

an alternative vision of that institution. At its best, the extramural tradition provided a form in which the university did not exist as separate from the community outside it.⁴ It could thus be responsive to those whose complex lives might interrupt any sustained course of study. Lawrie's book is attentive to such detail at its heart, but seems at odds with this ethos in how it is framed.

Lawrie closes this account by noting deftly that when the Newbolt Report, *The Teaching of English in England*, was published in November 1921, Arnold Bennett was 'occupied with other matters': he was finalising his divorce and subsequently escaped to socialise in the south of France (p. 160). This is a good image for the clashing visions and influences that informed the rise of university English and that are intertwined in this history. It is a reminder too that the university remains both a 'vital spot' in which people can find and hear one another, and an institution that can be oblivious to forms of expertise that exist outside its walls. This study, in sensitive detail, honours the traditions on both sides of the divide.

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All's Well That Ends

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Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov by Martin Hägglund. Harvard University Press. 2012. £36.95. ISBN 9 7806 7406 6328

Posthumous Love: Eros and the Afterlife in Renaissance England by Ramie Targoff. The University of Chicago Press. 2014. £28.00. ISBN 9 7802 2678 9590

JUST ACROSS THE STREET from my apartment is a path through the woods. Although this is a place of retreat – where people come to get away from work and home alike – absorption rather than distraction seems to be the

⁴ A critique of extramural departments is offered in Chris Duke, 'Trapped in a Local History: Why Did Extramural Fail to Engage in an Era of Engagement?', *AdLib: The Journal for Continuing Liberal Adult Education*, 36 (2008) pp. 3–19.

prevailing mood. Punctuating the path are wooden benches, many of them donated in memory of a spouse or a parent who was once nourished by time spent here. One bench has been sponsored by a living couple in recognition of their long marriage. The inscription features the two names, the date of the wedding, and the last stanza of Wallace Stevens's 'Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour':

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

Most of the poem remains poised on the brink of some sort of metaphysical investment – whether in God or in the imagination's transcendence – but these closing lines pull back. The world can offer its own kind of fulfilment. For Stevens, the sufficiency of lived experience is not registered within an individual mind, but rather by a couple. What exists here and now may not be everything, but finitude feels like enough when it is shared.

Love offers consolation in the face of mortality, even as it makes the prospect of leaving life behind more painful. Or, to make the same point in a more paradoxical way: our care for others depends upon the fact that they will die. Martin Häggglund's *Dying for Time* and Ramie Targoff's *Posthumous Love*, two recent, brilliant contributions to a growing body of scholarship on the literary history of human transience, question the assumption that a longing for immortality animates every experience of desire, positing that eros and eternity might even be incompatible.

Although the subtitle of Häggglund's book evinces an interest in modernist fiction, he is just as concerned with a theoretical tradition that begins with Socrates and continues through Jacques Lacan, both of whom, he contends, misconstrue the nature of love. We do not experience desire because of what we lack (immortality for Socrates, the Thing for Lacan), but rather because of our resistance to losing what we have: 'The fear of time and death does not stem from a metaphysical desire to transcend temporal life. On the contrary, it is generated by the investment in a life that can be lost. It is because one is attached to a temporal being ... that one fears losing it.' As a result, to escape from a mortal condition would destroy our ability to care either for ourselves or for anyone else. Whereas Platonism has generally made love the worldly accomplice of eternity (think of Diotima's ladder in *The Symposium*), Häggglund argues that the suspension of mortal threats to our attachments would pre-empt any need for those attachments in the first place.

Targoff's study of Petrarchism's fate in early modern English poetry identifies the Reformation as a crucial phase in the transition away from a Platonic model of desire. She traces the great florescence of love poetry in the period –

from sonnet sequences to *carpe diem* lyrics – to a constraint placed on the Protestant imagination. Whereas a synthesis of ancient philosophy and Roman Catholic theology made it possible for Italian Renaissance poets to depict love continuing after death and being renewed in heaven, the English writers who inherited this tradition had to contend with the fact that their own confession restricted marriage – along with all other human bonds – to the mortal world. ‘The result of denying posthumous love was not a negative void or lack where there had once been something positive and affirming’, however, Targoff explains. Instead, once desire was limited to the span of a life, it became more precious, intense, and ultimately tragic. Her brief discussion of *Paradise Lost* reminds us of the way in which love and mortality are made indistinguishable at the very origin of our fallen condition: ‘Adam ultimately chooses a terminal love with Eve.’ Terminal love in the sense of terminal cancer – the disease of desire will come to an end because it is the reason for that end. And yet this is a decision that Adam makes with his eyes open, a decision that every lover has, in his or her own way, repeated: ‘What it means for Adam and Eve to be a couple is to leave paradise together with no guarantee of a shared afterlife. Their love will bring them a “paradise within”: it is self-fulfilling, not a preparation for something to come.’

