diligence with which a literary work, radicalizing a feature inherent in all inscription as such, could always point to itself…as a so called literary text" (236). Poems are subjected to ex-appropriation, a phenomena where the failure of authorial intention is more often than not the key behind the success of a text. Some texts – rather some textual achievements are too overwhelming to fit within traditional binary compartments as iterability makes such distinctions at once ambivalent and existential. Poetry for Derrida is "learned ignorance" (240), which, in its essence, reminds one of Plato's Ion.

In the last chapter under my purview by Justin Clemens, Agamben is exhibited as discussing several relationships between "history and action, law and life, nihilism and renewal". Poetry is understood as "an indissociable act of intervention-and-revelation, interruption-and-transmission, negation-and-transformation" (315). The role of enjambment in poetry is understood to be a separation between the metrical limit of each line from its syntactical (rather, semantic since meaning is left suspended until the next line) limit. For Agamben, poetry is political in its very make-up and arises from the "paradoxical torsion" within politics.

The essays that I have chosen to review from this remarkable book shall continue to remain formidable in the ever changing being of literary criticism for at least a decade from its publication. What one finds in this book is a perfect representation of this poetry-philosophy complex through thought-events as opposed to an "emotive-event" (Romantic Poetry would be a nice example) or "spiritual-events" (as with Tagore and Sri Aurobindo). I had critiqued this "thought-event" in Modernist poetry by calling it Æpoetry in one of my early essays which was a product of my impetuous prodigality. The core philosophy of the poetry of the 20th century has been wonderfully summed up by the Yale critic Geoffrey Hartman in "The Fulness and Nothingness of Literature", and I find it fitting as I complete my review:

> Poetry is that which restricts itself to the recovery of "privileged moments," and since this attempt [is] caused by a nostalgia for an irretrievable immediacy, [it] is both retrovert and destined to failure.[2]

Notes

[1] The notion of art as intuition goes back as far as Croce in Western philosophy. In The Essence of the Aesthetic (p. 1921), Croce points this out at the very beginning: "The question as to what is art, - I will say at once, in the simplest manner, that art is vision or intuition" (8, tr. Douglas Ainslie). Also see pages 11, 16, 22 and 24 in the introduction itself. (Reprint by Hard Press Publishing).

[2] Geoffrey Hartman, "The Fulness and Nothingness of Literature" Yale French Studies 16(1955): 66)

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PLANTS IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY: ECOCRITICISM AND THE BOTANICAL IMAGINATION. By John Charles Ryan. New York and London: Routledge, 2018. 256 p.

Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics Vol. 43, No. 1 [205-209]

One could consider 2018 as a fecund year for research that combines ecocriticism, affect, emotions, and embodiment. Among many publications in this area which appeared in 2018, three of them are worth mentioning here. These include Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino's co-edited volume *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment* (2018), Nicole Seymour's *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (2018), and John Charles Ryan's *Plants in Contemporary Poetry: Ecocriticism and the Botanical Imagination* (2018). While Seymour's, Bladow and Ladino's works engage with a wide gamut of literary and media genres in their discussion of emotional connections between material beings and our responses to alarming environmental crises, Ryan's monograph singles out itself by focusing exclusively on plants – what he terms "botanical beings" – in the poetic genre.

Divided into nine chapters, and using eight contemporary poets of great repute in the Anglophone world viz. Les Murray, Mary Oliver, Elizabeth Bletsoe, Alice Oswald, Louise Glück, Judith Wright, John Kinsella, and Joy Harjo, *Plants in Contemporary Poetry* sets out to, among many objectives, "disclose the power of verse to anticipate and parallel scientific thought through a freedom of imagination…" (4). In respect of this objective, the author meticulously demonstrates an impeccable mastery of both scientific (neuroscientific) knowledge about plants and breathtaking environmental literary criticism. Within a larger framework of the botanical imagination, Ryan proposes *phytocriticism* as a concept for unpacking plant relations and modes of being in poetry. "A phytocritical outlook," he writes, "emphasizes the agencies of botanical beings in poetic texts and considers how plants are rendered, evoked, mediated, or brought to life in and through language" (14). This mode of analysis is situated within the overarching concept of the botanical imagination which, as Ryan puts it, "repeatedly evokes, builds on, and expands previous considerations of the imagination in some of the earliest and most formative scholarship in ecocriticism" (7).

