

## **Editorial: Plunging into the depths of scholarly critique**

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This issue of the *English Academy Review* provides both contributors and readers of our internationally acclaimed journal with a rare opportunity to imagine themselves as novice deep-sea divers, not in search of a Tennysonian Leviathan but rather plunging into the depths to view the wonders of one the world's surviving coral reefs, a metaphor for the contents of this issue. As we view Nature's bounty beneath the ocean, we may not be able to identify the wondrous variety of fish, sponges, anemones, plankton, octopi, star fish and other sea creatures as well as the sea weed, ferns, rocks, barnacles and carnivorous plant life beneath the seas. In like manner, we may not be familiar with the wide variety of texts explored and interrogated here or the scholarly readings thereof, yet we will still be able to enjoy them and to be intrigued by dipping into them.

I use the somewhat whimsical metaphor of diving down to a coral reef to stimulate our perhaps tired imaginations as the year draws to an end and to suggest a way into the array of intriguing and varied articles, book reviews and poems to be discovered in this issue, for we have no fewer than twenty-five contributions that have passed muster of our dedicated reviewers to whom I express the Academy's heartfelt gratitude. An anonymous author once wrote that "[t]he act of judging a piece of writing is fraught with critical difficulties, especially in a postcolonial context. The appointment of a judge is equally thorny," s/he adds. "Why," for example, he or she might also ask, "is an old white (wo)man, born in a former British colony being appointed to judge black writing; or a Western educated person being asked to assess writing from the Global South?" And, to extend my opening metaphor, "How could a landlubber determine the true value of our endangered coral reef Eco-system?"

The task of the writer of an editorial is, I believe, to dispense with such questions of legitimacy and to plunge into the depths of scholarly critique with or without a wet suit and breathing apparatus. For, as our anonymous writer insists, "such issues are small. To an academic in the tradition of aesthetics, any type of writing can be sifted, weighed and assessed without reference to the writer's biography or the socio-economic/historical conditions under which it was produced". Taken as a whole, the contents of

this issue create an oceanic wonder-world/underworld that reflects a flowering seascape of academic output. In its rich variety of ways of reading, polemical debates raised, points of view expressed, philosophical argumentation, and intuitive creativity, *EAR* 40(2)2023 is a simulacrum for one such coral reef.

As if surfacing from another nebulous zone - that in which Lit. Crit. Studies finds itself - Gareth Cornwall challenges the enterprise of scholarly critique with his "Postcritique, Critique, Precritique: A Personal View". Deliberate provocative, the article argues for a return to "precritique" - a position created by review of the logical misstep that made possible the application of theory to the practice of literary criticism in the first place - with which some may now sympathise, but central to its doing this is a setting up of Manichean opposites that are rarely as firmly established as they may make themselves out to be, as pointed out by one of the peer reviewers.

Diving even deeper, Rajendra Chetty may expose the conservative minded among us to the risk of the "bends" with his erudite, inevitably politically charged synopsis of the life of artist/activist, Fatima Meer. Appropriately entitled, "Critical Humanism and academic activism in *Fatimer Meer: Choosing to be defiant (2022)*", the article's socio-historical range on the emerging topic of critical humanism contextualised within the writings and life of an avowed Maverick is an important and timely reminder of the need to prioritise subaltern struggles against inhumanity in South African academies and in totalitarian societies elsewhere. As Chetty elucidates, "humanism is an activity understood to identify and correct imbalances and social injustices; it is linked to critical theory's purpose of revealing and explaining inequalities and hypocrisy in society".

In contradistinction and surfing the breakers, Big wave David Robinson exposes us to refreshing sea breezes with "The ocean, the Undertaker's Wind and a Wind called Hawkins, and other Natural Phenomena: Representations of Nature in Ian Fleming's *Live and Let Die*". Prefiguring the next issue of *EAR* - 41(1)2024, dedicated to eco-criticism, this article explores representations of natural phenomena in the second novel in the popular James Bond series. Robinson reminds us that several critics have noted the enjoyment Fleming derived from his Jamaican home, adjacent to the ocean, although this novel is firmly in the thriller/spy genre. The fascination with the sea motif is perhaps because of Fleming's many references to natural phenomena and particularly to birds that provide us

with points of reflection about humanity and the environment: deep ecology and humankind's oceanic heritage.