Does such a strong identification between post-Petrarchan love and mortal life imply a historical process of secularisation? Targoff has a remarkable sensitivity to the complexities of religious culture, and she shows how belief can inform even the most worldly experiences. As she argues in an early chapter, when Thomas Wyatt translated Petrarch’s poems into English, he rejected the traditional division between those written to Laura during her life (*in vita*) and those written to her after her death (*in morte*), along with the whole Platonic apparatus of love as a path to the divine. Instead, he devoted his attention to poems which explore lapses of desire:

Yf it be yea, I shalbe fayne;
 If it be nay – frendes as before;
 Ye shall an othre man obtain,
 And I myn owne and yours no more.

Wyatt’s position in the Tudor court ensured that he cast a cynical eye on romance. Love was as likely as not to impede worldly ambition, so how could it have any role to play in spiritual advancement? His decision to depict desire as a tortured and frankly sensuous matter seems to offer evidence for a secular reading of his love poems, especially when they are compared to the Petrarchan synthesis of physical desire and religious devotion. But Targoff suggests that such a reading would be too simple. The mere existence of a feeling or a relationship that is not subordinated to God does

not have to undermine faith; in fact, a distinction between the sacred and the secular can benefit religion. Petrarch's abiding anxiety about the link between his love for Laura and his love for God – whether the two really were, as he hoped, one and the same – is lacking in Wyatt's devotional verse, which is clarified by the absence of eros: 'When Wyatt wants to write about love of God, he does not move through the vehicle of loving an earthly woman. Instead, in a pattern that becomes typical of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English poets, he shifts decisively from erotic to devotional poetry.' Christianity may no longer have provided a totalising structure for early Protestant England, but this transformation could enhance the seriousness with which faith was practised.

In several of Targoff's examples, however, secular love is pursued so relentlessly that it becomes difficult to see how any energy could be left over for the rigours of belief. Her survey of the various parodies of religion in *Romeo and Juliet* – the Friar who delivers a stirring homily on heavenly transcendence for a girl he knows is only pretending to be dead, the play's fleeting, merely physical resurrections – seems to confirm the notion that as attention is given to desire it must be withdrawn from somewhere else. The zero-sum logic of Targoff's reading of the ladder outside Juliet's window, a travesty of Diotima's ladder, is especially convincing: 'The ladder of love becomes a physical means to a physical end. It does not transport the lovers to a celestial sphere but brings them together to consummate their love.' The materialist temporality of *carpe diem* poems elicits an even stronger argument in favour of secularisation: 'There could be no mention of the soul's eventual journey to heaven in poems that urge an immediate seizing of the present; there could be no deferral of joy in poems that imagine this day as the lovers' only chance for bliss.' The death drive that animates a poem like Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' is certainly susceptible to a mortalist reading, in which the impossibility of posthumous love indicates death's total existential barrenness: 'And yonder all before us lie | Deserts of vast eternity.' And yet, whether early modern English love poetry serves as a site of secularisation or instead as an example of the divergence of worldly from sacred time remains an open question for Targoff. Even the most radical statements of love's immanence were consistent with Protestant teachings about death as an absolute rupture.

Whereas Targoff approaches religion holistically – as doctrine and social bond, as wish fulfilment and unbending rule – Hägglund's focus is more narrowly theological. Indeed, much of his work, beginning with his influential writings on deconstruction and atheism, can be read as an attempt to recover concepts that have traditionally been associated with divinity for a secular mode of enquiry: what metaphysics is for Heidegger, theology is for Hägglund. He discovers carelessly theistic thinking in the most unexpected

places, including the writings of Leo Bersani and Gilles Deleuze, but psychoanalysis remains his paradigmatic case: 'the Lacanian account ... conforms to the conception of desire that has been handed down to us from a metaphysical and religious tradition: we are temporal, restless beings but desire to repose in the fullness/emptiness of timeless being'. As an alternative to arguments that rely on transcendence, whether as inescapable fantasy or as religious doctrine, Hägglund develops an authentically secular analysis of love. It is because time makes everything ephemeral – constantly changing, constantly receding from our grasp – that we experience desire. The concept of the self, the experience of love, and even the impulse to write are all examples of our effort to build stability into our inherently unstable condition. And yet these efforts to make time more hospitable to us do not indicate that theology has merely been displaced into secular temporality: 'A temporal being is constantly ceasing to be and can only perpetuate itself by leaving traces of the past for the future. This tracing of time is the movement of survival that transcends a particular moment of finitude and yet is bound to finitude as a general condition.' From this perspective, an anti-Kantian aesthetics emerges, in which the mortality of art differs little from the mortality of human life – an aesthetics marked not by disinterestedness, but by care.

