Book Reviews

Edited by **Manu Bazzano**, Book Reviews Editor

Do not Eat Soup with Chopsticks

Bollas premises his exploration of the Chinese mind by saying that Eastern and Western modes of thinking are not 'different minds' but 'different parts of the mind'. Echoing a line of reasoning unbroken in his work, he sees Eastern thinking as leaning towards the maternal order and Western thinking as dependent on the paternal order. Sensitive to the dangers of oversimplification, Bollas admittedly approaches the challenge with trepidation, and is aware, one assumes, of how exposed the book's central claim is to the charge of championing a belief in a 'universal mind', which in a time of imaginative fragmentation is at best archaic. But then Bollas never shied away from regarding psychoanalysis itself (a practice he single-handedly brought back to vivid life from the mechanistic clutches and the knee-jerk interpretative compulsions of the transference/counter-transference brigade) as archaic, albeit in a positive sense, i.e. at variance with a *Zeitgeist* dominated by academic psychology, cognitivism and neuroscientism.

After a brief foray into Hinduism, the author focuses on the Far East and China. This part of the Eastern mind is founded on five 'mother texts', the intellectual foundation of the writings and sayings of the great sages and thinkers Lao Tzu, Confucius, Mo Tzu, Mencius, Zhuangzi. Echoing Winnicott's transitional objects, he sees the 'long periods of source-based interpretation' that followed as 'transitional moments' (p. 3). I wonder, however, whether reliance on classic books reveals a dependence on 'the paternal order' rather than the 'maternal'? Surely a 'classic' is part of the canon, and as such inscribed in an order of discourse belonging to the solar, paternal *logos*. And how does Lao Tzu's anarchic celebration of spontaneity and naturalness fit the picture? The answer may lie in a fundamental split that Bollas imagines between spiritual cultivation and the ways of the world: 'The imaginings of Lao Tzu are passionate testimonies to the infantile epoch in human beings' (55), incompatible with societal and political life. This division is highly problematic and even mystifying. One of these two separate worlds is described, bafflingly, as a 'very private realm, cocooned by the self-hypnotic trance of meditation... a derivative of the maternal order', and placed in stark contrast with the social and political dimension, in turn belonging to the paternal order. Strangely, Bollas seems to understand *Zen* univocally, as retreat from the world, when the reverse is true: both *Ch'an* and *Zen* strongly emphasise *communal* practice, *sangha*; they emphasise ordinary life, ordinary mind, and the *bodhisattva* path of social and ethical commitment.

‘Our relentlessly reductive Zeitgeist has exerted an indirect influence on… large sections of humanistic therapy’

In stark contrast with Daoist spontaneity are the rules of behaviour spelled out in the Confucian *Book of Rites,* including not attempting to eat soup with chopsticks and refraining from singing when seeing at a distance a coffin with the corpse in it (p. 43).

When comparing Western and Eastern thought, Bollas understandably relies on the Western ‘tradition’, but this sort of comparison does not come off in the long run. The ancient Greeks were interested, according to the author, in the radical opposition between the sensible world and the intelligible, ‘a distinction which the Chinese would have rejected emphatically as artificial’ (p. 8). But the above only applies to mainstream Greek thought. One only needs to think of Heraclitus and Pyrrho to find a much more nuanced position, strongly at variance with mainstream Platonism and the rationalism of Socrates. What Bollas forgets, or chooses to ignore, in his eastern journeying is the presence, alongside dominant Western discourse, of a *counter-tradition*. The latter appreciates chance without the need to systematise it or to dress it in Platonic garb. It values fragmentation as well as what Blanchot, an author Bollas often quotes approvingly in his work, calls the *limit experience*. This oversight on the author’s part is perhaps to be attributed to a matter of style. I see Bollas as a classicist who greatly values the intelligence of form. He is to Freud what Valéry was to Mallarmé – weaving a dazzling thread around the core teachings. In many ways Valéry and Bollas are the ideal disciples, composing their own web of precious dream-work, bringing to the edge of awareness what was latent, and even redirecting the primary thought along more audacious lines.

