

BOOK REVIEWS

Varieties of Solace

Irene Papoulis

All of this year's books circle around issues of healing, a richly faceted subject always dear to members of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning. Nate Mickelson reviews Burt Bradley's *After Following*, in which the poet takes solace in writing his own meditations on the work of other poets; Paul Puccio responds to Peter Khost's *Rhetor Response: A Theory and Practice of Literary Affordance*, which explores the potential connections to life that literature could provide readers in our classrooms and beyond; Erin Frymire addresses Jessica Restaino's *Surrender: Feminist Rhetoric and Ethics in Love and Illness*, which combines rhetorical analysis and personal writing to address the agony of terminal illness; and Tracy Lassiter reviews Terese Marie Mailhot's *Heart Berries*, a memoir in which the writer finds catharsis in exploring her traumas by writing about them.

While the authors and reviewers of these books have a diverse range of interests, they have all inspired me to reflect on how much the brutality of the world gets to all of us, inevitably, and how much we need outlets and support for acknowledging our reactions. They've made me think about the fact that as a teacher I sometimes focus too narrowly on the tasks I assign to students, and the skills they will acquire by performing those tasks. They remind me of what I know but sometimes forget: that acknowledging underlying emotions and life-realities can make our classrooms, as well as our lives in general, more life-affirming, more nurturing, and ultimately more productive.

These books all point to the profound value of writing and storytelling. As many students spend less and less time reading for pleasure, schools can be the one place where they learn to respond deeply to the stories of others, and to be able to compose and rethink their own stories. These books encourage us, and our students, to embrace and enter written stories, and to view the practice of doing so as an emotional as well as an intellectual exercise.

In theory, we in the academic world have become increasingly aware that the emotional and the theoretical are very much entwined. Yet it can be a giant step from that awareness to an actual welcoming of real emotions into our own as well as our students' writing and thinking. These writers demonstrate the complexity, the difficulty, and the rewards of doing so, and our reviewers provide careful and interesting readings of the process. Both authors and reviewers inspire us to approach the intimacy of storytelling with care and empathy, being fearless in our openness to ourselves and others.

Many JAEPL readers deeply understand already the need to acknowledge students' emotional lives in the classroom. These wonderful books not only offer reminders of the need for healing practices; they also provide nuanced approaches that can be useful for living as well as teaching. They inspire me, and I hope you, to take another step from wherever we are toward a richer understanding of the solace that reading and writing can offer us.



Bradley, Burt. *After Following: Poems*. Homebound Publications, 2019

Portrait of a Western Poet in Progress

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The town of Powell is located in Wyoming's northwest quadrant, midway between the Big Horn National Forest and Yellowstone National Park, twenty-five miles south of the Montana border. Home to slightly more than 6,000, the town sits on desert land reclaimed for agriculture in the early twentieth century. It is named for explorer and engineer John Wesley Powell though he never visited the region. (Somewhat more troublingly, the town is also near-neighbor to the site of Heart Mountain Relocation Camp, one of ten camps where the US government interned Japanese Americans during World War II.) Summer is Powell's best season. Dry, hot days stretch into cool evenings, and light lingers past 10 PM late into August. The town smells of sugar beets in the fall as farmers stockpile their harvest for shipment and processing elsewhere. In winter—even through early spring—temperatures drop well below 0° Fahrenheit and bright white snow stretches toward mountains in all directions.

Burt Bradley explores these and other aspects of Powell and its surrounding region in *After Following*, his ambitious and charming first collection of poems. Winner of the 2018 Homebound Publications Poetry Prize, the collection honors a pantheon of the poet's influences and inspirations. Bradley names his mentors in his poem's titles and then transforms their characteristic styles to suit a rural Western context. In "Sagebrush Sutra (after Allen Ginsberg)," for example, the poet refigures the high desert around Powell as an epic backdrop by injecting some of Ginsberg's playful disruptiveness:

It has something to do with jet engines
and a little with unmarked cars.
It is the absolute proof of $E=MC^2$,
the certitude in the uncertainty principle,
and concrete evidence of God's existence.