In order to dismantle "the relegation of the plant to the zero-point of behavior, experience, and intelligence against which the capabilities of the animal are turned to in sharp relief" (16), the author highlights what he terms the "sacred ecologies of plants" while establishing that plants have souls, as expressed in Les Murray's poetry. He defines sacred ecology "as a state of plant-animal-human souls in dynamic exchange with the material landscape" (29). Therefore, poetry enacts and evokes vegetal souls through the dynamic interconnectedness of all other beings which share life with plants. Overall, Ryan argues that Murray's sacred ecology of plants deconstructs the idea that plants lack intelligence by approaching "the botanical domain as a sentient locus of spiritual realization and multispecies exchange" (28); Murray further brings together Christian and Indigenous Australian concepts of nature while mirroring fresh scientific evidence for plant intelligence. In this respect Ryan writes that Murray believes "the sacred is communicated to mortal beings through the interplay of Indigenous and Christian traditions" (33).

The third chapter focuses on the American poet Mary Oliver, arguing for what Ryan calls "the inter-corpore-

ality of the vegetal body." The author establishes that previous studies on Oliver's poetry have overlooked her "engagement with botanical life and the sensorial rendering of human-plant transactions" (54-55) and given priority to birds, mammals, insects, reptiles, and other mobile creaturely subjects, thereby neglecting vegetal beings. Consequently, Ryan proposes that "the sensing body of Oliver as poet exists in dialogical exchange with the multitudinous bodies of nature, including those of lilies, trilliums, peonies, grapes, roses, and other everyday vegetal forms that co-inhabit her coastal terrains" (55). He draws on recent scholars on plant communication such as Richard Karban's *Plant Sensing and Communication* (2015) to demonstrate that science is increasingly exonerating Oliver's poetic insights into vegetal life which she has garnered through walking, sensing, and writing. The chapter asserts that plants mediate human experience of the world and that they are possess the ability to perceive corporeally. Most importantly, it contends that the power of intercorporeality is found in its relationship to empathy which can lead to love of plants. This ushers in the fourth chapter which centers on bioempathic emplacement and the radical poetry of Elizabeth Bletsoe. Ryan argues in this chapter that Bletsoe's poetics moves beyond the mere utilitarian functions of plants to posit vegetal empathy which consists of "bioempathic feeling into and with plants that conversely entails openness to being affected by plant gestures in response" (93). Without any intention of propounding a revision of Western medicinal history, Ryan underscores that "plants are already endowed with the intentionality, desires, affective states, future-directedness, and empathic resources required for them, in turn, to imagine a future with us and other non-vegetal beings" (102).

Chapter 5 admirably separates John Charles Ryan from those "environmentalists who [have] acquired a reputation as gloom-and-doom killjoys" according to Nicole Seymour. This is one of the chapters that offers Ryan the avenue to engage with positive emotions in botanical beings, thus demonstrating that environmentalism and ecocriticism can also be pleasurable. Using British poet Alice Oswald's work, he examines botanical humor. Indeed, drawing on the Greco-Roman era and thinkers such as William Copper and Ralph Waldo, Ryan posits that, on the one hand, "Oswald's collection positions plants as agents of humor that engender laughter in human subjects" as her poems become "a vehicle for comedy through caricature, parody, and other literary techniques leveraged to bring about humor through—or sometimes at the expense of—flora" (109). "On the other hand," Ryan continues, "Oswald's poetry figures plants as inherently funny personae who enact the forms of jocosity endemic to their being-in-the-world" (ibid). The above sums up what Ryan calls "the dialectic of botanical humor" and he goes on to ask: "We laugh at plants; do they laugh at or with us? If flora is funny, then what is funny to flora?" (110). Then he surmises that such transposals invite us "to imagine—and reimagine—the plants around, between and within us" (ibid). Finally, the author underscores the importance of vegetal humor as a great resource with which to face the future of the "grossly unamusing geological epoch of the Anthropocene" (121).

The next chapter handles vegetal memory in the poetics of Louise Glück where Ryan argues that the ability to recall past occurrences and anticipate future events is not only possessed by animal-human beings. Drawing on Charles Darwin's experimentation with tendril-bearing plant cotyledons, Ryan submits that Glück's poetry "imaginatively mediates vegetal beings' memories of themselves, one another, and their ecological circumstances" (137). This is followed by Chapter 7 which discusses the temporality of plants using Judith Wright's poetry. According to Ryan, "Wright's work troubles the reduction of plant time and resists the imposition of human timeframes on plants and other beings. Instead, she strives through her ecopoetic practice to responsively and dialogically attend to the time of plants—and particularly to render time in terms of her commitment to environmental consciousness, ethics, activism, and stewardship" (ibid). However, the lengthy accounts of philosophical notions of time here slowed me down as I read this rather poetically and scientifically rich and fascinating book. I therefore consider this as the most difficult chapter of the book.