There may be another rationale to Bollas’ classicism beyond matters of style and form, one of psychoanalytic cultural resistance, a need to shelter psychoanalysis under the umbrella of dominant Western thought. Our relentlessly reductive *Zeitgeist* has exerted an indirect influence on psychoanalysis and large sections of humanistic therapy, pushing our difficult craft off into a tight corner, bullying practitioners into mechanistic formulae variously obsessed by *Sudoku*-style interpretations of transference and counter-transference, by M.O.T. therapy and lapses into the byzantinism of academic psychology – often relegating creative, hands-on practice to the sphere of literary criticism and social commentary. Yet one does not need to rely sheepishly on the ‘tradition’: formidable affinities and elective associations may be found within our own rich Western counter-tradition and of course within Eastern thought – provided, I hasten to add, that we allow ourselves to become exposed to its otherness.

A term Bollas often uses in his work is ‘aleatory’, which means ‘dependent on the throw of a die’, from the Latin *alea*, the dice. *Aleator* is the dice player. Human life is aleatory, made up of chance moments, and this is mirrored in one of the key texts examined here, *The Book of Changes (I Ching)*. Already perceived by Jung as an exemplar of the Chinese mind ‘less interested in causal logic than in the overdeterminations of life’, the *I Ching* is a collective work, nothing less than ‘the effort of a civilization to conceive its view of mankind’ (p. 19).

In a revealingly Platonist move, Jung conceived synchronicity as something *more than mere chance:*

> [Synchronicity] formulates a point of view diametrically opposed to that of causality [in that it]… takes the coincidence of events in space and time as meaning something more than mere chance, namely, a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as the subjective (psychic) states of the observer or observers. (cited on p. 22)

Surprisingly for an author well-versed in post-structuralism and aware of phenomenology, Bollas quotes Jung approvingly, not giving a second thought to that disparaging phrase, ‘*mere* chance’. Where Jung just *had* to dress chance in metaphysical garb, Nietzsche wrote of the *player* who plays well in so far as he is free from the ‘spirit of revenge’, accepting chance in a purposeless universe, refraining from relying on metaphysics of hope and consolation (Bazzano, 2006). This is not the ‘tragic view’, the calamitous reverse of the hero’s quest recounted in the ur-texts

of the West, but true playing, nonchalantly skirting the non-utilitarian realm of the sacred – what Merleau-Ponty called 'the emergent phenomenon', and what Bollas himself, wonderfully re-visioning Freud, calls the unconscious or, in a particularly inspiring passage on Eastern poetry and Western poems, 'the matrix of unconscious affinities' (p. 38):

> We do not know *what* is thought but we are taken up in the thinking of it, drawn into the matrix of unconscious affinities that have met with experiences in the real. (ibid.)

The little that Bollas wrote on Nietzsche is disparaging and often misleading, bafflingly associating him, in spite of one hundred years of sophisticated Nietzschean scholarship, with 'the fascist mind' (Bollas, 1992). In spite of the fact, one must add, that without Nietzsche there would have been no Freud or Jung or Adler. If invoking Nietzsche's spectre is too daunting a proposition, surely one cannot say the same for Blanchot. To a true sailor, Blanchot says, 'no allusion can be made to a goal or a destination' (1999: 445). The sailor loses himself in the dangerous voyage; he is the opposite of Ulysses and won't be tied to the mast, but wants full exposure to the dangerous stirrings of diversion and *se-duction*, of being led astray. Bollas is right: with the herdsman, the sailor is the prototype of the Western hero (the gardener being the equivalent in the East). It is also true that for every Ulysses, there is an anti-Ulysses; for every Oedipus, an anti-Oedipus.