Even if the desert "doesn't care a fig about us," the poem concludes, "if we ignore it, we miss / one of the gateless gates to heaven / on earth." The poem "Falling (after Keats)" achieves a similar effect by retooling the British poet's dense abstractions via multisensory immersion in a Wyoming sunset:

sealed and unsealed with a whiff
of some primeval perfume,
vermillion scented, a hint of plum
dissipating into the deep red end
of things turning purple, indigo,
these last swaths of color on the horizon.

To write “after” another writer is to bring their characteristic style to bear on new subject matter through sometimes appreciative, sometimes rivalrous affiliation. In addition to Ginsberg and Keats, Bradley writes “after” Neruda, Picasso, T.S. Eliot, Edgar Allan Poe, and Jack Kerouac, among others. (Los Angeles poet Wanda Coleman’s “Retro Rogue Anthology,” rewriting Mark Strand’s influential, and predominantly white male, anthology *The Contemporary Poets: American Poetry Since 1940* from a woman-of-color perspective, is perhaps the most transformative example of this technique.) “Following” another writer’s example is doing something different and perhaps less fraught. As Bradley observes in the closing lines of “In the Footprints of Whitman,” *After Following*’s final poem: “It’s not about catching up with me or him, / it’s just about following.” No doubt the Brooklyn poet would welcome this kind of following, especially given his admonition in *Leaves of Grass* that “He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher,” if it breaks new ground. If Bradley celebrates the writers and artists he names, he also shows his independence from their tutelage through the poems he has created under their influence.

Imitating models is a generative practice with a long history. The classical rhetorician Quintilian, for example, proposes *imitatio* as method for using model texts to generate writerly invention (Kalbfleisch 41). As Elizabeth Kalbfleisch explains in a recent essay for *Pedagogy*, Quintilian’s concept, if not the term or its classical meanings, continues to inform the ways reading and writing are taught, in particular in college composition. She describes imitative reading strategies such as memorizing, reciting, and paraphrasing as “fluid practice[s]” that enable students to understand and internalize other writer’s techniques and ideas (48). John Muckelbauer theorizes a further possibility that mirrors Bradley’s experiments. Applying insights from Derrida and Deleuze, he notes that imitating models involves two simultaneous moves: repeating their methods and introducing variations. Recognizing the generative tensions between these moves, Muckelbauer advocates for having student writers approach model texts as sources of inspiration: “what is propagated in inspiration’s infectious movement from the model to its copy, is precisely the dynamic of losing oneself in response to a model, of becoming something other than oneself” (74). Indeed, as Bradley demonstrates, imitation allows writers to immerse themselves in the “singular, affirmative rhythm of transformation” brought into being by the text they are considering (Muckelbauer 75).

After Following tells the story of Bradley’s development as a poet through his engagement with transformative models. As the poet notes in “An Open Apology to Robert Haas on the 25th Anniversary of Janis Joplin’s Death,” he started writing in earnest while “driving a forklift in and out / of refrigerated warehouses” during a first job after high school. Soon after, he entered a years-long period of searching for form “head first, ass up like some Looney Tunes character, spinning the contraption [of poems] into a cocoon” (“Belated Letter to James Wright”). Encountering the everyday speech rhythms and intimate subject matter of James Wright’s poems proved a decisive influence. As he signals in a poem written “after” one of Wright’s own influences, William Carlos Williams, the older poet’s work helped him gain confidence: “The work day still panting / after me . . . // I feel for a few words, all ill-fitting / but enough for this to depend upon” (“After Work (after William Carlos Williams).” Looking back over his years of writing, Bradley notes that perhaps the most important lesson he has learned from his mentors is to

embrace the possibility of “sitting in the pure poetry / of this Being all alone” (“A Long Way from Amherst (following Emily Dickinson).”

