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## **METAXIS: ANTONY ROWLAND BETWEEN COMMITMENT AND AUTONOMY**

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...

I think it needs that ancient scream  
to pierce the skulls of Academe  
to remind them that all poems start  
in the scream of Orpheus torn apart.

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The quoted fragment from Tony Harrison’s enigmatical film-poem *Metamorpheus* (1999) subsidizes Antony Rowland’s central argument about the unavoidability of in-betweenness in a metamodern perception of the artist who seems to be trapped in an intellectual-emotional vice: between unrefined poetic flame and cultivated scholarly research, between a disenchanting, individual radical talent delivering a world of violent survival and a genteel nostalgic rumination on the mellowness of tradition. A telling moment in the emergency of this dualism is a late 20<sup>th</sup>-century English reception of orphic sacrifice, explored by Professor Oliver Taplin. Taplin undertakes a journey from Bulgaria to Greece which reveals, idiosyncratically, the “plight of the modernist Bulgarian poet Geo Milev, scourge of the police authorities in Sofia, who was brought to trial for the publication of a new magazine, Plamak (‘Flame’) in 1924, and then murdered the following year in ‘massive repressions which followed a terrorist bomb explosion in Sofia” (Rowland 2021: 123). The implied, but not mentioned overtly at this stage, poem ‘September’ (“Септември”, ‘Septemvri’), forms part of Rowland’s exquisitely finished claim about the unavoidability of a consideration of “double consciousness” as part of his formulation of metamodernism: A cocktail made of “forg[ing] barbaric

poetry out of atrocious history” and “a Poundian desire to explore the rootedness of myth” (ibid.). Rather shocking is the resuscitation in *Metamorpheus* (42’) of what could be assumed to be the severed head of Orpheus – floating down the Maritsa and with eyes having already blinked, quite evocatively (33’) – to eventually mimic the expression of none other than Tony Harrison himself who sets Taplin on this journey and thus declares his indebtedness to both myth and “the skulls of Academe”. Self-antagonism, as a feature of metamodernism, asks for analysis: This need is laid out in Rowland’s initial argument (taken from Geoffrey Hill’s fourth Oxford professorial lecture ‘Poetry, Policing and Public Order (2011 – 2012)’) – economically clad in an exploration of conceptual incongruences in the ‘Introduction’, but admirably well unfolded further, in particular in Chapter 3 (‘Committed and Autonomous Art’). As an academic and a native speaker of Bulgarian, I trust I may be excused to have expected more than the six-page opinion on Milev as part of the mythopoesis of Tony Harrison’s collage-like perception of “transformations of the Orpheus myth” (Rowland 2021: 121). On the other hand, Milev becomes a cornerstone in Rowland’s adroit investigation of metamodernism which may be seen as a lingering between “departure” and “perpetuation”, “mainstream and ‘innovative’ poetry”, “recalcitrance” and a wish for harmony (ibid. 1 – 2). Ploughing through the embedded narratives that contemporary British poetry spins out of its ambiguous relationship with the past, as Rowland demonstrates, is certainly worth taking the time for, as one tries to assuage the clash in perceiving a contemporary poem as at once extension of, and revolt against.

The monograph consists of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. The one-hundred and fifty pages of consistent critical labour that Antony Rowland’s study amounts to are followed by some seventy pages of invaluable notes – a fact indicative of the volume of the author’s resolve and the succinctness of his argumentation in the main textual body. In the Acknowledgements section Rowland declares a sense of faithfulness for his terminally ill friend who inspired the composition of the book. This humane dedication balances the edginess and the provocatively conflictual nature of the poetical material selected for analysis.

Geoffrey Hill’s reflections on the need for a poem to exasperate, on “doomed literary culture”, and the impulse to go beyond texting (disclaimed in his pejorative reference to Carol Anne Duffy’s creative stance) is a case in point: Rowland sees himself filling in a gap opened by

