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Book Reviews

Historical Film: A Critical Introduction. Jonathan Stubs. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. p/bk 206 pp. ISBN 978-1-84788-497-8. Price $32.95.

In *Historical Film: A Critical Introduction*, author Jonathan Stubbs attempts to accomplish multiple objectives—defining historical film as a genre, critically analyzing the generic dimensions of these films, and tracing the development of historical films throughout Hollywood history. Additionally, Stubbs contextualizes historical films as both a major mode of Hollywood production as well as one of the primary ways that the public interacts with the past. In a somewhat slim volume (181 pages of primary text), this seems to be a rather large task, but it is a task Stubbs skillfully accomplishes, in part by limiting his examination to Hollywood films. Stubbs, Associate Professor of Communication at Cyprus International University, has organized the book both topically and chronologically, and has arranged the seven chapters into easily digested subsections, making the book ideal for classroom use or understanding by non-specialists. In addition to a comprehensive bibliography, the book contains a fine filmography and an annotated bibliography that will be especially helpful for readers wanting to delve more deeply into the subject of historical films.

While historical films have long been a subject of study from film and media scholars, historians have, until relatively recently, been more hesitant to seriously approach historical films as legitimate sources of historical inquiry. This was, in part, because of disagreement over what constitutes a historical film, and because most historians have privileged the written word over film, which was too often dismissed as simply entertainment. Robert Brent Toplin and Robert Burgoyne are two of the pioneering historians who have written significantly on historical film and provide definitions of historical films. Toplin catalogues nine textual practices to define historical films, allowing that

historical films need not adhere to all nine practices to be considered historical. Burgoyne follows a similar method, relying on genre and five subtypes to define historical films. Although crediting these and other scholars for their research and drawing on their work, Stubbs finds their definitions of historical films lacking, arguing their approach does not provide the needed nuance to distinguish historical films from other films. Stubbs finds much more useful the works of Philip Rosen, David Eldridge, and Natalie Zemon Davis, who define historical films not simply through genre, but rather as films who seriously engage with representations of the past. Expanding on their ideas, Stubbs defines historical films as "films which engage with history or which in some way construct a relationship to the past. However, in order to account for the impact of production and audience practices on genres, I will argue that these relationships to the past are created not only by the films themselves but also by cultural contexts in which they operate and the discourses they generate." (Stubbs, 19) It is in his study of the cultural contexts of the films, the extra-textual engagements, that Stubbs excels and persuasively argues the importance of understanding the societal role of historical films.

In the chronological section of the book, Stubbs traces historical films in three broad eras—up to World War II, the age of epics, and New Hollywood (with special attention paid to the Vietnam and post-Vietnam era). Of course, there are not set in stone delineations, there is some overlap in these eras, but by approaching the subject chronologically, Stubbs is able to explore the cultural contexts of the films. Stubbs strikes a nice balance between films featuring American history and films featuring European, ancient, and other historical subjects, and uses some interesting examples, discussing *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1941), *The Godfather* (1972), *Grease* (1978), and *American Graffiti* (1973), as well as *The Robe* (1953), *Quo Vadis* (1951), and *Disraeli* (1929).

The final two chapters of the book move away from the chronological approach by focusing respectively on technical/aesthetic aspects of historical films and public interaction with historical films. The public interaction chapter is particularly important, and perhaps Stubbs could have expanded it, especially the small section examining the use of historical films in the classroom. If, as he argues, historical films "need to be understood as one of the principal ways in which people form relationships with the past," then a more in-depth analysis

of the often-symbiotic relationship between film studio marketing departments and classroom teachers would have strengthened his argument. (Stubbs, 4) However, that is a small criticism for a book that provides a valuable resource for those seeking to understand the role that historical films play in American society. Speaking as a historian who both teaches classes exploring the intersection between historical film, history, and identity, and who is researching and writing on those same subjects, *Historical Film: A Critical Introduction* will prove to be a well-thumbed, useful addition to my bookshelf.

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Thoreauvian Modernities: Transatlantic Conversations on an American Icon. François Specq, Laura Dassow Walls, and Michael Granger (eds.). Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2013. P/bk 310pp. ISBN 978-0-8203-4429-4. Price £21.50.