Bradley taught writing at Powell’s Northwest College, one of Wyoming’s seven community colleges, for more than 30 years before retiring in 2016. His tender appreciation for Wright, Williams, Dickinson, and others suggests he values imitation just as much as a teaching method as a practice of writing. Further evidence of this possibility comes in a poem titled “Why No One Writes Like Thomas Wolfe.” As the poem builds steam, Bradley decries the warping effect of some writing programs:

We’ve got nice, accredited creative
writing programs now, where you learn
all about hooks and pithy topic-sentenced
short paragraphs, suddenly bereft of adverbs,
and for God’s sake keep it succinct. Remember
the real work lies in the pitch, the query
letter, the marketing strategy.

Kalbfleisch and Muckelbauer (not to mention Quintilian) would likely agree to the alternative Bradley models: Have students read, and then have them imitate as a way to discover techniques and rhythms that will open up new possibilities for their work!

A few of Bradley’s poems fall flat, in particular those that play too neatly with their model’s well-known elements. “Sometimes a Raven (after Poe),” for example, aspires to Poe’s dense, haunting, repetitive sounds but offers what I hear as a distracting muddle of I’s: “It’s difficult to imagine / my day life, the kids, wife, bills. / my dull job in a fluorescent office, / and bills, hells bells! bills.” And the collection’s opening poem, an invocation of Yeats’s remarkable “The Second Coming,” jangles with faux-earnestness: “So, I pray for your help, my dear Yeats. / I’ll take one fake fairy, or one occult fib, / even some mumbo-jumbo automatic writing— / new metaphors or dead—for any vision: / even with glasses, rose-colored or cracked / is better than no vision at all” (“An Open Prayer to W.B. Yeats”).

Despite these wrong notes, *After Following* is filled with moments when Bradley’s imitation of his mentors and his careful attention to his corner of the West combine to wonderful effect. His dexterous evocations of the Wyoming wind are a case in point. “Blizzard (following Katagiri Roshi)” immerses the reader in a chilling winter gale:

Strung out like shredded sheets, this snow
unnerves things, a whitened wind
at full strength: seen! at last.
...
Even with squinting eyes
and grimacing face, with numbed hands
and frozen feet I feel this constant
manifestation of beauty itself.

“The Beet Season (after Jack Kerouac),” the title a play on Powell’s sugar beet harvest, fills the page with a fall breeze:

In the grace and beauty of the dying season,

the wind glasses into light in clear rectangular sheets,
 while the light brilliances back into wind,
 of serrated ocher, the stuff of lost leaves
 losing their sense of limbs, disembarked and sap free—
 a woodless vision that torments ex-lumberjacks and ex-squirrels.

One hopes that Bradley's students are busy, somewhere, imitating his imitations, transferring and transforming the techniques they developed in his classes to the contexts and purposes that matter for them now. Poets and writing teachers alike have much to gain from *After Following's* careful mirroring of such a wide range of poetic styles and preoccupations, as well as from its encyclopedia of influences. Indeed, Bradley invites us to visit two vast libraries in these poems: one stocked with books and art and music he learned from as he developed his craft and one that expands from horizon to horizon and mountain peak to mountain peak around Powell. Both are worth the trip.

Works Cited

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Khost, Peter H. *Rhetor Response: A Theory and Practice of Literary Affordance*. Utah State UP, 2018

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I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind.

—Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

This epigraph, borrowed from a book that has long figured in my imaginative life, expresses, by way of analogy, how literature lingers and unfurls in my mind. Like actual dreams, literary texts generate many of the landscapes and persons and situations that materialize in my consciousness. I may close a book after reading, but I rarely close out what breathed and pulsed in me as I read. Ever since I was a boy, my reading has washed over the rest of my life, shaping how I understand myself and the world, and also crossing, in analogies and references, into my acts of communication. Peter Khost describes

this particular form of bookishness as “the wakeful dreaminess of living through texts that change us” (179).