The true 'fascist mind', which elsewhere (Bollas, 1992) he helped unmask, resurfaces unchecked in this book under spiritual guise. Given that 'contemplation may aim at the destruction of delusion, but the deluded mind engaged in contemplation will continue to delude itself' (p. 91), he goes on to quote the Korean commentator Wŏnhyo's (617–686) stern advice to '*annihilate* all productions of mind' (ibid., my italics). The author associates this martial approach to psychic life with Winnicott's 'theory of the elimination of the mind-as-false-self' (ibid.).

I am no authority on Winnicott, but it is disappointing that there is very little mention in this book of the *Ch'an* masters, of Zen and of Dōgen in particular, for his nuanced perspective goes beyond the Manichean opposition between awakening and delusion portrayed above. The opposite of the 'fascist mind' would then be a mind that is curious about itself, open to all its manifestations. For example, in his discourse 'This mind itself is Buddha' (*Sokushin-zebutsu*), Dōgen gives a new twist to the meaning of *kuge* ('flowers in the sky', customarily understood as delusional thoughts distracting the meditator from contemplation). He re-translated *kuge* as 'flowers of *space*', as phenomena to be embraced and appreciated by the mind's thusness (*shinshō*), instead of being hurriedly and nervously rejected as distractions in a practice erroneously identified with quietism. It would be naive, Dōgen says, to identify the discriminating activities of the mind or consciousness itself with Buddha. In fact, Dōgen's point is strikingly similar to Bollas' (2007) own critique of formulaic ways of practising psychoanalysis leading to a 'hypertrophied consciousness' (p. 81). It is also similar to what Blanchot says of Valéry's poetry: it is not only that a poem *houses* individual experience; the poem is the mind; to write a poem is to think, to inhabit the space of thought (p. 88): not a way of exercising the mind but the mind itself. The ways in which both Buddhism and psychotherapy are assimilated in current discourse bypass the subtlety of the unconscious and the more latent, mysterious aspect of psychic and poetic exploration. Bollas' work has been decisive in clarifying this very aspect for psychoanalysis and in opening up exciting new avenues of psychic exploration. What a pity, then, that instead of an encounter with the otherness of the Chinese mind across the centuries, the book uses the interpretative axioms of psychoanalysis to seemingly incorporate that very otherness.

'...without Nietzsche there would have been no Freud or Jung or Adler'

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How it feels to be conscious

The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World

By: Iain McGilchrist
Yale University Press; 2012 2nd Edition, 544 pp
Reviewed by: R. J. Chisholm, trainee psychotherapist with the Tariki Trust, Leicestershire

One of the most astonishing developments in our era of scientific discovery is the increased understanding of consciousness through the investigation of its principal organ, the brain. But seeing how the brain works, and how it has evolved to perform the various and highly complex tasks that allow consciousness to occur, has led many thinkers, and not just neuroscientists, to conclude that consciousness is largely a matter of brain function alone. By likening the brain to a computer and seeing consciousness as a fundamentally computational operation that is supported by the organic hardware that the brain provides, a radically different view of human consciousness than from that which has prevailed throughout most of Western history has begun to emerge. In this determinedly materialistic view there is no spirit or divine spark that lights the consciousness of humankind, nor does consciousness ever rise above its evolutionary origins. Consciousness is only a highly evolved organic function, driven by a blind urge to produce offspring. Even the exalted achievements of civilisation such as art, literature and music are merely byproducts of the human mating game, and provide no argument for a transcendent human spirit.

As for religion – 'that vast, moth-eaten musical brocade', as Philip Larkin described it – it has long ago outlived its evolutionary purpose. While this may seem a bleak and reductive way to regard human nature, the scientific evidence which is widely believed to validate it appears to negate any opposing views. We are simply the cleverest monkeys on the evolutionary scale and we are deluded if we believe we are anything more than that. But in this remarkably learned and highly readable book, Iain McGilchrist argues that the scientific evidence does not support such a flatly reductive view at all. Indeed, consciousness only appears this way because of the reductive habits of mind which have come to predominate in science and incline most scientists to view the brain as a machine. Even worse, those very habits which skew the scientific understanding of consciousness now appear to affect the brain itself, and are causing deleterious effects on the world we construct and inhabit.