This collection of essays was conceived following a May 2009 conference in Lyon, devoted entirely to the work of Henry David Thoreau. As the introduction tells us, the aim of the collection is three-fold: to explore how Thoreau responded to emerging economic, cultural, philosophical and political currents of the nineteenth century; to expand upon the dialectic of the "timeless" and the "timely," as, the editors argue, this combines to form "a utopian image of the eternal" in Thoreau's work (2); to further the commitment to transatlanticism that has come to define American Studies in recent years. The editors connect the third point to Thoreau's famous expression in the conclusion to *Walden* of his desire "to speak somewhere without bounds." Indeed, bringing together essays from European and American scholars alike, the timeliness of this volume should not be minimized. *Thoreauvian Modernities* follows in the wake of such critical works as *The Other Emerson* (2010), which, edited by Branka Arsic and Cary Wolfe, provides a radical reassessment of Emerson's philosophy without the constraints of historical specificity. In this regard, we should also mention Jane Bennett's *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild* (2004), in which the author constructs a number of dialogues between Thoreau and contemporary thinkers, such as Michel Foucault and Donna Haraway. Driving *Thoreauvian Modernities* is a constant attention to concepts of "openness" and "relationality," which, of course, are keywords related to so-called postmodern philosophy. However, the authors in this collection are not unified in their estimation of Thoreau as a proto-postmodern thinker, and he appears variously in the guises of "modernity" (Robinson), "nonmodernity" (Walls), and "antimodernity" (Granger). The most successful chapters of the collection are those that seek to link the discussion of temporality and critical genre to Thoreau's ethical and aesthetic dimensions, which often appear inseparable in his work. In his rejection of modernity, understood as the industrial and economic upheaval of the nineteenth century, Thoreau turned to the classics of literature as part of his project of living apart from his New England neighbors. His obsession with etymology, Michael Granger avers, "gave him new possibilities of expression to convey a vision that

was impossible to impart with simple stock phrases" (52). Certainly, Thoreau's preference for ancient, or "backward," tropes to describe the folly of his contemporaries is clearly indicated in one of the central mottoes of *Walden*, where he states that "men have become the tools of their tools" (80). This is similar to his assertion that: "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us" (136). Both are examples of *hysteron proteron*, or "putting the cart before the horse," as we most commonly identify this particular trope. The inversion of the order of things "is neither beautiful nor useful," according to Thoreau's *Walden* (81), but it is nevertheless his knowledge of early modern sources that allows him to wage his rhetorical assault on modern society.

However, as William Rossi's chapter "Thoreau's Multiple Modernities" rightfully points out, Thoreau was greatly ambivalent about his position in relation to the historical circumstance he found himself in. Rossi engages Thoreau's ambiguous view of history by turning to the ecological strain of Thoreau's work, which, Rossi argues, aims at slowing down time and preserving nature as a "material memory" in the form of his Journal (63); Thoreau's "seasonal sensibility" thus amounts to a "cumulative temporality," which is opposed to the "fragmentation" that Thoreau associates with "normative modern temporality" (66). François Specq's essay "Poetics of Thoreau's Journal and Postmodern Aesthetics" focuses on the temporal theme of Thoreau's Journal as well. Addressing the "gravitational pull" of the Journal, "the passage of time," and Thoreau's "attunement to the enigma of the visible," Specq portrays Thoreau as a liminal figure, traversing "the edge between physical nature and human significance" (220). In his conclusion, Specq affirms that Thoreau's style—and, thus, his conception of nature—is caught between "firmness and fragility," but, Specq is keen to note, "this is only ontological fragility, not postmodern fallibility or fallacy" (230). Thoreau's "desire for absoluteness" thus means that we should not view him as some kind of "pioneer postmodernist," according to Specq (230); however, Specq's anxious disavowal of postmodernity, a fragmentary and differentiated term in itself, does not help us make sense of Thoreau's "relative" universality, as Specq confusingly brands it (230).

