

Reviews

Emily Alder. *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

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It is safe to assume that there has been a resurgence of interest in weird fiction over the last two decades. This is evidenced both in general publishing by the abundance of new collections and anthologies dedicated to weird stories, as well as in academia by the increasing number of books and articles that treat the weird as a distinct type of speculative fiction. While initial scholarship focused primarily on H. P. Lovecraft and his fellow authors writing for the American pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, more recent studies have extended the scope of investigation, and the literary output of the Lovecraft circle in the 1920s and 1930s is now viewed merely as a later stage of a longer development that has its roots in the nineteenth century. The triggering factors of this development, however, still remain largely unplumbed. Emily Alder's *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle* sets out to address this gap in knowledge by arguing that the emergence of the genre can be seen as a response to the changing landscapes of scientific culture at the turn of the twentieth century.

In the first chapter, Alder outlines the theoretical framework of the book, conceptualising weird fiction as “a literature of borderland science” (26). By the end of the nineteenth century, Alder observes, new discoveries across various disciplines and the growing influence of occult ideas had undermined previously dominant assumptions about science, blurring the boundaries of what counts as legitimate scientific inquiry and compelling a re-evaluation of positivist methods as the primary means of knowing the world. Alder sees this climate as the fertile ground from which weird fiction's fascination with the unknown arises, adding that the weird, unlike science fiction, revels in what *cannot* be achieved or explained by science. The rest of the book provides sufficient evidence for her thesis by looking at a range of weird stories—all by Lovecraft's British predecessors, in a more or less chronological order—and analysing the ways these narratives reflect on problematic areas of *fin-de-siècle* science.

The next three chapters form the first part of Alder's case studies, “Borderlands of Mind, Body, and Spirit.” In Chapter 2, Alder discusses Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*, linking the weird monstrosity represented by Edward Hyde and Helen Vaughan to the debates of contemporary psychology about human consciousness and the nature of reality. The focus of Chapter 3 shifts from ontology to epistemology. Returning to the aforementioned two novellas and also covering Machen's “The Inmost Light” and Edith Nesbit's “The Three Drugs” and

“The Five Senses,” Alder sees the alternative ways of knowing offered by the weird story as a critique of positivism, highlighting the limits of sensory perception. Chapter 4 centres around three series of short stories featuring an occult detective character and establishes that E. and H. Heron’s Flaxman Low, Algernon Blackwood’s John Silence, and William Hope Hodgson’s Thomas Carnacki all have to rely on a combination of occult and mainstream scientific methods when tackling the weird phenomena they encounter. As a fresh addition to the weird terminology, Alder coins the terms “weirdfinder” and “weirdfinding” in reference to these figures and their profession (116-17).

The last two chapters make up the second part, “Borderlands of Time, Place, and Matter.” The texts discussed in Chapter 5 are H. G. Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and Hodgson’s “The Voice in the Night” and “The Derelict.” In her analysis, Alder applies Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia to describe the remote marine settings of these stories as “other” spaces where life can take on strange, previously unseen, hardly categorisable, or, in other words, weird forms. These weird forms of life are then examined in the light of radical theories in biology about the nature of organic matter. Finally, Chapter 6 deals with Hodgson’s *The House on the Borderland* and *The Night Land* and Blackwood’s “A Psychical Invasion” (a John Silence story already touched upon in chapter 4) and “The Willows.” Alder interprets these stories in terms of energy transformations, which was a widely debated topic among the physicians of the time.

The structure of the volume is innovative. Whereas similar books on the weird usually confine the analysis to a single author per chapter, this one is more flexible, allowing the examination of the same text from different viewpoints. Alder’s selection of the literary corpus, too, deserves special attention. Most notably, the inclusion of Stevenson’s novella as a pioneering weird story is a welcome extension of the still forming canon. In addition, it is encouraging to see that the likes of Nesbit and Wells, who are mainly recognised for their respective contributions in children’s literature and science fiction, are more frequently considered in the context of weird fiction, too. As for Machen, Blackwood, and Hodgson, who by now have become household names in the weird canon, the book is successful in presenting new information on their oft-discussed stories, and Alder’s reading of “The Willows” is especially engaging.

The relationship between weird fiction and science has not yet been investigated in detail, so this monograph offers an intriguing new perspective, and one can argue that a systematic exploration of the subject has been long overdue. Such an interdisciplinary approach means, though, that Alder’s book relies heavily on scientific theory, which at times might prove a bit too hard to follow for the common researcher of literary studies. To make this engagement easier, a short conclusion is placed at the end of each chapter to summarise the main findings. The author’s expertise in both fields is beyond question, as her evidence is drawn from a wide array of both primary and secondary sources, of which, unfortunately, no comprehensive bibliography is provided. All things considered, though, *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle* is a commendable endeavour that will be a stimulating and informative read for scholars interested in weird fiction, the intersections of literature and the sciences, or *fin-de-siècle* culture in general.

Bandia, Paul F., ed., *Writing and Translating Francophone Discourse: Africa, The Caribbean, Diaspora*. Amsterdam & New York: Brill / Rodopi, 2014.
236 pp. ISBN 978-90-420-3894-3.