“the absence of an extended appraisal of contemporary poetry in the context of metamodernism” which he perceives “in terms of the bifurcation ... between mainstream and ‘innovative’ poetry” (Rowland 2021: 3). Rowland’s intention is tied to his revealing the depthiness of concepts such as “enigmaticalness”, “committed” and “autonomous art”, and “iconoclasm”. That he should have made such a choice is hardly a surprise, given his consistent, but not blind interest in Adorno’s preference for ambiguity, non-definability, and dialectical thinking as the essence of modern art (ibid. 7). Constant approaching that which may be defined as the spectrality of sense, open-mindedness to “the methodological challenges of literature” in terms of interpretation, the amoebic alterations in a text’s life with subsequent readers – these are some of Rowland’s ambitious initial intentions, actually rather elegantly committed to negative dialectics (ibid. 8 – 9), as he monitors contemporary British poetry’s journey toward ontological incompleteness and contingency of sense. Behind Rowland’s project there stand also Derek Attridge, Walter Benjamin (ibid. 9), an unquiet and persistent temptation to quote Eliot, and a wish to defend – showcasing, for instance, the work of “Prynne, Monk, Parmar, Warner, and Byrne” – art’s persistence “to delight, challenge and exasperate” (ibid. 20). In the wake of Hill, Rowland denounces literature’s “‘promotional [...] outlook’” and articulates the need to turn over a new leaf – after postmodernism – so as to notice “a perceived shift ... to a new historicity bound up with affect, the return of sentiment, post-irony and the impact of austerity” (ibid. 22) – a cross-generic link, also, with the metamodern novel.

In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) Theodor Adorno reflects on transitoriness versus absoluteness in perusing art’s substance, arguing that true art is non-representational<sup>1</sup>. Art’s ability to surprise, perplex and

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<sup>1</sup> Here is a compact selection from Adorno’s aesthetic theory which propels Rowland’s theoretical motivation. The problematic nature of concepts such as edginess, enigmaticalness and historicity is evident:

Art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fiber. ... The concept of art is located in a historically changing constellation of elements; it refuses definition. ... Art can be understood only by its laws of movement, not according to any set of invariants. It is *defined by its relation to what it is not*. ... . The new is the longing for the new, not the new itself: ... The art of absolute responsibility terminates in sterility, whose breath can be felt on almost all consistently developed art works; absolute irresponsibility degrades art to fun; ... As a thing

kindle a desire for the new, its auto-allegorizing potential, which signals the necessity to negate, rather than affirm pleasure, art's demand from man to cultivate tolerance to *enigmaticalness* (i.e. to the problematical status of understanding per se), art's becoming social through its opposition to society (i.e. "autonomous art") – these seminal points find their way into Rowland's selection of such poetical matter that discloses the diverse and angry spirit of Contemporary British poetry. Similar seems to be Geoffrey Hill's attitude when he defends poetry as a need to exasperate, to not alleviate but fuel "cantankerousness" and abstain from resolving "obscurity", to maintain depthiness of argument and create double consciousness, while he spurns "texting" (in the definition of the then poet laureate Carol Anne Duffy) as an all-too-easy "anarchical sentimental pillage"<sup>2</sup>. Still, the debate would have been even more fruitful, I trust, if Rowland had included the opinions of some notable 20<sup>th</sup>-century scholars in the area of hermeneutics (i.e. we do not see Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Iser, or Ricoeur in the Bibliography section) – this would have provided the study with the much needed diversity of literary theory, as it perceives conflict at the heart of creativity and interpretation. On par with Hill, Rowland feels confident in revisiting late modernism via Adorno's

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that negates the world of things, every artwork is a priori helpless when it is called on to legitimate itself to this world; still, art cannot simply refuse the demand for legitimation by pointing to this apriority. ... The enigmaticalness of artworks remains bound up with history. It was through history that they became an enigma; it is history that ever and again makes them such, and, conversely, it is history alone which gave them their authority ... All artworks – and art altogether – are enigmas; since antiquity this has been an irritation to the theory of art. That artworks say something and in the same breath conceal it expresses this enigmaticalness from the perspective of language. This characteristic cavorts clownishly; if one is within the artwork, if one participates in its immanent completion, this enigmaticalness makes itself invisible; if one steps outside the work, breaking the contract with its immanent context, this enigmaticalness returns like a spirit. (Adorno 1997: 2-3, 31, 39, 119-120, emphasis added)