Whatever kind of "modernity" we might group Thoreau with, the impossibility of domesticating the tensions and points of crisis in his work—vacillating between "rapture and disgust," as David Dowling's contribution has it ("Fraught Ecstasy: Contemporary Encounters with

Thoreau's Postpristine Nature" 235), or between "exhilaration and regret," in Alan D. Hodder's words (see *Thoreau's Ecstatic Witness* 35)—finally means that any critical categorization of Thoreau's work must and should necessarily fail. As *Thoreauvian Modernities* hardly presents us with a cohesive image of Thoreau, as it shouldn't, we may perhaps view it as we would "the laciniae of a lichen, a torn fragment," to draw on one of the more evocative images found in Thoreau's Journal (May 24, 1857). Be that as it may, as "[w]e want not completeness but intensity of life," this diverse collection certainly adds a most deserving fragment to the already substantial body of scholarship devoted to Thoreau.

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Henry Miller: The Inhuman Artist: *A Philosophical Inquiry*. Indrek Männiste. Bloomsbury: New York, 2013. h/bk 142 pp. ISBN 978-1-6235-6108-6. Price $110.00.

In 1930, aspiring author Henry Miller left New York City for Paris, in order to be, as he called it, reborn. Unable to find an authorial voice in his own country, Miller sought an environment suitable for developing and cultivating himself into a new type of artist: the *inhuman artist*. Trying to pinpoint a philosophy in Miller's writing has all but befuddled scholars—even Anais Nin claimed that Miller did not have a philosophy but rather feelings. A concept perhaps misunderstood in previous Miller scholarship, the philosophy of the *inhuman artist* begins to take shape within Miller's first novel, *Tropic of Cancer* (1934). Nearly 80 years after Miller's seminal publication, arguably the first scholarly work has been published that attempts to unravel the mystery behind Miller's overarching philosophy. Systematically presented, Indrek Männiste's effort is exceedingly successful in bringing order to what has often been construed as Miller's divergent perspectives on art and life.

For far too long, Männiste argues, the task to demarcate Miller's philosophical position has been avoided; therefore, this new work sets out to undertake a comprehensive look across the artist's oeuvre in order to delineate the boundaries and direction of Miller's thought. Of note is that this new publication on Miller's philosophy is far from exhaustive, and Männiste makes this clear from the very beginning.

A crucial starting place begins with Miller's perspective of time. Männiste explains Miller's time-concept through two divisions, the *traditional present* and the *full present*. For Miller, the *traditional present* represents the obsessive ideologies of society—consumerism, work, linear time, the "vulgar reality"—essentially, the consumption from which he sought escape. *Full present*, in contrast, gives freedom to the "emerging artist's realm" (28). Within this space, the artist is free to move in all directions, ultimately heading to the ideal concept of a symbolic *China*. Not the literal China, rather, *China* is a realm born from the need to escape the *traditional present*. It represents an "antithesis to the world" (103) and is "a concept relating to art and living" (101). Miller does not depend upon time in a chronological sequence (also discussed in the works of both James K. Decker and Katy Masuga), but rather, looks internally, in order to "uphold certain moments and sustain their

aura as long as he pleases" (34). The *full present*, for Miller, becomes an ahistorical pathway through which the artist can remove the shackles of the *traditional present*.

Männiste justly draws a distinction in Miller's work between "art" and art as well as "literature" and literature. The words in parentheses represent the forms that conspire with the *traditional present*, and are therefore incapable of guiding the artist and his audience to the ideal of *China* (82). Moreover, "literature" is inferior to true literature in that it is revolutionless, incapable of spurring people out of their daily routine. It is the *inhuman artist* who is capable of ascending the consumerized "art" in order to produce effective art, divesting himself from his surroundings and creating art for the betterment of man and opposing cultural demands. But Miller believes that the true artist will eventual transcend their medium, moving past art as they move through the *full present* toward *China* (112).

Männiste's publication primarily examines Miller's work through a close reading of the texts; yet, a crucial element to Miller's development includes geographical influences. Approaching the *inhuman* condition could not be achieved if Miller had remained in America. Paris proved a necessary resource for acquiring freedom from the American environment. As Miller grew older, returning to American to live in Big Sur and then the Pacific Palisades, he continued to support the idea of artists rebuffing a life complacent within the American societal norms. He was the wise sage, who believed that "art is a weapon against modern society" (127). And in particular, the modern American society had only promoted a false sense of identity that did not require the literature or art of the *inhuman artist*.

