

reference base, but also a state-of-the art survey with a wide array of incisive interventions in scholarly debates that are likely to have a long-lasting impact on the study of Black and Asian British Writing. This *History* is clearly a must-have: for any library with holdings on British, Anglophone and Postcolonial literature and for any scholar researching or teaching in these fields.

FRANK SCHULZE-ENGLER

Susanne Bach, ed. *Erotik in Literatur und Theater. Literatur, Imagination, Realität* 56. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2019. 301 pp.

When Georges Bataille wrote in 1957 that already by that date "eroticism had become a subject that a serious man could study without forfeiting his good name,"¹ he could scarcely have anticipated the embarrassment of riches that confronts modern students of the topic. In the past two decades alone studies in German on eroticism and the erotic in religion, eastern mysticism, philosophy, art, literature (prose, poetry, and drama), linguistics, and cultural history from antiquity to the present have appeared. The volume under review makes a valuable, broad, and interdisciplinary contribution to this increasingly crowded field. Stemming from two conferences held in autumn 2017 in Kassel and Klagenfurt, the book contains seventeen chapters and an introduction, grouped into four sections that respectively explore eroticism in theory, the novel, drama and theatre, and genre-historical perspectives. The focus is overwhelmingly on 20th- and 21st-century texts and writers, although three chapters examine medieval (Mecklenburg on *Märendichtungen*), Renaissance (Brusberg-Kiermeier on *Richard III*), and 19th-century (Bach on *Dracula*) texts. Contributions come from scholars at all career stages, which makes for a diverse collection but does entail some variability of quality: a firmer editorial hand would have helped to rein in the excessive verbosity and length of some of the individual pieces.

The notoriety attached to its study may have long since passed, but eroticism remains a tricky subject, not least because it is fiendishly difficult to define. Definitions abound in the individual chapters of *Erotik in Literatur und Theater*, and the introduction to the volume takes some pains to survey the principal abstract definitions of the concept from the likes of Barthes, Bataille, Freud, Kierkegaard, and Margaret Mead (2-6). Recourse is made frequently throughout the book to the abstract discussion of 'Erotik' by Konrad Paul Liessmann. As is typical in such a volume of essays, the introduction then proceeds briefly to outline each chapter, but in doing so the editor has missed a major opportunity to showcase the contribution this book could make to its well-populated field. The cacophony of competing abstract definitions in the wider scholarship on eroticism has created a space for an empirical, praxis-based elucidation of the erotic; the introduction would have performed a major service had it brought the chapters into dialogue with one another in an effort to distil and highlight the major components of this theme. It is left to the reader to isolate these features, the most important of which are summarised in the following paragraphs.

1 Georges Bataille. *Eroticism*. Trans. Mary Dalwood. London: Marion Boyars, 1998, 7.

The most surprising omission from the book is any detailed discussion of pornography, which almost always functions as a 'silent partner' in any definition of eroticism. When discussions of the erotic (such as Liessmann's) emphasise its indirect, metaphorical, or euphemistic nature, implicit reference is thereby made to its direct, literal, and explicit counterpart. Yet though they are locked in this definitional embrace, pornography has enjoyed far less scholarly attention than the erotic, despite yielding valuable insights where it has been explored. For example, the connection between subversive thought and pornography, in which sexual and other forms of licence (intellectual, political, religious etc.) are bound together, is a staple of the early modern – and especially Enlightenment – history of ideas, and is echoed in this book's contributions that deal with the cultural and intellectual shifts of 1968 (Siebert, Greif). Folkert Degenring's chapter is the only one in which pornography is explicitly discussed, and his analysis of one of Angela Carter's novels reminds us that pornography, although an "outlaw discourse,"² is often tolerated when it supports the prevailing system of values (96). In many of the book's chapters, 'sexuality' fills the role usually assumed by pornography, as a discourse regarding sex characterised by directness and the goal of providing sexual stimulation.

