930; *The Wandering Jews*, 1927), was also a prolific newspaper reporter and skillful, early German-language adopter of the genre of literary criticism and light literature known as the *feuilleton*. He was also an inveterate traveler throughout Eastern and Western Europe: First out of personal interest, and then of necessity when the Nazi Party took power in

---

Germany in 1933. *The Hotel Years* was chosen as the title for this collection because Roth notoriously lived out of suitcases from 1925 until his death in 1933. Michael Hofmann, the translator of this volume, is also the official translator of all fourteen of Roth's books that have appeared in English, novels and short works alike. He is justly considered the scholar most responsible for having (re-)introduced Anglophone literary and academic culture to Roth in our time. As such, his authoritative interpretation here of Roth's turns of phrase, sometimes-archaic formulations, and witty, incisive observations in short-form prose remains as strong as when his first translation of other Roth short pieces, *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin, 1920-1933*, was published in 2002.

*The Hotel Years* is as personal a project as Hofmann has yet undertaken in his myriad renderings of Roth into English. Indeed, it is the translator's stated intent that the Hofmann-Roth collaboration reviewed here "take the English reader closer to Roth than anything else he wrote" (xii). The earlier Hofmann translation, *What I Saw*, was a straight translation of a Roth reader in German that the Berlin-based literary scholar Michael Bienert had compiled and published from Roth's short-prose oeuvre on his own. This time around, Hofmann's methodology was, in the true impressionistic spirit of the *feuilleton*, to select and arrange the sixty-four pieces according to his own knowledge of Roth's whims and aesthetic sensibilities born of a decades-long engagement with the author's literary output and personal history. This is especially useful in the footnotes which Hofmann provides to various pieces – sometimes translating German proverbs in order to make what Roth is referring to in his texts understandable, sometimes providing short biographies of long-forgotten historical or literary figures to whom Roth alludes, sometimes defining dates and places key to full understanding of Rothian wit in particular passages.

Hofmann has also used some of his own intuition as to what best fit together when arranging the pieces into chapters. Some chapters are thus more or less arranged chronologically, some thematically, and some are linked only by topical, historical, or stylistic commonalities the reader is invited to discover during engagement with the text. The only other governing principle was that no piece could have yet appeared in any book Hofmann had translated of Roth's. The chapter headings are equally enigmatic: "Germany," "Sketches," "Austria and Elsewhere," "Pleasures and Pains," "Albania," and the like. A short introduction to the collection is also provided, along with

---

one short piece to begin the collection not part of any chapter, and one “coda” piece at the end in which Roth recounts his earliest memory, the loss of his cradle. Quite helpfully, a four-page index of names, places, and other terms is also included at the end of the book.

Scholars of turn-of-the-century Europe, regardless of country or language, have recently noted certain unfortunate similarities in politics, economics, and the contentious public sphere between those days and our own. This reviewer also sees certain parallels between the 1900’s and today, perhaps not as completely transparent when *The Hotel Years* was published a year ago, but becoming ever more so. As such, in addition to being historical documents of a singular voice confronting modernity’s contradictions, prejudice, capitalism, gender relations and more, Roth’s prose and his critical eye resonate with some of today’s societal friction as well. There are too many excellent passages in the book from which to quote to illustrate comprehensively the skill with which Hofmann renders Roth’s critical prose in the space provided here. Still, a few examples can be mentioned: Describing a nationalist, anachronistic German fraternity member as living “from the mould of the past and decay,” (42), conversing with an Afro-German on a train whose knowledge convinced Roth that “in the purity of his soul” he “stood far above the racial purity of Dinter,” an infamous Nazi race propagandist of the day, and that “he didn’t even need his blond hair and blue eyes to be German” (45), and more.

Watching a street procession of the penultimate, enfeebled Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Josef, Roth (and Hofmann) could still say: “He had the look in his eye of someone who sees nothing in particular and everything in general. His eye described a semicircle like the sun, scattering beams of grace to all who were there” (96). And regarding the people of Albania, Hofmann renders Roth’s words as: “A long and laborious process of education needs to take place to make citizens out of shepherds, chieftains, warlords, and religious fanatics” (132). And, describing the realities constructed by Nazi Germany’s rulers just one year after Hitler took power: “No reporter is equal to a country where, for the first time since the creation of the world, not just physical but metaphysical properties are propagated” (236). As stated above, one cannot help but be reminded of certain sociopolitical developments in Western society today when one reads Roth in Hofmann’s translation. Another praiseworthy quality which bears mention is Hofmann’s lack of hesitancy to match certain archaic German phrases or

---

German slang with their English equivalents, which too few translators today attempt. Again, too many instances of this courage exist in the book to be comprehensively repeated here. Yet while reading *The Hotel Years*, simply enjoy Hofmann's deployment of words such as assizes, civvy, Shank's pony, eyrie, foregather, capacious, telephonist, and sougning, for example.