<sup>2</sup> As Hill dwells on T. S. Eliot's 'Lines for an Old Man' and 'Little Gidding' (*Four Quartets*), he urges "the exasperated spirit to proceed" and declares the premises of his own genius: "The angst of my youth compounded by the exacerbations of old age" (Hill 2011 – 2012). Further, Hill speaks of poetry as "lines in depth" (hence "depthiness"), and not just in line – lines, in other words, which ought to be seen in relation to "disrelation", as writing poetry means, essentially, "not to be oneself", "not to be sincere, but to be inventive", to "protest" and thus to be "an elitist" who works against "political careerism" and "oligarchical commodity" (ibid. 36' – 37', 40').

skepticism toward a naïve perception that interpretation could ever explain away conflict which is at the heart of poetry:

Late modernism suggests attenuated endurance, whereas metamodernism connotes a self-conscious return to a formidable but also ephemeral phase in literature and culture. ... Enigmatic poems are like the Sphinx: they are unsolvable puzzles, in which any infringements of critical understanding are tempted as the poetry's 'meaning' recedes into the distance. Adorno's resistance toward hermeneutics in his context offers a methodological challenge not only to the study of contemporary poetry, but to the study of literature as a whole. (Rowland 2021: 9).

Silent about the possibility of including, in his research, Iserian 'gaps' or 'blanks' and the 'as-if reality' principle of the existence of the work of art, Rowland's perception about Adorno's conviction that art must be approached in its "relation to what it is not" gets established through a discussion of enigmaticalness in the works of Prynne, Paterson, and Monk in chapter I, which embosses a key sub-section in the study: 'Contemporary British Poetry and Enigmaticalness' (Rowland 2021: 21 – 41). The selection of poems from J. H. Prynne's *Acrylic Tips* (2002), Don Paterson's *Landing Light* (2003), and Geraldine Monk's *Ghost & Other Sonnets* (2008), aims at showcasing, once again, the rapprochement between Adorno and Rowland on the need for critics to "remain open to literature's unassimilable 'remainder,'" and accept that all they can understand is "something of art", and not art itself (Rowland 2021: 26). In addition, this chapter deals with the inefficiency of the human body ("infarct", *ibid.* 30), the motif of growing up as registering disturbance (*ibid.* 36), Patterson's much discussed anthology *New British Poetry* (2004), and the destinies of the modernist faith in the necessity to get "rid of the controlling ego" in relation to "the 'poetry wars' since the 1970s" (*ibid.* 41). The context for this debate includes Paterson's attitude to postmodernism, and Hill's critical stance on "poetic 'democracy'" (*ibid.*). Rowland's integration of Prynne, Paterson, and Monk hereby asks for an expansion of one's understanding of their poetical works and collections. And so, there emerges a common metamodern discourse chronicling man's "shadowy / Word World" (as also in other poems by Geraldine Monk, such as 'Three Versions of Three Ships, One'. Monk 2016: 59), man's spastically falling apart and losing contact with the world ("a white coat on the hook of its own alienated shade."). *Landing Light. The Forest of Suicides*, Paterson 2004: 14), and the grief of the devastating muteness

of departure that man dwells in (“Sorrow will you turn remain muzzle gripe, yet sign / off abject partition truly. On inference upside / losing track top infiltrate, curt shouts demark a place / soon to leave to live commiserate in vivid suffusion”, *Acrylic Tips*, Prynne 2004: 539). What Rowland’s discerning eye has caught in his comparative investigation of Prynne, Patterson, and Monk could be summed up if one were to consider Henry Staten’s succinct definition of poetry as “departure from sense”, assuming that sense in poetry is an entity behind which there may also be sought an unequivocal “design”, rather than a natural conundrum, or “blockage” (Attridge & Staten 2015: 119, 121, 123). Paterson’s own works, just as well as his striving to compile a select assortment of poets (New British Poetry) sculpt a peculiar desire to give vent to working-class consciousness, while being “blunt”, “elliptical”, and status-aware, as Sarah Broom has noted perspicaciously (Broom 2006: 36 – 37, 42).