Beyond pornography, the most commonly encountered counterpart of Eros is Thanatos, death, which appears in a number of guises throughout *Erotik in Literatur und Theater*. Murat Sezi and Katharina Debney offer a psychoanalytic reading of Terry Pratchett's *Carpe Jugulum* (1998) in which the relationship between witches and vampires is governed by Eros and Thanatos. Franziska Sick's discussion of the 'black erotic' examines death in relation to sexual and economic exchange in the work of Baudrillard, Rousseau, and Racine. And a similarly materialist perspective on death and the erotic features in Beate Möller's analysis of César Aira's *Emma, la cautiva* (1981), in which she argues that its erotic elements are borrowed from the 'anti-oedipal' theory of Deleuze and Guattari. The frequently insightful readings by Sick and Möller are slightly marred by the fantastic historical claims made by the theorists they have chosen to guide their interpretations.

Less symbolic discussions of death and (sexual) violence feature in a number of chapters. Susanne Bach's rich and detailed analysis of *Dracula* expands on existing interpretations that show how the novel overlays sexual content with horror by pointing to the eroticism hidden beneath this sexual material. The murder and violence that permeate the texts analysed by Stefani Brusberg-Kiermeier, Folkert Degenring (*The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*), and Sabrina Gärtner (*Lovely Rita*) point to the close ties between violence and the erotic/pornographic: Richard III's villainy retains its erotic charge because it occurs offstage, while the open sexual violence occurring in *Hoffman* and *Rita* evokes disgust that is more readily associated with the pornographic than the erotic. Yet, as Brusberg-Kiermeier points out in what is perhaps the strongest chapter in the book, even the disgust that Anne displayed towards Richard's body contained the seeds of eroticism.

The body naturally features prominently in a collection such as this. Most contributors concentrate on ways of looking at or thinking about the body. Stella

2 Feona Attwood. "Reading Porn: The Paradigm Shift in Pornography Research." *Sexualities* 5 (2004): 91-105, 97.

Butter's compelling analysis of Sarah Ruhl's play *In the Next Room* (2009), for example, highlights how several female characters struggle to describe their first orgasm. Her discussion of the prelinguistic reality of orgasm would have benefited from closer engagement with the work of Judith Butler and the omission of a somewhat unfair accusation that Ruhl employs a racist stereotype. In contrast to such chapters, that by Arno Rußegger focuses directly on the body and explores (un)eroticism in children's and adolescents' guidance literature. In this insightful and well-written chapter, Rußegger discusses the vital role played by laughter and humour as a communicative tool for conveying serious subject matter to potentially uneasy readers.

The complex relationship of the erotic with laughter, religion (both feature in Mecklenburg's chapter), and magic (Weber) are all further themes that cannot be explored here for lack of space. The range of media covered by the book's contributions, which in addition to those already mentioned includes film (Fabris and Helbig) and podcasts (Kriesch), is admirable although something on video games – which formed a major part of the Klagenfurt conference – would have been a welcome addition. Nevertheless, the editor has done a fine job assembling such a number of interesting and insightful chapters into a strong collection that ought to be required reading for all those interested in eroticism in literature and culture.

ANDREW WELLS

Stefan Lampadius. *The Human Future? Artificial Humans and Evolution in Anglophone Science Fiction of the 20th Century*. Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2020. 353 pp.

Stefan Lampadius's *The Human Future?* presents a systematic taxonomy of 20th-century novels, short stories, and plays that deal with the question of human enhancement alongside the theory of evolution, which serves as the overarching metanarrative. Drawing on works by authors such as Aldous Huxley, Philip K. Dick, H.G. Wells, William Gibson, and E.M. Forster in addition to several less canonical texts, the monograph provides a useful discussion of the (predominantly white male) Anglophone imagination of artificial humans in the 20th century. Situated primarily in literature and science studies, the book contextualizes its readings through bioengineering and machine ethics. Categories for analysis include technological reproduction, the humanization of machines, the mechanization of humans, and the virtualization of human life. While this work of criticism importantly and effectively calls into question a clear-cut distinction between the robot, the cyborg, and the android, it is somewhat weak in addressing its titular question. At the same time, the sheer number of works of literature analyzed means that the book contributes to a growing discussion about literary texts retrospectively labelled 'science fiction.'

A monograph of this type (of which there are now quite a few) tends to engage with one of two bodies of scholarly literature: the technological singularity or posthumanism. Whereas the singularity discourses emphasize unprecedented change in technology, imagining a digital future that is beyond our understanding from the perspective of the present, posthumanism foregrounds our social and cultural