At the time of writing, "Of New Axioms from Alternate Time Zones: Exploring notions of Another Time in Ben Okri's novels *The Famished Road*, *Astonishing the Gods* and *Age of Magic*", the late Fetson Kalua, a brilliant proponent of the theory and praxis of intermediality, signifying tolerance of difference, was floating on a life raft to escape rampant xenophobia in academia and South African society at large. In his attempt to find a new path to the future, Kalua explores Okri's embrace of magical realism as a genre that allows him to evoke a vision of the world in which the notion of time, rather than being seen as linear, is subject to multiple disruptions. The core argument here is that, in these three novels, Okri locates historical time or temporality in a liminal zone where it combines with space to yield identities that are indeterminate, a correlative of the notions of intermediality and interdisciplinarity. This disruption of Western monadic time, Kalua surmises, helps to move Okri's readers into realms of alternative temporalities - in this case into mystical time - where notions of spatialising time can be interrogated. For Okri, he concludes, time is not an objective phenomena, hence showing the extent to which there is always "another" time, perhaps one closer to humanism. In the context of "the postcolonial muse that haunts African writing," Gayatri Spivak was to write that "Most if not all African literary texts in English are already determined by an absence: a lost origin which the text seeks to restore even while recognizing the impossibility of such as restoration" (2022, 198). Spivak's observation seemingly echoes Wole Soyinka's explication of the myth of the Sango cult and the god's identification with the source of lightning and traditional African thought that operates not on "a linear conception of time but a cyclic reality" (1995, 10).

Excavating another but likewise mythological time zone, Julie Pridmore dives back into time past in "J.R.R Tolkien's *The Fall of Arthur: A Timeless Journey?*" The article aims to show how this very early unfinished poem, published posthumously by JRR's son, Christopher in 2013, had an influence on and was perhaps a catalyst for the *The Lord of the Rings*, first published in 1954 to 1955, timelessness being the central theme of both texts. Both are archetypal narratives of life's cyclical progression, and *Lord of the Rings* was soon extended to form a trilogy. On being introduced to Tolkien's famed novel, the likewise justly renowned novelist, Salmon Rushdie, writes in his memoir entitled, *Home* ([1981]1994:2), that it "entered his consciousness like a disease, an infection he never managed to shake off". Literary theorist, Giorgi Lukács (1970), states pertinaciously that "the great

mission of true literature is to awaken men [sic] to consciousness of themselves”. Celebrated marine bacteriologist and, as with our very own JRR, an acclaimed South African writer [of poetry], Douglas Livingstone once explained his own penchant for seemingly disparate disciplines, by saying: “Science is man’s search for truth; art is the interpretation of it. Poetry probably combines the two” (in Philip 1996:19).

Reminiscent of Camus’ *L’Etranger*, Grace Danquah’s “Embodying Identity: Exploring the Space and Place of the émigré in *Testimonies of Exile*” skates on the thin ice of its themes of rootlessness, loss of identity, displacement and lack of belonging in her exploration of Abena Busia’s poetry anthology, which she argues is a prototype of exile literature. In her reading of these poems, Danquah argues that the place and space of the immigrant is not only secondary and bordering on the peripherals of foreign culture but, reflecting feminist issues of self-acclamation, is also seen as contemptible - a wound that might never heal.

Viyayasharanthi’s co-authored article, “The quest for identity in Male-Dominated Society: Representations of Women in Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*” extends the theme of identity adopting a feminist perspective, a prominent focus in recent Indian women’s writing. In contrast to the more conventional portrayal of marital bliss and dutiful home-bound women, the article highlights the inner life and delicate relationships of this novel’s female characters, alluding also to Kapur’s second and third novels that likewise foreground women’s struggle for independence and self-realisation. The discussion invokes Virginia Woolf’s somewhat obvious observations about the difference between male and female authored texts: “It is probable . . . that both in life and in art, the values of women are not the values of a man” (Woolf 2009, 81). As an example of “precritique”, despite enticing one with a passing reference to Foucault’s statement that “truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power” [(1980, 131), the article lacks the kind of theoretical rigour displayed in exemplary articles by the likes of a Chetty or of that which follows this one that current academic scholarship has come to expect.

Picking up on the notion of Foucault’s “truth”, Fiona Taylor invites us to take a ride in a glass-bottomed boat to explore the mysteries of the coral reef from a position of safety in “The Master of the Unsayable: Elena Ferrante’s Representations of the Complexities of Female Friendship as a form of ‘Truth-Telling’”. Elaborating on the expectations of current analytical critique, one of Taylor’s peer

reviewers wrote: “The article is well written, stylistically balanced and well structured and original in focus with pragmatic examples and impeccable up-to-the-point citations. It denotes scholarly potentials to further the theme of Italian literature in English translations and consequent marketing success. I would only suggest adding some more lines/paragraph on Goldstein and the award-winning translation.” In this article that focuses on the method and methodologies used to define and describe female friendships and truthfulness, the writer expands on contemporary studies on Elena Ferrante’s literary production, offering a comparative analysis of *My Brilliant Friend* and *The Lying Life of Adults*.