The title of the book comes from a parable by Nietzsche in which a wise, spiritual Master appoints a talented but short-sighted emissary to oversee his affairs, only to have his vizier seize control of his properties and then run them to ruin. According to McGilchrist, the right hemisphere of the brain, whose powers are intuitive, holistic and open to new information, is like the Master, and the left hemisphere, which is logical, reductive and closed in its operations, is like his emissary. Ideally, both hemispheres would work together harmoniously, as the right hemisphere would intuit meaning and values out of its capacity for gathering and appreciating new experiences, while the left hemisphere would perform the cognitive work which would give functional expression to the right hemisphere's directives. But ever since the Enlightenment, Western culture has increasingly ceded power from the right to the left hemisphere. Now, in the present era of post-modernism, the triumph of the left hemisphere is all but complete as we live in a hyper-rational age almost entirely bereft of transcendental meaning and spiritual values.

Given the vast scope of its thesis it might seem that even such a prodigiously well informed book as this has attempted to present Western cultural history in too narrow a frame. Indeed, one wonders whether these learned reflections on the influence of the hemispheric divide on culture offer much insight into the split nature of the brain, or try to use the divided brain itself as an authority for making some highly contentious philosophical and aesthetic judgements. But in its great, sweeping vision, the book seems less concerned with constructing a flawless argument than with urging a change of perspective. The brain should not be seen so much as a fixed site of consciousness, but should instead be regarded as the pre-eminent organ of experience which both affects, and is affected by, the

world it encounters. In this respect the book succeeds magnificently, for it is hard to imagine how any book could convey so beautifully not only what it is to *feel* consciously, but also how it feels to be conscious. Even so, one may still wonder whether the central argument is correct.

A neuroscientist, McGilchrist admits that there is still much more that is unknown than is known about the brain. Even in a widely accepted phenomenon such as the hemispheric divide, for example, there is no certainty about why the brain is structured that way. And even though the brain is divided, both hemispheres play a role in virtually every act and condition of consciousness. Although puzzles such as these are ones that only neuroscientists can explore and debate, there are many other questions raised by the book for the non-expert to ponder. Perhaps the foremost would be whether it is correct to regard one hemisphere or the other as responsible for particular types of engagement in the world. It may be legitimate to say that activities which mainly draw on the capacity of one hemisphere or the other dispose us to act in particular ways. But in which side of the brain do the volitions that activate the capacities of each hemisphere reside? McGilchrist is certainly opposed to the idea that consciousness can be reduced to brain activity alone. Yet by appearing to attribute agency rather than propensity to each hemisphere, it might seem that he is in league with brain reductionists.

Far from limiting himself to his area of expertise, McGilchrist demonstrates great erudition in a number of other disciplines, including philosophy, literature, art and religion. All of these subjects are brought together in a survey of Western cultural history that presents a vast array of ideas which cannot be summarised here. But two things deserve mention. First is his discussion of imitation, which not only demolishes the concept of replication that is so central to meme theory, but also presents a wonderful explanation of how imitation can be an act of creation, as well as a way of understanding. Second is his discussion of metaphor, in which metaphor is seen as the bodying forth of language into the felt sense of experience. Quite simply, these are brilliant ideas that are beautifully expressed, and the book would be worth reading for them alone. But McGilchrist offers far more than a parade of fascinating ideas affixed to a controversial thesis about the brain. His book presents a profound meditation on the reduced possibilities of experience in our spiritually desperate times. It deserves the most serious attention. S

Governmentality

Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind

By: Nikolas Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached
Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013, 344pp.
ISBN: 9780691149615
Reviewed by: Daniel Daviddson, geneticist