One almost feels that to bring up any concern with the text would be drawing undue attention to minutiae, but a couple of minor points relating to Hofmann's footnotes might be mentioned. First, they are quite copious in some chapters compared to others, but similar glosses of terms, persons, and allusions in later chapters could easily also be applied more consistently to earlier ones – be these in footnotes or built into the body of the text. Some footnotes, such as the one defining “vendetta,” or the recommendation to read Ismael Kadare on Albania, also seem superfluous. However, as this is most certainly a question of editing, it is to be hoped that this volume finds many eager readers to encourage the publisher to reprint the volume and address the minor textual concerns.

---

Carmen Tafolla. *This River Here: Poems of San Antonio*. San Antonio: Wings Press, 2014. 92p.

**JEFFERY MOSER**

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

At the heart of Carmen Tafolla's new book of poetry and prose is the subject of the San Antonio River, which serves as allegory for the southwestern professor's narratives that weave together the many charms and choices of her hometown's foods, art, music, and people. Hence, Tafolla's poetry brings to life the rich history of crossings and creations that collect her vivid memories about San Antonio's diverse peoples, languages, customs, and stories. The highly anthologized Latina poet, writer, and educator alludes to all of these in her preface that calls readers to, “Listen to the voices in this breeze, / your ancestors, the trees / the river that remembers...”

Tafolla compiled her book to be a gift to the people of San Antonio after she was named the city's first poet laureate in 2012 by then Mayor Julián Castro. Published shortly before she was named Poet Laureate of the entire state of Texas for 2015-2016, these verses and stories most poignantly accent the place and history of Tafolla's ancestors and her own upbringing

---

while welcoming visitors to San Antonio. The poet promises that, “This river here / is full of me and mine. / This river here / is full of you and yours” (1). Powerful and moving, Tafolla’s lyrics invite the reader down to the banks of the San Antonio River and thus, into and along with the loves and experiences of her family, friends, and the city’s most interesting characters and sites: “Right Here / (or maybe a little farther down) / my-great grandmother washed the dirt / out of her family’s clothes” (1).

Like a ceaseless flowing river, Tafolla wastes no time with lines that carry the reader back to the rich history of San Antonio that inspires her work, where the river has ever-flowed for generations with joys, pains, and sorrows. Together, their indelible marks upon the poet’s memory are transposed into the writings that appear on every page and transfer the reader to “Right here / (or maybe a little farther down) / my grandpa washed the sins / out of his congregation’s souls, / baptizing them, scrubbing them / bringing them up / clean” (2-3). Not one stanza of Tafolla’s introductory poem that provides the book’s name sake is dry. Its surface glitters with love and humor that confront the everyday and unexpected when life throws a curve or rolls out a memory that ripples with pause or floats a lesson:

Right here  
(or maybe a little farther down)

my great-great grandmother froze with fear  
as she glimpsed,  
between the lean, dark trees,  
a lean, dark Indian peering at her.

She ran home screaming, “¡Ay, los Indios!  
Aí vienen los I-i-indios!!”  
as he threw pebbles at her,  
laughing.  
Till one day she got mad  
and stayed  
and threw pebbles  
right back at him!

After they got married,  
they built their house right here  
(or maybe a little farther down.) (4)

---

Accompanying Tafolla's poetry are historic and contemporary black and white photographs that help to convey the enduring sense of place and space. The little river of San Antonio moves with the poetry that informs, charms and tests cultural differences and misunderstandings.

One special feature added to these 38 poems, sonnets, and long-poems is a useful glossary. In addition, Tafolla has inserted a note on her selected use of italic type, which explains the publisher and poet's shared practice to emphasize those instances when the "oral presentation of these poems often places emphasis on certain words in the text, some of them in Spanish" (viii).

In another poem that recalls a meeting of scholars and artists at the Witte Museum for the purpose of discussing "deep time in South Texas," Tafolla reveals "Something about the way / the water erodes but draws together / the way it makes dirt recycle in new formations, / new colors, new places, calling, shaping, echoing / people, mountain lions, minnows, monarchs / ever-moving, endangered" (66). Here is the striking symbolism and uniqueness of the San Antonio River, its under-ground walk-way, and the city that Oscar Wilde described as "a thrill of strange pleasure" during his American lecture tour that took him to Texas in the summer of 1882. The late-Victorian poet, novelist, playwright, and short story writer visited San Antonio in June and pronounced the Alamo a noble structure, but he lamented that it was not better preserved.

Wilde's observation and regret are not lost upon Tafolla in another of her poems titled, "Searching for Mission San José." She highlights the multiple, periodic attempts and extensive efforts by the citizens of San Antonio to maintain and preserve the city's historic Spanish mission that is over 250 years old: "like the old man who's come home and recognized his wife / seen her for her strength at last, her grace a miracle to his tired eyes" (76). Personally involved in helping to save and preserve the mission, Tafolla repairs misunderstandings about historic sites and lyricizes the monumental historic preservation efforts that have proved successful while others did not:

We allocate funds, renovate  
bleach to white the ancient walls of calm cathedral  
make altars gleam and gold attract, and bureaucrats glow proud  
to reclaim Early City History (though bulldozing Nation's first  
*estación en español*, a few dawn-pink roses tied on  
its barbed metal fence lie some *Altar a Nuestros Muertos*.)