While this new publication on Miller organizes his ideology through a manageable presentation, Männiste's work does leave the reader desiring a heartier analysis of the texts. Indeed, it seems as if Männiste is rushing through the crucial points. Additionally, while there is adequate support through quotes from Miller's work, the breadth of sources appears limited to select key texts. For instance, when introducing the foundations of Miller's term, the *inhuman*, the hypothesis is established on a mere two pages from Miller's vast repository. Männiste acknowledges this point; however, for such a crucial aspect of Miller's theories on art and the artist, it might be argued that a few paragraphs are a weak foundation for ascribing an

encompassing philosophy upon Miller. Such weaknesses may reside in the fact that Männiste relies heavily, and in some cases only, on *Tropic of Cancer* for the key elements of the argument. What prevents these drawbacks from detracting significantly from the work is Männiste's awareness and deft maneuvering around these textual qualms.

In sum, these new insights into Miller illuminate the motivations behind one of America's most controversial authors. Indeed, Männiste's analysis of Miller brings fresh understanding as to why Miller believed that America failed to support its artists. A welcome addition to recent Miller scholarship, Männiste's initial efforts will undoubtedly find expansion within Bloomsbury's upcoming publication, *Henry Miller: New Perspectives*, edited by James K. Decker and Männiste, slated for 2015.

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Anger and Racial Politics: The Emotional Foundation of Racial Attitudes in America. Antoine J. Banks. New York: Cambridge UP, 2014. ISBN: 9781107049833. Hardback. 214 pages. $90 USD.

Political scientist Antoine J. Banks could not have predicted that *Anger and Racial Politics* would appear just before the fatal shooting of an unarmed Black teenager by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Nor could he have predicted the scale of the protest movement that would develop not just in response to the shooting of Michael Brown, but also in response to the grand jury's decision not to indict Brown's killer. However, Banks might have predicted the shape and emotional basis of white Americans' reactions to the protests, for this book theorizes the relationship between whites' anger and their attitudes toward race and public policy.

Anger and Racial Politics brings to the study of American race relations clarity and methodological rigor at a time when both are needed. Banks examines government survey data and performs original experiments on human respondents, using quantitative methods to advance a striking argument: that anger drives contemporary American whites to make policy decisions in terms of their beliefs about race, even when the trigger of that anger is ostensibly unconnected to race. Banks finds that among both racially liberal and racially conservative whites, anger causes their racial attitudes to exert a greater degree of influence over their political thinking. Scholars and political commentators have long disagreed over the gulf between the norm of (formal) racial equality currently dominant in American culture and white Americans' opposition to policies designed to reduce racial inequality. Many on the right understand whites' opposition to such policies as grounded in a principled commitment to small government and individualism; many on the left, and in the social sciences, understand this opposition as an ideological commitment (in the Marxian sense) to race-neutral juridical norms that allows whites to claim innocence of wrongdoing, while allowing them to maintain the collective advantages that they accrued over centureis of *de jure* and *de facto* white supremacy. Banks aims to clarify this debate "by providing a robust theory that correctly predicts the emotional substrates across a range of political and group attitudes" (18), and his book succeeds.

In demonstrating that anger activates white Americans' racial attitudes, Banks traces some of the ramifications of this phenomenon. The dominant racial attitude among whites is that of colorblindness, also known as symbolic racism (or as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva vividly puts it, "racism without racists"). The colorblind claim that race is not and should not be a factor in their decision-making, and that systemic racism is a thing of the past, yet sociologists have shown that colorblind ideology actually correlates with both anti-Black affect and opposition to Blacks' political demands. Banks finds that anger does motivate white liberals and anti-racists. However, progressive whites constitute a minority; the majority of whites score high in what sociologists call symbolic racism. Banks's theory therefore has a chilling implication: if you make 100% of whites angry, and thereby increase the influence of their racial attitudes over their policy decisions, then you strengthen the white majority's opposition to Black political demands. Banks shows this to be the case in his analyses of the role of Tea Party candidates in 2010 midterm elections. Tea Partiers' angry rhetoric appealed to reactionary whites, while it drove the minority of white racial liberals further left, resulting in a massive Republican victory.