' What kind of beings do we think we are?' 'Is our very nature as human beings being shaped by the structure and functions of our brains?' (p. 1). Since its inception in 1962, the field of neuroscience has been challenging our conceptions of the mind and the self, seeking to localise mental states within the neural pathways of the brain. Technological developments coupled with the exponential growth of research and scientific publications have led to the ubiquitous use of references of the brain in popular culture, with neuroscientific arguments being deployed in psychiatry, pedagogy and policy. Steady encroachments into the once-privileged domains of the social and human sciences have evoked vehement rejections of reductionism, essentialism and materialism. Do we have anything to fear from the novel 'truth claims' of the neurosciences?

Nikolas Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached provide a refreshing analysis of the new brain sciences, describing the key conceptual, technological, economic and biopolitical developments that have enabled the neurosciences to transcend the laboratory into the utilisation of governance. Drawing on the work of Georges Canguilhem and Michel Foucault, they chart the emergence of a 'neuromolecular gaze', intertwined with the rise of psychopharmacology to make the mind visible to a conjugation of different elements and practices of seeing:

> One dimension is spatial and temporal. This distribution occurs along a number of planes: across the individual body (localization) across the collective body (social factors in causation and recovery), across time (the hereditary). A second dimension of this conjugation is technical or perhaps that which is observed into marks, lines, colours, spaces, and edges, patterns and patterning. A third dimension of this rendering visible, perhaps the most significant, consists in the practices within which acts of seeing are enmeshed. (p. 55)

Whilst this book seeks to develop a more affirmative relation

to the neurosciences, appropriate critique is applied to the use of functional brain imaging technologies such as positron emission tomography (PET) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) that aim to decrypt complex molecular pathways in relation to cognition, and transgenic mouse models for neurobiological research in the hope of translation to therapeutics. Illustrating the inherent technical and conceptual limitations of such technologies, the authors trace a history of hype and hyperbole all too familiar from genetics, through neuropsychiatry's futile quest for the ever-elusive neurobiological phenotypic marker or gene for the diagnosis of psychiatric disorders, to social neuroscience studies of consciousness and our capacities for sociality.

The truly fascinating aspect of this book concerns the reshaping of the bio-political sphere, focused on utilising biomarkers for the prediction and control of pathological conduct, to risk identification of genetic susceptibilities for behaviours such as aggression and impulsivity. The field of neuro-criminology actively seeks to provide evidence for a neuro-law of policies for prevention, identification and the management of 'pathology'. A new form of 'governmentality' is taking shape from this emerging neuro-ontology where 'we are obliged to take responsibility for our biology, to manage our brains in order to bear the responsibilities of freedom' (p. 23) through a 'somatic ethic' that no longer just applies to our bodies, but also to our 'plastic' brains. Evidence is already present in the forms of 'brain education' and 'brain awareness programs', and a range of products for our consumption such as Nintendo's Brain Training™ software and Neuro® drinks, all promising to optimise and ignite your brain.

What is novel, then, is not the aspirations to shape, improve, fashion oneself, but the source of authority that underpins it, the technologies that it deploys, and the target or substance upon which it operates – the brain itself (p. 224).

The authors have distanced themselves superbly from the over-generalised critiques of 'neuromania' levelled by the social and human sciences. They reject the argument that neuroscientific materialism is set to displace our conceptions of personhood and the self, but do see the formation of 'a neurobiological dimension to our self-understanding and our practices of self-management' (p. 223). It is from this perspective that Rose and Abi-Rached attempt to sketch out a number of possible opportunities for the neurosciences and the social and human sciences, to move beyond mutual critique to a collaboration of constructive dialogue. Pointing to a new future of bridging the previously insurmountable divide between these disciplines will certainly be a fascinating space to watch. S

Not a Thing of Beauty

Proust among the Nations: From Dreyfus to the Middle East (Carpenter Lectures)