‘Continuing ‘Poetry Wars’ in Twenty-First-Century British Poetry’ (Rowland 2021: 42 – 58) is the title of the second chapter, in which Rowland makes a transition from Paterson to former poet laureate Carol Anne Duffy, and then to Geoffrey Hill. Here is one of Rowland’s forthright appraisals of contemporary British poetry: “Paterson’s defence of ‘accessible’ writing is by proxy an attack on the version of metamodernist writing that I outline throughout this book” (Rowland 2021: 43). His further disagreement with Paterson includes criticism on the way the poet “awkwardly fuses Language poets with the London and Cambridge schools into a distinct tribe of postmodernists: there is no critical reflection on the formal (or personal) rifts between the writers within each group” (ibid. 44). To this should perhaps be added that, peculiarly enough, Rowland himself, very much apparently engaged with the equivocalness of the descendancy of metamodernism in contemporary British poetry from the London and Cambridge schools, makes no overt clarification about either of these two literary formations (except for some sparse remarks in the Introduction and chapter IV which barely specify his point), their philosophy and the fate of their achievements when placed next to more recent voices such as Parmar or Warner. Greater clarity and precision would have helped Rowland make his point even better. The scholar intends to showcase, further on, Paterson’s role in bringing out the antagonism between “‘postmodernist’ poetry (‘the parallel tradition’) and the mainstream” (ibid. 47), between the “‘conciliatory’” and the “‘excessively playful’” (in Adorno’s terms), which leads him to a productive discussion of Geoffrey Hill’s *Scenes from Comus* – terminating

with the enigmatically unresolved, indeed neither categorically conformist, nor outlandishly experimental element in Hill's work. Rowland manoeuvres: He interlaces Hill, Paterson and Duffy in a debate on the relevance of conformity. The poem in focus is Duffy's 'Death of a Teacher' – the argument against 'democratic poetry' attracts Hill's resentment against "anti-elitism" which, he argues, "hinders the quality of her own writing" (ibid. 50). A specific sub-chapter on *Scenes from Comus* outlines, fruitfully, Hill's faith in engaging the reader "intensively with the work" and in the need to accept that absolute revelation of a text's meaning is but a chimera (ibid. 56). Yet Hill, in the eye of Rowland, remains himself unresolved and in a state of metaxis: Between conciliatory acceptance of poetry as history, as past, as responsibility, and poetry as currency, as active interpretative effort. The latter ambiguity can be best seen in the finale of this chapter which ends with a contemplation on Hill's work and the inspiration he apparently derived from Eliot's *Four Quartets* – enigmatically encoded in *Scenes from Comus* (ibid. 58). It seems adequate to conclude that it is this very last section that calls for Sartre's view on the significance of word as 'send[ing] back to the poet his own image, like a mirror', which dismantles the hope for "poetic commitment" and brings to light the "opacity of things" created by "the ambiguous properties of words" in which emotion gets enclosed in poetry: "We are within language as within our body. ... The word is a certain particular moment of action and has no meaning outside it" (Sartre 1988: 31 – 32, 34, 35). A reference to Sartre could explain even better the impossibility of thinking of poetry as representation and of seeing authorship as anything but promotion of the allusiveness and ellipticalness, i.e. poetry as language per se (ibid. 70 – 71). Or, to put it in the words of Barthes, we are faced with the "desacrilization of the image of the Author by ... the ... disappointment of expectations of meaning" (Barthes 1977: 144).

Chapter III, "Committed and Autonomous Art", however, seems to somewhat contradict an earlier view of poetry as counter-commitment and of "writing as ... the destruction of ... [any] point of origin" (ibid. 142), of loss of identity to a *joie-de-vivre* satiety in language. Rowland proceeds with Hill's *The Orchards of Syon* (2002), from which he makes an intriguing, tense vault back in time to Tony Harrison's *The Kaisers of Carnuntum* (1996) and *The Labourers of Herakles* (1996). It is here that Adorno and Sartre are called for on the matter of literature's "ahistorism" (Adorno's faith in "a potential fusion of autonomous and committed art" and Sartre's antagonism to "'idle pastime'" (ibid. 61)). The conflict