The book also helps clarify discussions of the changing nature of whites' anti-Black feelings. Some have argued that colorblind racism is merely old-fashioned bigotry that has gone underground, but Banks demonstrates how these two structures of feeling differ. The old-fashioned racism of Southern segregationists works from the premise of Blacks' supposed biological difference from and inferiority to whites; its emotional foundation, Banks finds, is disgust at the idea of physical contamination. In contrast, the new-model racism of the colorblind works from the premise of Blacks' supposed cultural inferiority, their failure to adopt the mainstream American (read: white) cultural norms of individual responsibility, sexual continence, and so forth—the narrative of Black cultural pathology recited by everyone from Bill Cosby to the white reactionaries chanting "pants up, don't loot." Banks discovers that the attitude of new-model racists is founded not in disgust but in anger. After the Black unrest of the late 1960s, white attitudes toward Blacks shifted from old-fashioned disgust toward blame, or as Banks puts it, "an individualistic frame that held Blacks responsible for their lower status in society because of their own moral failings" (24). The two forms of racism may have functionally similar results, but they spring from different emotional and ideological sources, which means that different emotional appeals can trigger them.

And here the book is most provocative, suggesting not only avenues for further research but also political strategies. Activating the anger of racially progressive American whites has the potential to mobilize them to pursue egalitarian or redistributive policies; Banks also proposes that instead of activating anger, anti-racist activists and politicians might activate whites' feelings of guilt and shame over racial inequity (feelings much derided by the right). However, as Banks notes, "people who should feel the most guilt about race do not," since "whites scoring high in today's subtle form of prejudice report less guilt than those scoring low in prejudice" (168). Readers expecting analyses of political rhetoric or an ethnographic study of differences in whites' racial attitudes will find the book a disappointment, but only if they fail to recognize that its strength comes from its narrow focus on the relationship between affect and testable political responses. Banks acknowledges that his study is specific to the United States, but his work suggests that investigations into the emotional bases of attitudes toward race and ethnicity in other national contexts could change the terms of many debates on culture and policy, from Ferguson to Xinjiang to Lampedusa.

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The Triple Package: What Really Determines Success. Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. h/bk 320pp. ISBN 978-1-4088-5223-1. Price £18.99.

Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld argue that they have isolated the keys that really determine economic success for individuals and groups, documenting the "rise and fall of groups" (8) as they enact, or lose these keys. Citing sociological and economic statistics, and looking primarily, but not exclusively, at Mormons (the Church of Latter Day Saints), Asians and Jewish groups, the authors argue that groups and individuals who have 1) a superiority complex, 2) (seemingly paradoxically) insecurity, and 3) impulse control offer the best chance for economic success in the United States. The authors define a "superiority complex" as any group that has a "deeply internalized belief in your group's specialness, exceptionality, or superiority" (8). These beliefs can come from a variety of sources including cultural, historical, or religious justifications. In a seeming paradox, however, these groups also have a measure of insecurity, or a "chip on their shoulder" that creates an "anxious uncertainty about your worth or place in society, a feeling or worry that you or what you've done or what you do have is in some fundamental way not good enough" (9). This usually comes from outsider groups who feel an antagonistic relationship towards the dominant U.S. culture—or, in the case of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, an inferiority complex towards Western Europe—but still want to participate in that dominant culture. These outsider groups combine the superiority-inferiority complex with "impulse control" that runs against the grain of current U.S. culture. This advantage provides "the ability to resist temptation, especially the temptation to give up in the face of hardship or quit instead of persevering at a difficult task" (10). These three factors must be present, the authors argue, and any group that has some, but not all of these factors, does not have the "Triple Package" that can foster economic success in the contemporary United States.

The Triple Package provides extensive anecdotal evidence regarding the groups they explore (which is not excluded to Mormons, Asians, or Jews) in a way that offers a provocative glimpse into the cultural beliefs and norms of the groups presented. For any readers interested