By: Jacqueline Rose
Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2012, 256 pp
ISBN: 978-0226725789
Reviewed by: Manu Bazzano

I see Jacqueline Rose as a natural heir to Hannah Arendt: the same rigorous thought, the same courage to tackle head on (and elegantly) what wilfully escapes the hollow platitudes of contemporary discourse. This book partly continues her critical examination of Zionism, so brilliantly conveyed a few years ago in *The Question of Zion* (2005), this time following an exquisitely unorthodox trajectory with an impressive array of first-rate guest appearances: Dreyfus, Freud, Beckett, Jean Genet, Elia Suleiman, Mahmoud Darwish and Marcel Proust. *Unlike* Arendt, who welcomed the Jewish diaspora and questioned the very nature of belonging as spurious, Rose seems caught up in the compulsion to revisit again and again the armoured citadel of Zion. She could have looked elsewhere: to a nation of elective affinities that refuses to be limited by borders and partitions, or to be enthused by the arbitrary call of belonging; to a sovereign embracing of a voluntary diaspora; to a principled refusal of ethnicity as tribalism. Yet many of us are grateful for her choice to persevere in her quest to unmask the blatant injustice done to the Palestinians and, in this case, to find striking links between the Middle East and Europe, the Israel–

Palestine conflict and some of the greatest literature produced in the very heart of Europe.

The first step in the book's journey is Dreyfus, sent to prison on Devil's Island, off the coast of French Guiana in 1895, wrongly accused of treason, languishing in his cell for five years, one of the most famous miscarriages of justice in history. His was an infamous example of widespread anti-Semitism in Europe. In France, Freud was similarly subjected to rabid prejudice with the newborn art of psychoanalysis equated with 'irrationalism' and assumed to be a frontal attack of venerated Cartesian rationalism.

The odd thing is that the author (coming, of course, from a diametrically opposite angle of informed, articulate and sympathetic stance towards psychoanalysis), obliquely agrees with that view. Partly drawing from Jacques Rancière, she presents the unconscious as the seat of a 'confused knowledge', of a thought 'which can only break bounds and rise to the surface of the mind as a form of savagery' (p. 11), adding sharply: 'For all the attempts to transform it into an aesthetic object, the unconscious is not a thing of beauty' (ibid.).

Is that really so? Hers is of course a well-timed reminder, in a psychological landscape naively bent on narcissistic, happy-clappy self-actualising and mechanistic reprogramming of thoughts and behaviour, of the very real existence of the shadow. It is true, as Rose reminds us, that we are fundamentally 'inhospitable to ourselves' and 'prey to aggressive drives' (p. 64). Discounting this fact would be a sure sign of narcissism and the seed of political disaster – the latter pretty much the course of action chosen by the ruling political class in Israel. Rose aptly reminds us of the story, in the early days of psychoanalysis, of the American woman who, during a lecture by Ernest Jones on dreams, objected that Jones could speak only for Austrians; in her case, as with her fellow Americans, all dreams were positive and altruistic.

Yet what Roses fails to register is that the very notion of the unconscious has shifted considerably since Freud to make room for a sophisticated and pluralistic view beyond the Id. Instead, the author obstinately inhabits the memory of an unreconstructed view of psychoanalysis, even exhuming 'hysteria' as a contemporary relevant form of malaise. This is at variance with her own appeal for a 'new vocabulary, a way that allows us to remain attuned to the iniquities of the world' (p. 9).

In pursuing her fierce and delicate argument, she takes the reader through the 'scarred landscape of a contemporary world from Europe to the Middle East, where 'the legacy of Dreyfus is still being played out to this day' (p. 10). But why Proust, of all people? Because, I presume, he is Mnemosyne's elected bard, a great poet of involuntary memory and a contemporary of Freud who, like Freud, did not 'idealize, flatten out, or subordinate to reason the vagaries of who we are' (p. 8). Both Proust and Freud are also prey (this the author did not say) to the idea that it might be possible by means of involuntary memory to decode reality and retrieve a sort of lost language. Both egregiously stand for the bourgeois dream of resolving the contradictions of frightened elites in the face of the ravages of history. This point is made clearly by Adorno, quoted by Rose, who saw Proust adopting a 'physiognomy' in the attempt to arrive at the secret language of things.

