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Julian Wolfreys ed., *New Critical Thinking: Criticism to Come* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 208 pp., ISBN 978-0-7486-9964-3

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For its very essence, it is unlikely that a definition of critical thinking will be equally accepted by all. One of the possible definitions sees critical thinking as a way of processing information “in a creative and logical manner, challenging it, analysing it and arriving at considered conclusions which can be defended and justified” (Jennifer Moon, *Critical Thinking: An Exploration of Theory and Practice*, Routledge, 2008, 21). “Is there, any more, new critical thinking?” (Wolfreys, “Introduction”, 1). Such is the question Julian Wolfreys, the editor of *New Critical Thinking: Criticism to Come* poses and challenges at the very beginning of his introduction to the volume. The word ‘new’, in fact, signals that complex temporality within the “just now, the modern”, which can never be determined ahead. ‘New’ entails futurity, as expressed by the subtitle Wolfreys has chosen – a “to come” to be understood as the Derridean *avenir*, the only real but unexpected, unpredictable future.

With a title that may seem pretentious, this work is not exempt from the open debate as to what are the possible futures of, and how they are to be interpreted by, the ever-changing humanities. And critical thinking is engaged not to find an answer, but as the daily work of the academia, by means of which the question keeps being posed.

Where would the claimed novelty lie, then? The twelve essays in this collection, which deal with a wide range of very specialised topics, all introduce and present new perspectives into the texts they discuss. In fact, the contributors address key concepts such as modernity and historicity by intertwining them with issues on identity and discussing the experientiality of reading through a range of texts belonging to different genres – poetry, novels, travel writing, historiographic metafiction, microhistory, and philosophy. Going beyond any mechanical application of literary theory, each text is presented as the critic’s personal reading which led to the necessity of a critical engagement. Therefore, these essays make an attempt at changing the perception of what may be known by finding a way of making it unfamiliar. They do so by means of close reading. It may be argued that close reading, as a method, has itself stemmed from a theoretical approach, that of New Criticism; however, any good reading is “like a true critical reading, an experience, an encounter” (Wolfreys, 13), and a search for something that is present within the text, intended in a Barthesian way, and that awaits to be found every time one is confronted with it.

Such is the case of Mary Ann Caws’s “Turnings and Re-turnings”; Caws begins her enquiry into what modernity and modernism are to her by engaging with the idea of ‘the turn’, be it a simple turn in the road as in Nicolas de Stael’s painting *The Road* (1954), the physical movement of the character of Tazio in Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*, who is on the beach and turns to look at the shore, or “a returning to memory” in some passages of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. This key idea allows her to conclude that modernism is more about what something turns to and points to, and is therefore about “learning by turning” – inwards, one may add.

Modernity is also revisited in Monika Szuba’s analysis of some of the ekphrastic poems by the Scottish contemporary poet John Burnside (“‘Peering into the Dark Machinery’: Modernity, Perception and the Self in John Burnside’s Poetry”). Szuba’s work may be seen as a reading of a reading: the poet “reads” paintings and explores, by means of the senses, his attraction to surfaces, like

the pool of water in Caravaggio's *Narcissus*, as places and non-places of tension between the inside and the outside.

If the fine line between fact and fiction is a well-known thread in studies on literary texts, it is all the more interesting when such line is present in disciplines as history. In "Reading Microhistory: Three Layers of Meaning", Anton Froeyman claims that there are three layers to microhistory – a genre of historical writing made popular by Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976): a cognitive layer, an experiential level and an ethical level. However, what is striking is Froeyman's use of close reading to show how microhistorical writing makes use of narrative techniques – which he signals are also used in anthropology – such as telling the story of "how I got there", introducing readers to the historical context by using a character with which they may identify, and/or making use of direct discourse taken from documentary sources like trial hearings.

Another perspective on history is offered through historiographic metafiction. "Writing Fiction, Making History: Historical Narrative and the Process of Creating History" by Christine Berberich is an interesting reminder of how historiographical writing is not an act of reconstruction, but rather of construction, of one out of many plausible hypotheses on a past event. By drawing upon the work of Frank Ankersmit, she analyses Patrick Modiano's *The Search Warrant* (1997) and Laurent Binet's *HHhH* (2009): two novels on the holocaust which challenge the perception of the past and whose self-reflexivity serves as a reminder of how any narrative of the past, and therefore history itself, is a construction.

As anticipated, another main motif in this collection is the act of reading seen as a process, which is addressed in the last two contributions. It is worth mentioning J. Hillis Miller's "On First Looking into Derrida's *Glas*", as it is a personal recollection or rather a comparison between the memory of the author's first time reading *Glas* and his second reading experience. Miller's personal engagement in the essay, shown in his use of the first person and in the expressivity of some passages, renders it a remarkable example of the different possible forms of writing to which critical thinking may lead.

Hence, at a moment in time where theoretical approaches to texts are said to have come to a stasis, this collection of essays questions key concepts such as modernity and historicity, it explores issues on identity through the reading process which leads to acts of thinking from which experiences emerge. The twelve contributions in *New Critical Thinking: Criticism to Come*, which focus on different authors, genres, and historical periods, may be a precious resource taken individually. The book may also be seen as performative of a way of proceeding, an example of how critical thinking is put into practice through interdisciplinarity and close reading; given the experiential nature of the act itself, the latter is the one method which will always let "something unexpected" arrive.