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Dedicated to Edouard Glissant, this collection, volume 78 of the *TextxeT* series of studies in comparative literature, gathers ten essays by international scholars, specialists in French and Francophone studies and/or translation studies. The research methods and tools to explore the intimate connections between those academic fields are multiple and eclectic, since the analytical framework draws upon translation studies, postcolonial studies, discourse analysis, stylistics, but also film studies, to name but a few (see the useful index provided at the end of the book).

Informed by Glissant's seminal concept of *Tout-Monde* and his Poetics of Relation, along with Deleuze's striking metaphor of the rhizome, Bandia's introduction accurately brings to the fore the similitudes between postcolonial writing and translation, whether it be performed *per se* or viewed as a metaphor for inter- and trans-cultural communication. The articles following range from literature to movies, to historical documents, geography and philosophy, and cover diverse Francophone areas, as the subtitle puts it, even though the Caribbean takes the lion share. The approach of the authors, mostly postcolonial, nonetheless 'seeks to transcend [...] binary conceptualizations' (3). Indeed, Bandia points out that the archetypal *francophonie* model, based on a colonial hierarchy, can prove particularly segregating for authors, due to institutional and publishing politics, whereas translation may help reconsider this traditional order of things and open up new vistas thanks, in part, to the archipelagic turn taken by post-colonial studies.

Lieven D'hulst first examines the relation between the French Antilles and the Caribbean: what could be perceived as a geopolitical as well as a literary whole is in fact constrained by the strong institutional ties of the former with metropolitan France. Both from a linguistic (Creole is used in a diglossic space) and cultural (Creole writings are often received as exotic literature) standpoint, Antillean authors are often seen as neither here, nor there, and secluded in a 'postcolonial niche' (33). D'hulst ascertains how much their works are infused with translation, from the oral to the written code, from code-switching to code-mixing, from Creole to French—translation is often included in the narrative itself, by way of specific characters for instance. Translating those productions into a third language is therefore eminently complex and often relies on paratextual devices to preserve both the original text and its final readability. All in all, D'hulst nevertheless regrets the absence of a 'homogenous politics of translation' (35) within the French-speaking Caribbean area, owing both to institutional strategies and linguistic and cultural practices regarding Creole literature.

Chapter 2, 'A 'Flavor of Diversity': Intercreation and the Making of a Mosaic-Whole', by Christine Raguét, relies on Victor Segalen's notion of diversity, based on a reassessment of exoticism to make it evolve towards 'fair and respectful

exchanges' (38) rather than on a voyeuristic stance. Raguet includes Antoine Berman's 'trial of the foreign', Jean-Louis Cordonnier 'openity' and De Campos's manifesto on philosophic anthropophagy in her reflection, to demonstrate how translation can avoid dualistic preconceptions and promote the Diverse in the Other. A translator herself, she puts under scrutiny Segalen's main concepts, such as 'kaleidoscopic vision', 'strong individuality', 'distance', 'complementary elements', 'adaptation', 'perfect comprehension and eternal incomprehensibility' to analyse extracts from Anglo-Jamaican novels and their French translations. Using a simile with mosaic *tesserae*, she thus defends an ethical translation process, fulfilling both a social and creative function to render the 'flavor of diversity' of the original text, far from too common sterilizing and *cliché*-creating practices.

Sandra L. Bermann, author of 'Glissant and the Imagination of World Literature: Relation, Creolization and Translation', considers Creolization too, as she advocates its inscription in World Literature, following Glissant's Poetics of Relation and Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the rhizome. To this end, she underscores the relevancy of the notion of *métissage* inherent to Creolization, when applied to translation, for 'a more linguistically and culturally open and attentive World Literature' (85) that would help balance hegemonic nationalistic views of the literary through new circulation routes in the 'constellations of cultures and languages' (79), a spatial metaphor reminiscent of the recurrent island trope which runs through this book.

The reader will similarly find hybridization at the core of the next chapter, epitomised in the hyphen, the semiotics of which Samia Kassab-Charfi studies in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Biblique des derniers gestes*. Exploring the notion of polylexicality, and the hyphen's dialectical meaning, she emphasizes its analogy with translation, but also with the 'Linked World' concept. The iconic value of the hyphen as an articulation glyph extends to the representation of a work-in-progress, but it is also a fruitful lexicogenetic device, concerning each and every grammatical category and marking both condensation and dislocation. The mosaic metaphor used by the author echoes Raguet's previous chapter, even though translation is treated more metaphorically than pragmatically in this fine stylistics essay.

This is the case, too, with Tom Conley's 'Mapping "Tout-Monde"', moving on to Glissant's Poetics of Relation reviewed through the cartographic prism. Conley draws a parallel between Glissant's very graphic archipelagic thinking and the ideology at play behind maps throughout History, in order to proclaim the capacity of Glissant's speech to translate from language to space, in synesthetic dynamics. His short essay, investigating mainly the islands system as opposed to the continental order, is richly documented and resorts to history, geography, politics and poetics to propose a very convincing demonstration by deconstructing the many facets of the 'Whole-World' notion.