Thus, Hägglund's sharpest readings abandon the piety of poetic immortality in favour of an understanding of the written word as vulnerable. Nabokov's genial arrogance and his abiding obsession with commentaries, archives, and other technologies of preservation make this reasoning a little hard to swallow, but the evidence bears out Hägglund's claims. Characters keep scrupulous written records, memorising life as it happens, not so that they can escape from time, but, rather, so that they can be enveloped in time's folds: "One day we shall recall all this," Fyodor pledges on the last page of *The Gift*.⁷ Proust provides an even better case. Most critics have argued that the experience of involuntary memory in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, which exposes, if only fleetingly, an alternative to time's onward march, leads Marcel to discover a more stable form of transcendence in art. In reality, he acknowledges that his books are no less mortal than he is. Writing does not make him feel protected against death. Quite the opposite, Hägglund shows: 'Marcel's sense of literary vocation increases his fear of death. "I felt myself enhanced by the work I carried within me," he writes, but "feeling myself the bearer of a work of literature made the idea of an accident in which I might meet my death seem much more dreadful."' Here Marcel manages to outdo Montaigne, who embraced the idea that his writings would not last, but still treated his notebook as a sort of immortal surrogate, where he was constantly writing down what he wanted to be done after his death, in case he should meet with an unexpected disaster. Marcel lacks the sense of easy adaptability that inspires Montaigne to place so much of himself in a notebook, and his anxiety over substitution determines

the way he regulates his own inner life: 'To cease to love someone is for Marcel not simply an alteration within a self that persists as the same; it is to become *another self* whose life depends on the death of the former self.' Such subtle acts of suicide, however troubling, cannot be avoided, and it is Hägglund's view that the unbridgeable distance between 'the remembering self who still survives and the remembered past that is already extinct', a distance which the very act of writing down one's memories creates, gives Proust's books their remarkable combination of endurance and fragility.

The relentless pursuit of purely secular concepts does lead Hägglund to neglect contributions made by theologians to the study of immanence; as a result, he sometimes overestimates the originality of his thesis. His definition of time, for example, runs as follows: '*time is nothing in itself*; it is nothing but the negativity that is intrinsic to succession'. In Book XI of *The Confessions*, Augustine makes the same point, positing the non-existence not only of the past (what used to exist, but does no longer) and the future (what will exist, but doesn't yet), but also of the present: 'As for the present, should it always be present and never pass into times past, verily it should not be time but eternity. If then time present, to be time, only comes into existence because it passeth into time past; how can we say that also to be, whose cause of being is, that it shall not be?' Targoff's more open-minded approach to religion, which allows her attend to the complex transactions between sacred and secular concepts, would have proved helpful here. Materialist philosophy does not have a monopoly on materialist experience.

Targoff's omissions are much less serious, in part because *Posthumous Love* sets out to analyse a literary-historical norm rather than to define our state as mortal creatures. Nevertheless, a broader look at English literary production in the period shows that the limitations placed on the Protestant imagination did not prevent some writers from representing love as immortal. Targoff surveys epitaphic evidence of the hope for posthumous reunion in her introduction, including some fascinating examples of the queer arrangements (a widow joined to multiple husbands, male friendship redeemed into something more) to which heaven was thought to give rise. Once she turns to literature, however, mortal love becomes her primary focus. In a brief reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, she discusses the way in which Christian's journey towards God requires him to turn away from his wife and sons, but she does not mention the second part of the allegory, in which Christiana and the rest of the family undertake a pilgrimage that follows in Christian's footsteps. Ben Jonson shows up only in an endnote, and given his general neglect of amorous themes (one of his most famous poems is called 'Why I Write Not of Love'), this may not be surprising. But the idea of heavenly love appealed to Jonson, and he wrote about it repeatedly and with uncharacteristic beauty, as in his elegy for Venetia Digby: 'You will meet her there', he promised her husband and children, 'Much more desired, and dearer than before'. These

exceptions to the rule of mortal love do not detract from Targoff's argument. Instead, they illustrate the force with which Wyatt, Shakespeare, Marvell, and others disavowed the sentimental option.

As far as critiques of immortality go, *Dying for Time* and *Posthumous Love* remain relatively modest, unlike the radical experiments with ephemerality now being pursued by some artists, who aim to cure us of our obsession with permanence. This year's Pritzker Architecture Prize went to Shigeru Ban, who specialises in temporary buildings: refugee shelters, exposition halls, a Catholic church erected after an earthquake. His preferred working material is cardboard. One of the main characters in *10:04*, Ben Lerner's recent novel, spends her time making post-apocalyptic paintings, which look like they have been recovered from the wreckage of human civilisation. Hägglund and Targoff focus exclusively on well-known writers and philosophers from the European and Anglo-American tradition, and although both are suspicious of literary immortality, the concept of an enduring canon still has its uses for them. Still, given how few people have taken the lessons of mortality to heart, given how sad and strange a love poem 'Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour' continues to be, these books represent a major accomplishment. Desire helps us to experience our finitude, not to escape from it, and this reversal makes love all the more precious.

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Rational Delight

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Inside Paradise Lost: Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic by David Quint. Princeton University Press. 2014. £65. ISBN 9 7806 9115 9744

MILTON HAS BECOME RATHER HARD TO LOVE of late. We have always known him to be self-righteous and prudish, proud and combative, never happier than when there was someone to prove wrong and unlimited paper to do it on, insufferably purist, dogmatic, and prone to irritating assertions about the superiority of men over women. But at the same time, it is has never been difficult to marvel at his sheer personal courage, his pursuit of religious and civil liberty, his astonishing erudition, and the way he could