Chapter 8 explores plant death in John Kinsella's poetry which, of course, is a sad thematic concern, but Ryan delivers it pleasurably. He draws a useful demarcation between biogenic and anthropogenic plant deaths before engaging with the manner in which Kinsella's poetry transcends the usual consideration of plant death as metaphors for human mortality and societal decay (190). Instead, Ryan asks: "Why does a tree, shrub, or herbaceous plant die? And when should the death of a plant matter to us?" (191). After astounding textual analysis of vegetal death in Kinsella's poetics, Ryan concludes that both biogenic and anthropogenic plant deaths must be taken seriously in the current age of the Anthropocene and mass species extinction. Fortunately, Chapter 9 wraps up the book on a very positive note by examining vegetal hope and the love of flora in Joy Harjo's poetry. Cognizant of the sadness and sorrow orchestrated by biodiversity loss nowadays, Ryan reminds us of the "bold claim for a vegetally-inflected form of ecological hope [which] is tacit in stories of plant resilience, recovery, and renewal that continue to surface in the public domain despite a prevailing mood of dread and helplessness over the state of the planet" (214). He contends that Harjo's poetry does not approach vegetal life "as aesthetic background or cultural commodity, but as a vibrant agent in the process of writing, composing, and valuing language" (217). Both the chapter and book conclude as follows: "As a resource for the Anthropocene, botanical hope embraces the idea of the plant as a bearer of hope for a more equitable future on earth for itself and us" (236).

It is however curious to note that for a monograph dealing with contemporary poetry in English, all of Ryan's authors come from Britain, the US, and Australia. Surprisingly, Africa, Asia, and Canada are completely missing in the book. That notwithstanding, *Plants in Contemporary Poetry* stand out in many ways, including its breadth and depth of analysis, its dazzling combination of neuroscientific knowledge and literary criticism, and its forceful poetic language, among others. Most importantly, you can never look at

plants the same way you did before reading this book!

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UNFORGETTING CHAITANYA: VAISHNAVISM AND CULTURES OF DEVOTION IN COLONIAL BENGAL. By Varuni Bhatia. New York: OUP. 2017. 291 p.

Bhatia writes pointedly in the Introduction, "…this is a book about unforgetting Chaitanya and recovering Vaishnavism in colonial Bengal" (2). By the act of unforgetting, the author implies a simultaneous chiding of the *bhadralok* over forgetting the significance of Vaishnavite origins as well as a demand of a renaissance leading to recuperation, a collective process the author calls anamnesis. By locating literature that has Chaitanya as its literary axis within the larger Bengali Vaishnava traditional nexus, the author hopes to achieve another "world picture" of the anamnesis operating in relation to the "forging of a Bengali colonial subjectivity" (4).

In the chapter *A Religion in Decline in an Age of Progress*, Bhatia follows the two trajectories that general outlook towards Vaishnavism (led by Chaitanya) took in the mid to late 19th century: one was informed by "Christian missionaries, colonial administrators, and Westernized Bengali intellectuals" (21) of the Vaishnava followers who brought on the slow descent of a once rich, radical and wholesome value system into a corrupt, compromised and profligate lifestyle, while the other was informed by "Bengali literary historians, cultural revivers, Vaishnava theologians, and anticolonial activists" (26), being that of the later address to the loss of Vaishnava tradition from Hindu theism. From this point, the author follows the discourse prevalent during the time that pointed to the decline of Vaishnavism in the eyes of the late 19th century Bengali *bhadralok*. This chapter also provides a succinct hagiographical account of Chaitanya which supplements the historical-religious history of Vaishnavism.

By choosing texts of varying attitudes (Kennedy's sympathetic account, Ward's accurate/unsparing fieldwork and Wilson's background analysis of Hindu textual traditions to posit Vaishnavism within the larger Hindu framework) towards the practice of Vaishnavism, the author deftly exposes the white saviour mentality of the Evangelists as well as their rejection of the existing Vaishnava belief system as a part of the Indian theology they often wrote off as pagan-heathen traditions (the author astutely points out how one of the chosen authors is reminded of Catholicism). The section that succeeds it, explores the discourse that put into action "a program of reformative and culturalist regeneration" (41) with the two approaches the discourse takes—the cultural-nationalist and the religious-reformist. The first approach replaces the discourse of decline with that of loss, leaning towards a Romantic imagination and nostalgia for the past while through the second approach, Bhatia elucidates how Vaishnavism