Next comes a questioning, 'Translating the Other's Voice: When is Too Much Too Much?' penned by Marie-José Nzengou-Tayo & Elizabeth Wilson, who investigate the translation of Caribbean texts and their multilingual setting to review the translators' strategies in conveying Creole voices. The authors have, interestingly enough, chosen to study both Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean extracts, analysed within their ideological and linguistic contexts, in

contrastive regard to their respective translations into French and English. The ‘polyphonic nature’ (134) of those works induces diverse transfer practices. Several case studies are provided, ranging from examples showing a tendency towards reconstructing a ‘questionable authenticity’ (144) to productions which respect the original and show an overall consistency by accepting a part of the poetic opacity already present in the text (paratextual apparatus are often offered to help the reader in that respect). Nzengou-Tayo & Wilson hence call for a further conceptualization of their practices by Caribbean translators, to bridge the gaps between *praxis* and *doxa*.

Diglossia is also examined by Réda Bensmaïa, in an article on ‘The Language of the Stranger’ which sets into motion ‘A Dialogue between Jacques Derrida and Abdelkébir Khatibi on Language and Translation’. Maghrebian literatures are focused on in this chapter, but also language as a whole in its use by the ‘speaking subject’ (163). To tackle those issues, Bensmaïa addresses problematics such as norms and singularity *via* the latent ‘standard model’ underlying the ‘plurality of idioms’ (155) which makes Maghrebian authors write in reaction to the dominant language: even unconsciously, they usually choose to negate it or to deconstruct it in order to submit it to their very personal style. As demonstrated by Derrida, no writer or speaker can free themselves from the ‘fundamental structure of alienation’ (163) thus imposed; the monolingual becomes ‘*aphasic*’ (original emphasis) and has to live in ‘absolute translation’ in order to find his own ‘target’ language, having lost any proper ‘source’ language.

The last three chapters are also dedicated to Africa, with two of them dealing with cinema: the first, ‘Vernacular Monolingualism and Translation in West African Popular Film’, conveys Moradewun Adejunmobi’s research on the subtitling of Yoruba movies. Yoruba, an indigenous Nigerian language, is also spoken in Benin; the vernacular monolingual films are then subtitled in English in the former country, and in French in the latter, for economic reasons, to increase their circulation among local non-Yoruba speaking spectators. That linguistic choice allows the audience to hear the vernacular language, and promotes it within both countries. The comparative analysis of the original version and the two subtitled ones shows that their subtitles do not rely on standard English and French but display a Nigerian variety of both languages, re-appropriated by the local video industry and audience. This rather concise study is well contextualised, including paratextual items of the videos under scrutiny.

The next article by Verena Andermatt Conley, ‘Ameur-Zaïmeche: Translation as Artistic Practice’ focuses on two ‘docu-fictions’ by the Algerian director born in France, both set in the Paris ‘*banlieue*’. Their dialogues are conducted in French and Arabic, a code-switching practice that entails an intricate translation web, linguistic as well as cultural, between the characters. Besides, the analysis extends to other filmic codes beyond the verbal, e.g. music, or visual components like colour and space. It is worth noting that translation is not only literal, but also metaphorical in those films, as it reveals the social status of the protagonists, and, consequently, may explain their fate in the city. Moreover, translating is a step towards negotiation, in a milieu where religious and gender issues are notably pregnant.

The last chapter, ‘In a Free State? Translation and the Basotho: From Eugene Casalis to Antje Krog’ provides original insight, by Alain Ricard, into the

ethnographic and translation work of French and Swiss missionaries in South Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries. Drawing on archival and editorial sources, Ricard's reading of those early essays and oral performances' transcriptions informs the reader of political and linguistic issues at stake, as opposed to the dominant Boer historical narrative, and stresses the mythical and poetic value of those folklore texts, reminiscent of our contemporary 'rap'; they bespeak a 'dialogical relationship' (211) between their missionary collectors-transcribers-editors-publishers and the Basotho and Zulu peoples, and a rigorous methodology of research, so that Ricard considers their authors 'the first South African intellectuals'. He aptly demonstrates the fundamental role played by those first cosmopolitan translators from the indigenous languages in the circulation of those tales in Europe, be it Francophone or Anglophone, even though they have received only scant academic attention yet.

Indeed, this volume represents a step forward in the intertwining fields of postcolonial and translation studies; the Francophone areas covered have in common a diglossic, sometimes polyglossic tradition, which justifies their exploration through the translation prism, an original and fruitful way of investigating and apprehending the linguistic and cultural issues at stake. The theoretical and descriptive models provided open new perspectives on the way Creolization is instantiated, or so-called 'minor' languages and vernaculars are taken into account in their intercultural dimension *vis-à-vis* French language and academic and publishing institutions. Although one can notice some redundancies between chapters, those could be read as a sign of an overall coherence. In any case, the authors are effective in drawing a dynamic map of a thriving phenomenon, more complex and vivid than the reductive centre-to-periphery '*francophonie*' label could suggest, and this map is supported by appropriate bibliographic references: in short, scholars and academics involved in those developing interdisciplinary fields of research will find much food for thought in most of the stimulating essays collected here.