

Reviews

Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014). 321pp. Hardback \$30.00. ISBN: 9780300186628.

With the crossing of boundaries, if not perhaps the overstepping of limits, literary studies has increasingly moved toward discerning, rationalising, and presenting more panoramic purviews. This is arguably one of the defining features of literary studies in the time of the post-literary, and it finds a particularly intriguing reflection in the work under review here.

Panaesthetics, which collects and revises Daniel Albright's 2012 lectures within the *Anthony Hecht Lectures in the Humanities* series (held biennially at Bard College, New York City), is a particularly poignant volume following its author's sudden and untimely death in January 2015. Albright's work was enduringly invested in making a case for the comparative arts, as his other signature work from his late period, *Putting Modernism Together: Literature, Music Painting* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015) – in the event, published posthumously – further demonstrates. On his urging and on this evidence, there are worse objectives for literary studies and the humanities than enhanced familiarity with this notion.

The book is divided into two major sections. The first, called 'Individual Media', explores literature, painting, and music individually. The second, entitled 'Art Rampant', comes to terms with definitions, concepts, and the translating of one art form into the other, taking the countertextual to other-textual levels of analysis and meaning, as it were, while striking both enthusiastic and wary in regard to 'pseudomorphoses', or intermedial translation (120): a concern that claims a chapter to itself. These two parts are framed by an Introduction marked by some noteworthy wit – 'One of Danto's books is called *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, but I see no reason why the commonplace needs to be transfigured, though trans is a fine place for a figure to go' (9) – and two deliberately conflicting conclusions in a final chapter called 'Comparative Arts': 'Every Artistic Medium is the Wrong Medium' and 'Every Artistic Medium is the Right Medium'. This open-endedness to the book makes for more questions to be asked and, in the context of digital arts and the assault upon the

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multisensory, the closing words ring pertinently: '[T]he artwork appeals not only to all the senses we already have, but to senses as yet undiscovered. To learn to see with the epigrastrum and to hear with the elbows is part of the mission of the artwork: to read with the skin and all that is beneath the skin' (286).

Throughout, the symbiosis of literature and music, literature and art, art and music and, finally, the interaction amongst the three, reveal depth, insight, and concentration. They also posit an outlook whose implications can be difficult, even awkward, for some traditions of comparatism in aesthetics and critical practice. Indeed, anybody with an interest in comparative literature, and who recalls the debates consequent upon, for instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* (Columbia University Press, 2005) or the rapidly evolving profile of studies in World Literature, will want to take note of the trajectory that Albright's argument potentially imposes on those issues. His fluent style and lucid elegance should not disguise the complexity or the challenge that emerges from *Panaesthetics*. What the book represents, in effect, is a response to Jean-Luc Nancy's resonant question in *The Muses*: 'Why are there several arts and not just one?' Nancy's text is in fact invoked in the book's first endnote, and reworded by Albright as 'Are the arts one, or are they many?' (2).

Albright deploys myriad examples from literature, painting, and music to illustrate, break down, and collapse the naturally anticipated difficulty in the presentation of a panaesthetic ethic to critique. He moves from examples of words (poetry, novels, etc.), to pictures and paintings, and finally to the more abstract countercontext in musical sound. This is a vital point. Ultimately, for Albright, all three forms appeal to the aural sense. Even pictures can be 'heard', in the shape of a consort of musicians playing inaudible music on their instruments, recalling Mallarmé's 'Sainte', for instance, leaving the audience to create its own music, its own countercontext, through what Eliot calls the 'auditory imagination'. The hesitation, as I write this review, over whether to use in the previous sentence the term *audience*, *reader*, or *viewer* is itself symptomatic of what is at stake in the panaesthetic gaze. Literature, art, music: all three present energies to recreate, rehearse, recombine, revalidate.

It could well be objected: what of the other arts that the volume could have more fully invoked? Where are they, in this panaesthetic equation? A panaesthetic imagination, however – a panaesthetic envisioning on the arts in the present and on their relation and correlating – cannot be too ambitious, in its inceptive movement, in regard to what is captured within that morpheme, *pan-*. And it is as well, in any case and if wants to go down that line, to recall the cautionary reminder Albright places on his first page, taking us back to the fact that *music* anciently meant 'anything pertinent to the Muses', so that it therefore 'includes not only music but dance, mime, epic poetry, lyric poetry, history, comedy, tragedy, even astronomy'. He points out, further, that 'Greek mythologizing tended to confuse and unify the arts: an artistic medium was not a distinct thing but a kind of proclivity within the general domain of art' (1). But then, as he says, Aristotle's *Poetics*, 'a book with a strong appetite for division', made for a

different and even hierarchising dynamic, with later ‘assertions of the essential *disunity* of the arts’ coming in through such figures as Gotthold Lessing, Marshall McLuhan, or Wassily Kandinsky (3).

In the final analysis, Albright’s fundamental argument is that ‘the arts themselves have no power to aggregate or to separate – they are neither one nor many but will gladly assume the poses of unity or diversity according to the desire of the artist or the thinker’, he writes (3–4). The ‘coming together and splitting asunder’ of the arts is ‘one of the great stories in the intellectual history of the West’ (4), his book suggests, and those dynamics have long histories of contrariety and complementarity, such that what makes *Panaesthetics* noteworthy, in the end, is a detectable instinct toward advocacy for the latter, making Comparative Arts possible in the first place. And yet, in the following formulation on the language(s) of art, Albright is wise to potential philosophical objections: ‘Art is both a language and a non-language. . . . This is what makes the discipline of Comparative Arts possible: since the meaning (insofar as it can be conveyed to others) of the artwork is always linguistic, every artwork can be located in the domain of language, where everything is relatable to everything else. . . . So: every artistic medium is a language, but I can say this only because language understands everything as a language’ (8).

The liquid mobility with which Albright moves in his discussion of the three different art forms of literature, painting, and music and their relating means that it will be wondered why, beyond the obvious demand placed on the polymathic, this panaesthetic dynamic to critique is not a more sought or traversed path. Here, the thought arises, is one manifestation of the post-literary – the pertinence of the Comparative Arts – that it would not be too difficult to live and work with. The time is right for *Panaesthetics* to be influential.

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Mario Aquilina, *The Event of Style in Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). 272pp. Hardback £55.00. ISBN: 9781137426918.

In *The Event of Style in Literature* Mario Aquilina reads style as considered and performed in the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Maurice Blanchot, and Jacques Derrida. The radically innovative explorations of style made by these writers, which Aquilina intersperses with readings of Paul Celan, is ably positioned within and against classical and contemporary understandings of stylistics. Aquilina’s main focus is on style as a generative force of meaning and a structural force of interruption in writers who operate on the boundaries of literature and philosophy, and who do so in a manner or mode that subverts the old binary of content and form. Style, in this understanding, is not an embellishment that can be removed to reveal a stable kernel of truth, nor simply an idiosyncratic expression that marks author, period, class, or genre. Rather, ‘style has a substantive, performative and creative role, bringing into being conceptuality, which