

Introduction

This edition of *EnterText* is an open issue which offers two sections of creative work, mainly poetry in the first group and mainly prose in the second, on either side of a cluster of academic essays. It is being published at the second anniversary of the events in America on 11 September 2001, and includes a poem by Christy Lefteri in response, written in the days immediately after that unforgettable date, when we all tried to come to terms with a sense of history's tectonic plates grinding into a new high-pressure relationship. The poem uses the simple language of fairytale to access a lyrical and childlike innocence, so rudely shattered, as its Rapunzel-figure is not saved. The world events which have ensued in the intervening two years have indeed confirmed the sense, for many, that a new era was then delivered, bloodied by forceps, to gasp before us. Nor has the role of America, since, in what politicians like to call the global "theatre" been the stuff of bedtime stories. In fact explaining the unfolding events of the last two years to children must have been one of the harder aspects of parenting or teaching. It therefore seems fitting that innocence and experience are twin themes in several of the creative pieces in this edition, and that many of its items either stem from or are about the USA. Many are reminders that art and scholarship have no ivory tower, no privileged locus from which to claim a kind of moral exemption—rather that everything we do is political in some sense, and that we deceive ourselves if we argue otherwise.

A group of poems from an American, Paul Breslin, gets the issue off to a passionate start, but one to which the vehicle of formal metre lends powerful control

as well as momentum. There is irony, too, in some of the accompanying work, from Lynne Rees and Robert Klein Engler, which also engages trenchantly with world events. Some of this work is given a date, as the point of history at which it was written is part of its meaning. What is never lost sight of is the pathos of the human story, of the individual so often on the receiving end of a hard-bitten pragmatic power-politics: increasingly, no sleep, it seems, is lost over once thorny and crucial issues such as whether the end justifies the means. Not surprisingly, death hovers over several of these pieces.

Paul Magee, who, with Michelle Bakar, inaugurates *EnterText*'s relationship with Australia, also uses the idea of death and the figure of the skyscraper, but in a very different way, to access a "ficto-critical" Hegelian reflection on the human condition. Its ludic postmodern approach is rooted in a straightforward concept: that of the lives lived on the fourteenth floor of a lot of highrise buildings, a horizontal social slice through a vertical environment, that of the modern city. Questions of desire—for *eros* and *thanatos* (with which Paul Breslin also sports)—are explored in a textual unfolding which is posited as to be read in reverse, so that as the mind in the air contemplates death by falling, the hourglass of time is, as it were, inverted. The effect on the reader is curiously dizzying, that of being suspended, in limbo, and isolated, while being intellectually tickled. The city is also Michael Neal's topic, in an article about London at the turn of the twentieth century. It considers contemporary surveys of the rapidly expanding metropolis by George R. Sims and Ford Madox Ford, in comparison with its portrayal in fiction by Henry James, Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells, and shows how the problematics of representing vastness in the confines of the text are variously addressed.

If the idea of the city is historically at the root of the idea of civilisation, then the institution of marriage might be deemed one of its first branches. What follows is another first for *EnterText*, our first publication in the field of law. (This is perhaps a good moment to reiterate that we intend the broadest possible understanding of the range of “cultural and historical studies” as our area of interest.) Miguel González Marcos provides a critical review of Hendrik Hertzog’s *Man and Wife in America*, a history of the legal institution of marriage in the USA, which will be of interest to the general reader as much as to the specialist in jurisprudence. Marriage is—and historically was, even more so—commonly culturally constructed in idealised terms, but the law associated with it as social institution has always been called upon to negotiate its often negative realities as well as to enshrine the myth. It is also, of course, subject to constant change. While the principal focus is historical, controversies of our time such as that over gay marriage are brought into the frame of the discussion, which notes, interestingly, that coupledness is still the norm.

This serves to introduce the next two pieces, which address the politics of gender and sexuality. The first focuses on an American city with a particular historical relationship to the ideal. Monica Pearl gives a searching critique of the film *Philadelphia* which she regards as having fallen short of its purported gay politics agenda because it is afraid to let go of the framework of conventional heterosexual America. Ironically she finds it rather more radical in its portrayal of race than in its address to AIDS. Michael Cornelius’s piece, which follows, is a fictional recreation of a largely forgotten story from thirteenth-century European history, that of Conradin, the tragic scion of the Hohenstaufen line of Sicilian kings, whose story is creatively recuperated here from the homophobic accounts of standard histories. The blending of history and fiction is, it seems, an effective way forward in such a situation, to achieve

the desired objective of bringing an obscured human story to the light of compassion, and consorts well with our policy of encouraging new ways of doing things, creatively and intellectually.

The concluding sequence of creative prose pieces includes some engaging, compelling, witty and beautiful narratives of innocence and experience. Michelle Bakar's story eloquently presents a group of Australian boys using militarist fantasies to escape their reluctantly domesticated lives, while Mathew Tilsley offers a much darker image of alienated, disparate and desperate individuals gravitating towards a nightmare of actual violence and destruction in what becomes almost an admonitory poetic parable of the margins of modern America. Laura Smith also chooses an American setting for her story, a humorous take on the crime genre, now reinvented with a sassy female detective with a healthy (or unhealthy) appetite at its centre. Gleb Toropov's story is a brilliantly sustained, punctuation-free evocation of a journey across Europe in a Citroën 2CV, hilarious and poignant by turns. In the end, paradoxically, for all its entertaining surface it proves to be quite a serious meditation on the human condition. To conclude the edition we have William Leahy reading a lyrical narration to the music of Erik Satie. It too weaves in and out of death and life, innocence and experience, as it evokes a scene of contemporary despair against poetic fragments reminiscent of Europe's New World voyagers, driven by dreams, racked by desire for home, death-ridden. It is a reminder that though technologies may change, and history (and language, in its wake) may seem to have undergone a seismic shift, human fears and desires, for most, remain remarkably constant. Perhaps the danger point, politically, is when cultures of *eros* and *thanatos* are manipulated to coincide.

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