---

Elaborate reports and archaeological plans agree  
Somewhere here are ruins of the *first* Mission San José,  
the oldest one, a building that predates our current gem  
Queen of the Missions, Blessed by Franciscans,  
Bastion of the Granaries, Rose Window framing Hope.

. . . .

We dig. Search. Sweat in the sweet San Antonio sun.  
Brush off each cherished artifact with care, each breath a  
promise of the past. Until the earth unveils her yield. (76)

Due to history and the river, San Antonio has always been about borders and crossings, and one only has to read a few lines of any of Tafolla's lyrics to comprehend that her poetry calls forth the soul of her birthplace. The poet's poems and photos are histories and stories that intersect with space and human beings who have made San Antonio invitingly soulful and a most worthy place to call home.

If you have never been to San Antonio, writer and poet Carmen Tafolla takes you there, and you shall never regret having to leave this U.S. city that is a true cultural crossroads. After reading Tafolla's newest collection of poetry, you will most likely ask yourself, "What in the world took me so long to get here?" and "Why couldn't I hear the call of this river?!" Tafolla's new anthology is a moving treasure that carried information and rises with excitement and a community of knowledge to celebrate culture – this work is truly a gift from San Antonio's first poet laureate who has proven, once again, unfailing capacity to give voice to the peoples and cultures of San Antonio, Texas, and the great American Southwest.

---

Pamela Uschuk. *Blood Flower: New Poems*. San Antonio: Wings Press, 2015. 117p.

SEAN H. JENKINS  
WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY

The blood flower, a kind of milkweed, is not without its dangers: gashed stem-wise, it oozes toxin; but cultivated with care, it becomes food for butterflies. Pamela Uschuk's new book of poems evokes both the sting and the feast in a three-part collection, each with its quotient of life-sap and nour-

---

ishment, memory and care. The psychic terrain of her Russian forebears is as familiar and haunting as an old volume of daguerreotypes one might have come across, bewhiskered ancestors coolly appraising an unknown progeny. Uschuk's book is a chaplet of blood flower blooms wreathed around the brows of the grand-folk she conjures and interrogates. Stepping forward to summarize and memorialize their unruly lives (and sometimes unfortunate deaths), Uschuk takes a glisteningly aware sensibility to the memory of a grandfather, engineer of an obscure murder, who finished himself inside a gas oven; a beloved grandmother brewing borscht ("Oh, to palm the red cabbage head / the way my grandmother must have cupped / my infant skull..."); a spicy, if imaginary, pairing of violin and cello in a small collection of Shostakovich. Throughout her lines are mostly regular and conventionally sonorous, though there is a regular supply of felicities ("What we inhale is strangled / as the breathing of horses in a winter pasture"; "The slush of clouds"; "Emerald common as bread"), and her rhythms are mostly those of respiration: common, even, predictable. Reading Uschuk is to be lulled, not goaded; led, not thrust. Her most vivid lines, compact and blood-bright, seem to involve either the curette or the blade; but for the most part, Uschuk offers the music of the prayer-book and the natural revelations of a kind of poeticized *National Geographic*. She aims to startle, and sometimes does, but her craft emerges from glowing memory, gore bespattered though it sometimes is:

My brother, in those rainbright days  
when blood showered like pennies around you, and  
sense leaked from the world  
    like helium from a foil balloon,  
I couldn't see your hands at war in Vietnam. ("The Trick")

Not infrequently there are metaphorical pile-ups in the poet's pursuit of vivid sense:

Here, a cricket sings to desert  
far from the sulfur racket grinding the city.  
Was there a piano, at least,  
a stray balalaika to buffer silence  
    that tasted like rusted tin  
and roared like a wolverine so starved  
it could not gnaw through grief's walls. ("Blood Flower")



---

Uschuk is poorly served by her printer: there are misspellings throughout the text. Some of them are glaring, as in the poem entitled “Eucarist,” while others challenge the reader’s credulity. Is “umbrelled” (as in “Up ramps umbrelled by new oak leaves”) the poet’s attempt at coinage? And what about “Barn swallows swallows blue as Czech streams raise”? And there is some confusion about the difference between “lie” and “lay,” a bugbear among grammarians. These mistakes and malapropisms (there are several more) frustrate the careful reader and interrupt the expression of a competent poet. Uschuk’s work is otherwise cleanly assembled, but the collection, presented in three groupings (“Blood Flower,” family memories; “The Trick,” poems from the battlefield; and “Talk About Your Bad Girls,” a miscellany without a common theme) are workmanlike and worthy, but the collection is too large. A book a third as long would have produced fewer look-alike poems. For all that, Uschuk enthusiasts who can appreciate her poems in bulk will not be disappointed.