in the overall mindset of contemporary U.S. citizens, the authors do a strong job of pointing out the changing cultural and economic outlook of those U.S. citizens who do not consider themselves as outsiders. Chua and Rubenfeld rightly point out how many U.S. citizens have lost the "impulse control" of their Puritan, and more recently, WASP predecessors. This loss of key Triple Package feature has caused them to give up in the face of difficulty and has caused a "living for now" outlook in which many U.S. citizens feel they "have no incentive to engage in impulse control, sacrificing present satisfactions in hope of future gain" (180) because they no longer think that "discipline and hard work will be rewarded" (180). While the book paints with broad strokes in making its argument, and while the book does not necessarily address objections and counter-arguments, the book does address concerns that get raised from their own presented material. For instance, the Mormons are featured heavily in the book as exemplars of the Triple Package, but for much of their history on the North American continent they do not exhibit the type of success the book says of them. Chua and Rubenfeld point out, however, that it was not until the 1920s that most Mormons began abstaining from alcohol, tobacco, and other consumption. While the Mormons had the first two requisites of the Triple Package throughout their history, impulse control was missing until this time. Once established, though, the Mormons began to see a sharp rise of economic success, thus accounting for the missing years of success they could have had.

Even though the book claims they have "stressed the dark underside of the Triple Package," the authors fall short of exploring and condemning the pathologies associated with these elements of economic success—they address these problems, but not to a degree that gives confidence Chua and Rubenfeld really want to acknowledge the realities of genocide and holocaust that have come from a racial, national, or cultural superiority complex that has created economic success at the expense of other people. Additionally, the authors gesture at alternatives to what can and should be counted as "success," but only gloss over potential objections to defining success as only monetary gain and worth in such a way that readers get the feeling that the authors *do* define success in monetary gain and worth and are quite willing to gloss over inconvenient realities of social justice issues, environmental concerns, and competing economic theory when addressing the downsides of the Triple Package mentalities. For

instance, the authors seemingly critique and decry instant gratification and impulse-spending while seeming to praise delayed gratification and high-income consumption as signs of success when these actions can be part of an un-checked, un-examined pattern of consumerism within the United States regardless of when the spending occurs in a person's life. In these explorations, the authors state that to "be crystal clear, there's nothing wrong with a high salary or a luxury car," (159) the book does not entertain, nor imagine, possible objections from environmental, economic, or social justice perspectives that might disagree with such a statement, or alternatives to what counts as success.

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The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop

The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop. Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. P/bk 216 pp. ISBN 978-1-107-67254-3. Price $27.99.

The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop is a collection of essays, written by distinguished authors, who reflect on American poet Elizabeth Bishop's life and work. The main focus of the book follows its organisation, i.e. the first part comprises specific contexts and concrete issues, while the second one refers to Bishop's major works. In addition to this, the companion incorporates lists displaying relevant dates in Bishop's life and work, from the day when she was born, continuing up to 2011, when the centennial of Bishop's birth took place.

In their comprehensive introduction, Cleghorn and Ellis focus on the existing heritage within Bishop studies, without disregarding the merits of new perspectives. They maintain that Bishop was "admired for her descriptive powers and the apparent modesty of her poetic persona, not quite a Modernist or a confessional poet. At times she appeared an early Postmodernist […] Indeed, it was not until James Longenbach's *Modern Poetry after Modernism* (1997) that Bishop's centrality within the main shifts and tensions of twentieth-century poetry began to be understood. In historical terms, she is one of the few poets to link the Modern and Postmodern, Primitive art and Surrealism". Pointing out that "*The Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop* looks backward and forward" and aims at "[…] summarising contemporary Bishop studies, it also suggests new approaches, points of comparison, and questions". The next part focuses on "memoirs, short stories, art criticism, books reviews, and blurbs", her letters, as well as Bishop's posthumous reputation, expressed in Christina Pugh's quotation about the relevance of *Edgar Allan Poe* to Bishop's reputation, comparsing it with the impact of R. W. Franklin's manuscript edition of Dickinson's poems on Dickinson's studies.

Part I portrays Bishop from a biographical context. Firstly, Thomas Travisano depicts Bishop as "semi-translucent", 'veiling' important aspects of her life', while Mutlu Konuk Blasing calls her "an autobiographical poet with an impersonal touch" (341). Both authors take into account her poems, memoires, stories and correspondence, in which the mapping of the most subtle emotions is intertwined with gossip, 'quotidian facts', anecdotes, etc. Steven Gould Axelrod portrays

Bishop as a poet of observation, asserting that Bishop's output is neither ahistorical nor apolitical, but deeply implicated in the public discourse. Additionally, he touches upon gender issues in the context of her work, emphasising the dimension of self-awareness it includes in the context of the historical and political corpus. Kirstin Hotelling Zona discusses the issues of race, class and gender within Bishop studies, while emphasising the existing balance between the sensation of the individual in correlation with "the other". Many of Bishop's poems are included in the analysis, like "The Gentlemen of Shalott", "At the Fishhouses", "Questions of Travel", "The Moose", and many others.

