

examples from fiction and poetry to comprehensively illustrate his points. The book is published by Routledge and is one of the volumes belonging to the series Routledge Focus on Literature.

SANGEETHA PUTHIYEDATH
EFL University, Hyderabad

LIVING IN WORDS: LITERATURE, AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL LANGUAGE, AND THE COMPOSITION OF SELFHOOD. By Garry L. Hagberg. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 304 pp.

Garry L. Hagberg's recent monograph *Living in Words: Literature, Autobiographical Language, and the Composition of Selfhood* (Oxford, 2023), continues to follow the intellectual itinerary developed in his last work *Literature and its Language: Philosophical Aspects* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2022) by narrowing the scope of his inquiry to more specific concerns regarding the relationship between literary depictions of subjectivity and topics in the philosophy of language. Whereas Hagberg's contributions to the 2022 volume focused upon the capacity of events in the life of an individual to anchor, and similarly alter, the semantic value attached to the terms of one's personal lexicon, *Living in Words* extends this project by reflecting on the structure of subjectivity as seen through the lens of narrative.

This robust account prominently comes to the fore in Hagberg's discussion of Aristotle's *Poetics*, emphasizing the reciprocal dependence among single episodes within a narrative both requisite and, in some sense, essential to the coherence of a given plot. Prior to addressing potential lacunae, Hagberg puts forth a faithfully Aristotelian understanding of narrative as referring not a "purely episodic plot structure that merely strings events together along a temporal continuum" but rather a causal thread responsible for stitching an array of disparate occurrences into a single, unified whole (106). This moment underscores a broader theme that itself serves to unify Hagberg's text: the difference between succession and simultaneity is the difference between what sediments the past and what constitutes a history. The accomplishment of this reading of Aristotle is to extract from the *Poetics* a recipe for the former's differentiation between "composition," "construction," and "constitution" (xxx). Whereas "constitution" connotes the lack, or even impossibility, of a subject's access to agency with respect to the genesis of his or her subjectivity, Hagberg's avoidance of "construction" as a term of artifice is part of a methodological attempt to suggest that, forceful as external factors may be, the shape they impart to us is regulative, not constitutive. By contrast, "composition" puts forth a musical analogy "suggestive of an active and creative undertaking, but within limits that are themselves interesting" (xxx).

Hagberg finds in the *Poetics*' famous account of tragedy a means of bulwarking the idea that composition provides the fundamental structure of plot narrative and personal identity. In one of his text's most engaging moments, Hagberg does so by raising the question of whether Aristotle is right to situate plot structure as what pre-eminently authorizes us to compare and contrast tragedies in terms of one another. If what accounts for the way in which plot structure hangs together is the author's illustration of ostensibly independent events through causal linkages that inexorably dovetail, then the structure of a drama provides a useful analogue for the structure of a life. But, Hagberg asks, does this imply that the structure of a plot also provides a measure of its veracity? "Or is it merely a measure of the *literary* value of that life-narrative wholly separate from any question of its truth?" (107). *Living in Words* develops a multifaceted answer far too nuanced to definitively situate itself at the site of either pole. The value here is the import that his unraveling of this question has for the aforementioned notion of "composition." Just as Aristotle tasks the author with an imperative to thread together the events of the work, the concept of "composition" likewise involves unearthing

the various means through which two disparate nodes may be connected to one another. The difference, however, is that for Hagberg, composition refers to an indefinite process of combination, permutation and, ultimately, complexification: “Stravinsky said that a blank sheet of music manuscript paper was paralyzing, but once he had an interval, a single pair of notes in place that carried a range of implications and possibilities within themselves, he could fly” (xxx).

MICHAEL BARR

Stony Brook University, New York, USA

READING BAUDELAIRE WITH ADORNO: DISSONANCE, SUBJECTIVITY, TRANSCENDENCE. By Joseph Acquisto. New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic. 193 pp.

Virtually no aspect of Theodor Adorno’s prodigious body of theoretical writing is more contested today than his late turn to aesthetics. He had written on aesthetic themes since his earliest days, and was initially invited to contribute to the journal of the Institute for Social Research as its in-house musicologist, but it would be in the unwieldy, incomplete *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), jigsawed together from his drafts and published posthumously, that he undertook the most thoroughgoing effort to salvage from aesthetic experience an evasive kernel of truth about the damage done to subjectivity in the modern world. Much of this writing had its roots in embattled debates with Walter Benjamin in the 1930s on the potential of art both to reflect and critique the troubled consciousness of unfettered capitalism’s subjects, and the degree to which an overtly politicised art and the ironised, alienated experience of humankind could be made productively interdependent.

For both Adorno and Benjamin, the poetry and prose of Charles Baudelaire in the mid-nineteenth century represented a touchstone for the perceptual convulsions experienced by the city-dweller of the industrial era. In poems that break with the Romantic tradition of entranced contemplation, substituting for it a febrile sense of dissonance, Baudelaire brings to birth a modern aesthetic sensibility that refuses the cultic mythmaking of earlier eras. Now, in a new work that intricately aligns the French poet’s writings with the aesthetics of Adorno, Joseph Acquisto, a professor of French literature at Vermont, pursues these continuities with an imaginative vigour and assiduity rarely seen in this field.

Acquisto makes it clear from the outset that his study will not merely situate Baudelaire in his own epoch in a sterile historicist exercise, but will construct a transhistorical constellation by which the poetics of one of his subjects and the philosophy of the other will mutually illuminate each other. There are risks to such an approach, to be sure, not least in that it means negotiating the potential traps that facile anachronism might set, but Acquisto is far nimbler than that. Citing Adorno’s declaration in the *Aesthetic Theory* that artworks are ‘enigmatic in that they are the physiognomy of an objective spirit that is never transparent to itself in the moment in which it appears’, the author emphasises the importance of returning again and again to the artwork, ever anew, to scrutinise its instability rather than resting with a final definitive interpretation. This is one of the ways in which Adorno’s aesthetics anticipated the post-structuralist insistence on the endless mutability of the text, but without sacrificing its ethical imperative to convict a faulty world of its untruth.

Acquisto takes three major themes in relation to Baudelaire and Adorno: the expression of dissonance as the prefiguration of modernist technique; the transformation of subjectivity, encompassing the renewal of the subject-object relationship between the poet and his world; and the remodelling of the traditional poetic habit of transcendence, by which the lyric subject incorporates the external world into his or her own aesthetic sensibility.