concerns, actually, ways, rather than the necessity, of engaging with history – either in an avidly committed way, or in an idiosyncratic, avoiding popularity way. Politics, barbarism and verse plays, based on Harrison’s works, have fruitfully infiltrated Rowland’s peculiar analysis of contemporary British poetry’s engagement with the issue of time, human memory and grief. Incidentally, Rowland throws light on some stark thematic presences in Harrison’s works such as “Bosnian refugees” (Srbrenica and the former Yugoslavia) and the Nazi (ibid. 72), WWII being also explained in the context of Hill’s *Orchards of Syon*. The parallels that Rowland draws between the Manchester Blitz and *The Orchards* indicates that he himself is not at all indifferent to the idea that the requisites of metamodern art, i.e. a text’s enigmaticalness and the autonomy of poetry as language per se, can only ever emerge if a connection is established with a past, with existence, especially as he sees “lexical ambiguities bound up with ‘damaged’ existence” and with the quotidian persistence of trauma as part of human nature (ibid. 74). Rowland extends his discussion of ambiguities to “incoherence” as part of Ezra Pound’s essential self-perception (and in view of Prynne’s *Acrylic Tips*, ibid. 78). Next follows a sub-chapter on “Autonomous Art and Paul Celan’s *Atemwende*”. In its turn, this perceptive insertion, which takes its origin from Adorno’s trust in art’s abstaining from “a completely instrumentalized world” (ibid. 86), justifies Rowland summary of Hill’s work as “hermeticism” (“rather than productive enigmas”, ibid. 87).

Rowland discerns Harrison’s sensitivity for social inequality through delving into a number of works, including *V.*, *The Loiners*, his film-poems and verse plays: He elucidates the diversity of Harrison’s preoccupation with “social inequality and marginalization, sexuality, colonialism, imperialism – and the anger and violence that are linked to all of these” (Broom 2006: 12). This certainly suggests a scholarly impulse to historicize, to establish a connection between events in time. As he reviews Harrison’s works, Rowland may be seen to reveal – in the words of Linda Hutcheon – the possibility of not bracketing off “the past as referent” but seeing that “it is incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning” in view of the discourse-specific nature of art in the age of postmodernism (Hutcheon 1986 – 1987: 182). This path leads to a focus on the presence of T. S. Eliot in Rowland’s study, which deserves a space and time of its own, but perhaps it would suffice to point out Eliot’s conviction, expressed in his essay ‘The Modern Mind’, that “what the poet experiences is not poetry but poetic material”, backed up



by, and born out of, a “fusion of feelings” whose multitudinousness obscures their origins and so the poet remains unclear and inarticulate about “what he is communicating” (Eliot 1933: 126).

Chapter IV (“Iconoclasm and Enigmatical Commitment”, pp. 88 – 116) spawns a stunning entity of reflections on erudition as a prerequisite for understanding poetry and the treatment of violence and destruction as part of the historical responsibility of sharing human experiences (“were happily destined to love our destruction / as faith in the continuity by which we sing”, as Warner chants in another poem, *III. Works and Days*), with a focus on how we talk of those especially in view of the urban context of modern poetry (ibid. 99). This chapter consolidates, contrastively, Ahren Warner and James Byrne. Works like *Nevrometer*, ‘Lutèce, Te Amo’ and *Place’s You Leave* constitute a domain for gathering various critical reactions against “antipathy to the commodification of contemporary poetry” (Rowland 2021: 88) by way of describing atrocities and thus politicizing a potential reader’s perception of text as time (Cf. ibid. 91). The reference to Antonin Artaud’s *Le Père-Nerfs* betrays the thematic presence of the mind and soul – an illustration of contemporary poetry’s challenge to a conventional perception of reality (ibid. 90 – 91). Poetry which speaks of liminal states, waste of human life, and aggression (part of Adorno’s “sense of constant edginess”, ibid. 111) does as much to defy blind norm and ordinariness as to stress the worth of a perspectivist view on poetry as denial of uniformity and single-voicedness (Cf. ibid. 105). The referential field includes a citation of Byrne’s *The Caprices*,<sup>3</sup> and recognition of Warner’s *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted* (ibid. 109). Perhaps it might be proper to conclude an appreciation of this chapter by way of praising its finale which permits cross-pollination between prose and poetry while it also rebukes any attempt to assume that establishing connections between poems by different authors might be a solidly reliable interpretative strategy per se (ibid. 115).

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<sup>3</sup> *Tender Mothers* (ll. 1–6, from *Economies of the Living*, in *White Coins*, 2015) could be said to take edginess to an extreme, creating an ambiguous image of “the parent who is violent / by choice. Who – like the kite – / hovers, hypnotized by its prey. // ... / She stands in front of you again, / someone to administer the sickness” (Byrne 2015, n.p.).