In spite of my disagreements, I recognise this as a first-rate book and a must-read for all practitioners who are interested in a much-needed contemporary discourse which unites *polis* and *psyche*. A necessary, urgent book often prompts us to revisit familiar ground, inviting us to make the familiar unfamiliar again. In my case, I remember feeling greatly moved by Ari Folman's film *Waltz with Bashir*, which deals with the Sabra and Chatila massacres. In September 1982 the Phalangist Lebanese, fully aided and supported by the Israeli army, massacred over three days some 1,700 Palestinians at the refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila. In watching the film, I had overlooked something important which Rose helped me see with tremendous clarity. The film presents the point of view of a traumatised Israeli soldier who had erased the event from his mind. The film, she points out, undoubtedly stages a breakthrough of national memory, before going on to ask:

> What kind of memory, indeed, whose memory, is being privileged by this film?.... For Folman, as an Israeli, the difficulty was something else – how to draw up from the forgotten past a moment of cruel self-reckoning. Yet if this is the strength of the film, it is also its weakness. *Waltz with Bashir* is the story of the perpetrator who suffers. (p. 168)

This is urgent, courageous writing which looks unflinchingly and with remarkable empathic power at both historical events and subjectively nuanced, highly personal passages of poetry and love. In both dimensions, memory gains the central ground, particularly in our time of selective historical memory

and hyper-active forgetting. Unwearyingly, the book charts a collective trajectory of pain, pointing out all along that there can be, paradoxically, great freedom in suffering. Much better to awaken to the reality of suffering than to be lulled in the cosy slumber of de-sublimation. For Samuel Beckett, who authored a masterly essay on Proust, there is great freedom when 'the boredom of living' is replaced by 'the suffering of being' (p. 147). Protection is futile, and only when false protection is abandoned, life becomes fertile again. Freud himself, writing in 1915, argued that 'life... regains its full interest when... life itself may be lost'. Yet suffering cannot be *represented*, not even *suffered*. 'You must learn to suffer better', Clov says in Beckett's *Endgame*. What we can't tolerate becomes segregated; yet this strategy doesn't work. This is where voluntary and involuntary memory becomes crucial.

For me personally, the true hero of this book is not really Proust but Jean Genet, who makes his irreverent appearance towards the end of the book. A novelist and playwright of tremendous power, he went to live with the *fedayeen* and recorded his experiences in a book of aching beauty, *Captif amoureux* (translated as *Prisoner of Love*). Genet, the supreme outsider, loved the Palestinian cause because it was a lost cause. For Genet, the Palestinian revolution, at least during the phase he was acquainted with, was not the desire for a territory but the impossible aspiration to dissolve the 22 Arab nations and 'garland everyone with smiles', creating in the process a hybrid yet fertile union between revolutionary Marxism and Islam (Bazzano, 2012). The Palestinians brought Genet back to life and precipitated his vocabulary, injecting his art with urgency and passion, prompting him to question literature itself, even that of a great writer such as Proust who escaped the world, disappearing, as it were, up his own past. Genet's view of Proust is ambivalent throughout; to Proust he owes the very decision to become a writer when he read him in prison in the 1930s and 1940s – a prisoner made captive by literature, in particular by a passage in *A l'ombre de jeunes filles en fleurs*, which exposes the hatred of the foreigner hidden in the elegant veneer of Parisian aristocratic conversations.