Snorkeling above our coral reef and in a subtle twist on the Danquah article on the émigré, Josephine Alexander examines one of the major themes of African literature and a central preoccupation of African diasporic fiction on migration in “Displacement in No Violet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (2013)”. This article addresses the adverse criticism of the novel as “poor porn”, exploring not one but three intertwined facets of displacement: the internal displacement suffered by Zimbabweans in the aftermath of the 2005 Operation Murambatsvina purportedly aimed to cleanse urban cities of rubbish; that resultant upon the emigration of Zimbabweans to other southern African countries to escape poverty; and the displacement reaction resultant upon the illegal immigration of the author’s protagonist, Darling, to the United States of America. Alexander situates her argument in Gayatri Spivak’s theory of the Abject; abjection as induced by political, economic and social disintegration. The analysis reveals why the characters in *We Need New Names* cannot attain the Afropolitan identity of the characters in the works of diaspora authors such as Taiye Selasi and Ngozi Chimamanda Adichie.

In Anupama Bandopadhyay’s “Nation, Nationalism and Womanhood in Farah Bashir’s *Rumours of Spring: A Girlhood in Kashmir*”, the author sustains the themes of ethnic identity and trauma within the socio-political theme of nationalism, extending readings of female life in the patriarchy of India as if spotting the missing tentacle of an ailing octopus. Drawing on Rabindranath Tagore’s *Nationalism* (1917), the article begins by defining nationalism as “a concept that gives rise to dogmatic notions of loyalty, allegiance to one’s nation”, linking this to the idea of nation-states. As if in a subtle twist of Woolf’s truism, the writer asserts that the issue of allegiance to the idea of nation is “related differently to the man and the woman” in terms of the warrior and the home-maker, concluding that this autobiography documents the territorial and political trauma that women in

a war zone are exposed to, so that even the familiar aroma of curry and freshly baked bread exacerbates female trauma.

Throwing the fisherman's net wide, the eleventh and final article in this bumper issue of *EAR*, "The Reader, the Rodent, and the Viral Regeneration of Fear: Kafka's "The Burrow" as a Covid-19 Allegory" by Mohammed Hamden places trauma within the recent global historical moment, approaching Franz Kafka's "The Burrow" as an uncanny allegory for the social panic and claustrophobia induced by the covid-19 pandemic. Written in lucid prose and demonstrating familiarity with Kafka's oeuvre and relevant scholarship, the article brings together several of the themes and motifs covered in the issue as testified by Hamden's conclusion that it

employs Kafka's "The Burrow" to reflect on the meaning(s) of space, subjective identity and social relations in the time of Covid-19. The delirium-like actions of Kafka's rodent in its underground place, on the one hand, reflects the problematic definition of space in the time of crisis. The ambivalent relationship between internal and external spaces demonstrates the dilemma of spatial fragmentation that is difficult to escape. The rodent's failure of creating healthy connections between inside and outside transforms its home into a fragmented spatial identity. In the time of Covid-19, the impossible grasp of a concrete understanding of public or outside spaces becomes a metaphor that implies the recurrent possibility of exclusion. The article, on the other hand, shows how the politics of exclusion, which is embodied in the rodent's frequent retreats into the inner space of the Castle Keep, defines the crisis of social relations in a world that is rife with fear, tension and suspension. The rodent's fear of other creatures bespeaks the internal fear of contemporary individuals who are always incapable of self-knowledge due to the absence of social dialogues and fear of others during the outbreak of Covid-19.

Just as coral reefs provide a fragile habitat for bio-diverse marine life, so too does our flagship journal under the guiding auspices of Taylor & Francis and Unisa Press provide a platform for international research, diverse aesthetic debate and intellectual deliberations. This issue represents diverse facets of the modes of knowledge production, such as pure and applied research, prestige lectures, book reviews and creative writing. What then are the key sources of knowledge production in research? In Internet cites four sources of new knowledge: intuition (beliefs); authority (the influence of someone with more experience); rational induction (relating to previous knowledge or tying two ideas together to create a new one); and scientific empiricism (pragmatic research). And I would add a fifth and a sixth: genuine scholarship and the operations of the *imaginatio creatrix* - all of which are showcased in this issue.

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