The final chapter, “The Double Consciousness of Modernism” (pp. 117–33), is a refreshing plunge into the intellectual virtuosity of Sandeep Parmar’s *Eidolon* and Tony Harrison’s *Metamorpheus*. Demonstrating Parmar’s acceptance of Virginia Woolf’s sense of a Greek-style celebration of “every moment of existence” (ibid. 120), Rowland informs the reader of Harrison’s pursuit of the orphic element in his revelation of the atrocious fate of the Bulgarian poet Geo Milev (especially concerning the theme of the desecrated body and talent discernible in the speechless head which travells the route from Sofia to Lesbos, Cf. Rowland 2021: 123). The contextual trajectories of both works reach Ancient Greece as well as to more recent times in literary and political history (Whitman and the fate of woman as a universal but anonymous presence in Parmar, and “Orpheus and the modernist poetry of Milev” in Harrison, ibid. 125–126). *Eidolon*, according to Rowland, gives us a Helen (drawing on Helen of Troy) who is “representative of no particular woman, and all women, at the same time” (ibid. 132). *Metamorpheus*, on the other hand, “could be described as metamodernist in terms of its early twentieth-century antecedents, and indebtedness to the development of double consciousness in Joyce and Eliot’s work” (ibid. 133). Parmar and Harrison, it seems, take caution in building bridges between myth and a modern-day reality, but both allow for challenging vaults across time and space in writing. Parmar hesitates to promise “[retaining] the old names” (*Eidolon*, IV, 1 – 3) for a woman (“Helen of Sparta of Troy of Egypt / of no known address of no known nationality / refugee of no conflict / stateless without property / disappearing under a veil / of treason”; ibid. XIX) – she speaks of woman as namelessness, anonymity, and wasted potential (see also *The Octagonal Tower*, ll. 17 – 18). Woman becomes “the composite of an idea” (ibid. XIX, XXXII). The transformative value of poetic experience, the interchangeability of stories, names (e.g. man, poet, Orpheus, Milev; woman, poetess, Sappho) and forms, and the perennial themes of loss and destruction show a peculiar, unavoidable engagement with history.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A marginal glance at section 12 of Geo Milev’s ‘September’ would confirm the relevance of the theme of inheritance in understanding poetical experience: “O Muse, now sing the Wrath of Achilles” (Milev 1961: 38; in orig.: “Музо, възпей оня гибелен гняв на Ахила...”; Милев 1971: 71). This fragment asks for Adorno and Hill – anger could be held responsible for poetic self-perception, double consciousness matters just as well. There stand out the intensity of black, of death, the implied katabasis through denial of faith (“Down with God”, Milev 1961), yet upward movement (the heads of sunflowers: “The sunflowers tumbled in dust”; also “Earth shall be Heaven”) paid for with the

Compositeness and transformativeness are not alien to Geoffrey Hill's work, judging by the religious dilemmas his poetry sustains (Ramazani 2018: 995), as in *September Song*: "Undesirable you may have been, untouchable / you were not" .../... (I have made an elegy for myself it / is true" ('September Song', ll. 1 – 2, 7 – 9). It would have been good to read more on this in Rowland's book.

The Conclusion (Rowland 2021: 134 – 148) reminds us of Adorno's enigmaticalness, draws a chart of scholarly researches on metamodernism, and offers further paths for the development of the topic in hand. Eventually, Rowland motivates undertaking this research with a need for response to the specificity of the travail of existence; historicity is sought in a poet's creative attitude to aggression, "the financial crash and austerity" (Cf. Rowland 2021: 140). An exceptionally good list of alternative terms (e.g. 'neo-modernism', "hypermodernism", "altermodernism", "digimodernism, pseudo-modernism", etc.) and contextual connections in a diversity of poetical works justify the sub-title "Oscillate Wildly" (2021: 146). Exasperation, transformation, and formal conservatism are emblemized at the end of this worthwhile investigation which confirms that the source of metamodernism is rooted in "modernist antecedents" which have metamorphosed into "exasperating poetics" (ibid. 148). Prynne and Hill are brought together in what may be defined as an enigmatical, unstable, eclectic wish for poetry to show more of its 'in-itself' potential which would rescue it out of "utilitarianan texting" or "instrumentalist attempts to make it representative of something else" (ibid. 148).