Susan Rosenbaum clarifies the intertwined world of Bishop's written word and her visual musings, emphasising that "writing poetry is an unnatural act. It takes great skill to make it seem natural. Most of the poet's energies are really directed towards this goal: to convince himself (perhaps, with luck, eventually some readers) that what he's up to and what he's saying is really an inevitable *only* natural way of behaving under the circumstances" (*Pr* 327). Rosenbaum emphasises that Bishop was equally inspired by the scientific understanding of nature and "the decidedly un-real", leaving her readers with many possibilities for charting the "the vertiginous mixtures of modernity".

Bonnie Costello inspects Bishop's connection with poetic tradition, focusing on verbal, aural, thematic and structural parallels and echoes of this context. Not surprisingly, "poetic tradition was, for Bishop, not an intimidating 'ideal order', or even a set of conventions to which she must submit, but a resource from which she could draw personal and aesthetic models and adapt them to her unique contemporary experience".

In Part II of *The Companion*, in an essay titled "In the Village: Bishop and Nova Scotia", Sandra Berry provides insightful analysis of Bishop's art as an expression of her experience within different geographical contexts, while attempting to understand the nature of knowledge itself, defining it as "direct engagement with the environment, with events and activities, and with each other". Her five senses, according to Berry, are "entangled in conscious and subconscious ways with revelation, contemplation, speculation, questioning, and qualification", producing different kinds of knowledge (historical, cultural, familial, geographical, physical and aesthetic). Giving examples of some of Bishop's poems, Berry reveals new semantics, thereby corroborating

that knowledge is hard won and mysteriously real and unreal: "forever, flowing and drawn," and, finally, "flowing and flown". She points out how "the poems gradually become more autobiographical, more overtly drawn from or about her life", contributing thus to the perception of Bishop as being more explorer-like than confessor-like. Bethany Hicok puts forward a radically revised basis for perceiving Bishop's life and work through examining her poetics. Mapping the "geographical, intellectual and aesthetic axis", Hicok maintains that "these are not essential terms in Bishop's work, rather, they go beyond describing simple geographical destinations to assume diacritical significance".

Barbara Page draws the focus to three phases of Bishop's life in Brazil, a period that was elated and productive, while Lloyd Schwart in "Back to Boston: *Geography III* and Other Late Poems" expounds the period of Bishop's life chronologically marked by the moment when she returned to Boston and her poems like "Crusoe in England", described as "her deepest poem about loneliness and displacement, as well as "The Moose", a poem that evokes a sense of nostalgia and remains immersed in our minds as tender and touching poem…".

In her essay titled "Bishop's Correspondence", Siobhan Phillips tracks what further reveals the importance of Bishop's letter writing in the course of the demystification of her life and work. This mode of Bishop's writing seems to transpose the genealogy of her reflections on *ars poetica*. Moreover, Bishop's letters further reveal her subtlety in expressing her immense erudition, while in the next chapter Peggy Samuels observes the poet's expressions of the visual and her response to its different forms.

In the last chapter of *The Companion*, Lorrie Goldensohn pores over Bishop's posthumous publications (*The Complete Poems: 1927–1979*, *Edgar Allan Poe&The Juke-Box*, *Elizabeth Bishop: Poems, Prose, and Letters*), providing a chronological framework which entails literary canon analysis. More specifically, as Goldensohn emphasises, it is the story of maintaining short lyric as her answer to the stretchy flatness of narrative poetry, while it also includes her perception of contemporary American poetry, love poetry, her own doubts about publishing love poetry, and the story of the market place and its own reactions to novelties within the poetic corpus.

Bearing in mind all the above-mentioned, we may freely state that the book is definitely a good start for anyone interested in diverse

aspects of Bishop's life and work, in her place within the American literary tradition, and in the way diverse literary theoretical approaches meet Bishop's texts, in its variety of forms.

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