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Berlin-la-Morte

The Next Day

By: David Bowie
CD Music Album ISO/ Columbia, 2013, 60:24mins
ASIN: B00AYHKIZ6
Reviewed by: Manu Bazzano

The artwork of Bowie's 2002 album *Heathen* showed a black and white photo of three dusty old books on a shelf: Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*, with Karl Marx removed from the masters of suspicion's unholy trinity, substituted by the more benign model of the mad scientist. It would have been quite something to have Bowie embracing revolutionary social conscience, a drive which did not always translate well in pop music.

Immortalised and inescapably entombed at the *Victoria & Albert Museum*, having survived a heart attack while on tour in 2004 and considered 'retired' a long time ago, with this album Bowie shows that he is not willing to go gently into that good night. He says so himself in the title track: 'Here I am/ not quite dying/ My body left to rot in a hollow tree/ Its branches throwing shadows/ On the gallows for me'.

At its best, pop is effective alchemy: concept turned to sound, to air molecules, to a shiny and jagged *product*. It is fully digested, unlike 'conceptual art', which does not leave the cerebral womb of conception and remains forever an idea – unlike the Brechtian epic journalism of Lou Reed's *New York* (equally masterly but attuned to a different Muse). Unlike the melancholy and outrage of P.J. Harvey's *Let England Shake*, which deals with war, Bowie's comment on 'training guns on these men in the sun' is largely escapist (*I'd rather be high*) though he does sing, to his credit, 'Generals are full of shit'.

Bowie is Bloomsbury's sci-fi agent, sent to scan the future and contaminate its confused metaphysics with a paean to the mystery and lustre of appearances. An ancient game, to be sure, not limited to Mrs Woolf or

Wilde's militant eccentricities but harking back to the Greeks: reaching the surface of things out of thorough-going exploration of the depths; becoming sublimely superficial out of profundity. If you stare long into the abyss, the abyss stares back at you, Nietzsche said. In Bowie's case, staring long into the abyss turned him into a fashion icon. Unlike Warhol's, and its dissemination into trivia, Bowie's art is worked through. Redeemed even, by surges of thoroughly un-cool sentiment and lyricism, by the heroic lust to survive 'til the next day, the melancholy of Berlin's involuntary memory (*Where are we now?*), by the hope that something will survive (*The Stars are out tonight*). This hope is human, and it counterbalances what Bowie calls 'the heavy philosophical thing', something he mentioned in his conversation with William Burroughs in 1974, and recorded by Rolling Stone:

'The name Bowie just appealed to me when I was younger. I was into a kind of heavy philosophy thing when I was 16 years old, and I wanted a truism about cutting through the lies and all that.'

Heathen had every single word crossed, cancelled by a line. Which is how Nāgārjuna's notion of 'emptiness' should be written, before one has the chance of turning emptiness into a 'thing' – heavy philosophy thing indeed.

Echoes of Burrough's haunt *The dirty boys*, a track whose refrain as chords going up while the story gets down:

> When the sun goes down / when the sun goes down and the die is cast/ when the die is cast and you have no choice / we will run with the dirty boys

There are so many echoes here – of Ray Davies's 'Waterloo Sunset', of Bowie's own *Rock'n'Roll Suicide*, of Scott Walker, as well as echoes within the album itself. An unsteady foot in the avant-garde, one firmly planted in the world of shiny trivia, working through post-neo-romanticism and post-Thatcherism, with an eye to high-brow Nabokovian imagery and deliciously esoteric references (to the Belgian poet and novelist Georges Rodenbach, in *Dancing out in Space*). Rodenbach (1855–1898) might well be the unintentional inspiration for Bowie's own melancholy, moving tribute to Berlin, *Where are we now?*, a song of vulnerable beauty which in its own way links to Rodenbach' equally haunting tribute to Bruges in his short novel *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892).

Musically, too, this is an exciting, richly lyrical and satisfying album. For all his heavy philosophical thing, Bowie keeps breaking all too-humanly into longing and tuneful rage, into hope and despair, turning art, lived life and his gathered cut-outs of daily trivia into wonderful song. S