As do Vermeulen and van der Akker, Rowland occupies a middle ground – between "commitment and [...] detachment" (Vermeulen & van der Akker 2010: 2) in his perusal of this provocatively disparate assortment of poets: Byrne, Hill, Harrison, Parmar, Monk, Paterson,

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sacrifice of the lives of rebels ("Maritsa murmurs ...' / River of blood"). Atrocity as a source of spiritual might (and poetic creativity) and desire for freedom is what 'September' commences with: "From the dead womb of night / The age-old spite of the slave is born: / His passionate hate / Is great" ('September', 1, ll. 1–4). Compared to another recent instance of the reception and translation into English of Milev, which focuses modestly on form ("the astonishing sound effects he achieves in a poem like 'September'", Phillips 2021: n.p.), Harrison's work is one of heuristic power, depthness and subtlety of observation on the local Balkan culture.

Duffy, Warner. The “essayistic”, “rhizomatic”, rather than “scientific”, “linear” or “complete” “description and interpretation of metamodern sensibility” (ibid. 2) in Rowland’s study has been backed up by his generous and non-categorical allowance for at once historicity and non-historicity, for contemporary British poetry’s confrontation with, yet sense of respect for, a greater, albeit fluid, modernist before (in the face of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound). One of the purposes seems to be to unfold the argument that “new generations of artists increasingly abandon the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche in favor of aesthetical notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis. These trends and tendencies can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern” (ibid. 2). The way we could pacify these all too different poets is perhaps this: “the metamodern, it appears, exposes itself through a-topic metaxis. The Greek English lexicon translates as *atopos* (ατοπος), respectively, as strange, extraordinary, and paradoxical. However, most theorists and critics have insisted on its literal meaning: a place (*topos*) that is no (a) place” (ibid. 12). Are we then justified, after reading Rowland, to assume a more recent and perhaps more delicately uttered in terms of rigorousness of definitions, attitude which heralds the advent of “a new dominant cultural logic”: “If [...] there is a shared sense that postmodernism is no longer with us, there is less agreement about what has replaced it.” (Gibbons, Vermeulen & van der Akker 2019: 172). “Depthiness” is a term that feels suitable for the occasion: It could be perceived to dialogize with Frederic Jameson’s contemplation on postmodernity’s “depthlessness” (ibid. 174).<sup>5</sup>

*Metamodernism and Contemporary British Poetry* has not passed unnoticed in critical reviews. Some of them have spotted that Rowland’s over-emphatic accent on metamodernism as “[the] making of innovative, difficult work” could not be uniquely attributed to any recent cultural field (Hanson 2022: n. p.). In this sense, the radical, almost revolutionary fervor, the vacuity, contradictoriness and unreality perceived in Postmodernism, come to be extended, rather than reduced, in metamodernism’s search for an in-itself meaning in poetry (ibid.). Without overtly denying Rowland’s contributive investigation, Hanson,

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<sup>5</sup> And further: “‘depthiness’ designates a renewed need or wish to experience the world as possessing depth, as real, even amidst a lingering postmodernist scepticism of such an attempt” (ibid. 174).

nonetheless, destabilizes the ground of innovativeness of metamodernism by arguing that “metamodernism, ..., unfortunately, is often still Postmodern” (ibid.). If, then, as Frederic Jameson contemplates, “Modernity is not a concept but rather a narrative category” (Jameson 2002: 94), metamodernism, with its desire to perplex, reveal, oppose, encapsulate and diffuse, is an apt sequel to such a narrative which disallows uncontested representation of subjectivity as it is a kind of movement against oneself to become an in-itself being, a kind of perturbation of causality and “relativization of historical narratives” (ibid.30). And this is because of the unrepresentability of *Darstellung* (consciousness) and of “lived experience” (ibid. 53).

Since Geoffrey Hill has been reviewed profoundly in Rowland’s research, it might be adequate to propose that Metamodernism emerges as a compound milieu, where “... we live, [...], / To ravage and redeem the world” (*Genesis*, V, ll. 39 – 40, Hill 2000: 5). In other words, “there is a sense in which the modern artist is called upon to atone for his own illiberal pride and a sense in which he is engaged in vicarious expiation for the pride of the culture which itself rejects him” (Hill 2009: 6). Hence the sense of knowing yet not-knowing of the benefits and drawbacks of moving-up against the current (ibid. 7, 14 – 15) – both in poetry, defined as metamodern, and in scholarly research of metamodernism.

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