Khost’s *Rhetor Response: A Theory and Practice of Literary Affordance* is broadly concerned with readers who find meaning or pleasure in literary material and how they may use those materials for their own rhetorical purposes. Literary affordances are “applications of features of literary texts to unrelated rhetorical situations” (6). Occurring consciously or unconsciously, these applications emerge in the process of reading and writing. When we make a literary affordance, we respond not *to* but *through* a text, without concern for the text’s critical reception, the author’s intention (if that is even knowable), or the text’s meaning (46). Khost focuses on literature because “people are already inclined to make affordances of nonfictional texts” (12); we don’t hesitate “using” nonfiction, but the discipline of literary studies (at least since the twentieth century) has taught us to favor interpretation above any other kind of engagement with a text. Furthermore, readers are more inclined to become invested personally with literature because it “[moves] our emotions, [stretches] our imaginations, and [becomes] interwoven with or assimilated into our own life narratives” (13).

This is more than a matter of relatability (e.g., “My family is right out of a Dickens novel,” or “I’m just like Emma Bovary”—a declaration that would be particularly tangled because Emma Bovary herself understands her life through the romantic novels she’s read). Relatability is a one-way street, while a literary affordance reflects (or creates) a dynamic relationship with a text, “toggl[ing] between real and fictional worlds” (93). To extend the traffic metaphor, a literary affordance is more like a roundabout, with multiple entrances and exits and the endless possibility of returns, re-circlings, and recursions. “Something about our relationship to certain literary features holds us in a special way,” Khost explains, “which I suspect is partly a result of the dialogic nature of the nearness and distance of these textual features to our lives” (179).

One of the most familiar literary affordances, as Khost points out, is Freud’s use of the Oedipus myth to explain a child’s unconscious desire for the parent of the other sex. Freud is no more concerned with interpreting *Oedipus Rex* than Sophocles wrote with an eye on psychosexual development. Nevertheless, Oedipus and Jocasta are the narrative “traffic” through which Freud develops and proposes his theory. Another handy example of a literary affordance is the epigraph at the top of this review, a sentence that I slipped out of its original context (Catherine Earnshaw explaining why she will always love Heathcliff, despite her marrying Edgar Linton) and into my own quite different rhetorical situation.

Khost describes *Rhetor Response* as “a humble guide and companion” (211); in that spirit it does not argue for a theory or practice that comprehensively supersedes any other; rather, it invites readers, as Peter Elbow might say, simply to *believe* in this distinctive form of textual engagement. In prose that is lucid, colorful, and, as we might expect, full of illuminating literary affordances, this book gracefully balances the personal with the theoretical and the pedagogical. Throughout, Khost explores the “fuzzy energy” (xi) that vibrates between his life and his reading; particularly in a series of “interchapters,” he engages in a practice that he calls “autotextography” (a neologism that is cousin to “autoethnography”). In these sections, he explains, “I briefly narrate and analyze what a

particular literary text or set of texts has done for me and how these effects have become assimilated into my rhetorical and pedagogical repertoire” (12).

The book situates its subject within several theoretical frames. Khost provides an overview of affordance theory as articulated by James Gibson and other ecological psychologists who emphasize that an affordance occurs within the relationship between a person (or animal) and the environment. One may make an affordance of an object that was never intended by its creator (e.g. standing on a chair to reach my copy of *Wuthering Heights* on a high shelf). Khost also reviews the major theoretical claims in reader response criticism and in ethical criticism, both of which explore the relationships between reader and text. For me what is most compelling about Khost’s work is that he developed it “primarily by reflecting on [his] own experiences and later by observing those of [his] students and . . . only thereafter wandering (and wondering) about scholarly references” (39). This attentiveness to his students and to his own literacy practices, as well as his trust in intuition (xi), embodies a way of knowing that is increasingly necessary in higher education, occupied as institutions have become by quantitative inquiry and judgment.

I will explore the institutional and pedagogical possibilities for literary affordance later in this review. But here I’d like to respond to his invitational spirit by offering an “interchapter” with an autotextography of my own.

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Ever since I was 11 or 12, I’ve been reading Gothic literature. Throughout grammar school and high school I read this genre indiscriminately, hardly distinguishing between properly literary tales like “The Turn of the Screw” and *Jane Eyre*, popular novels like *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Burnt Offerings*, and Gothic romances like *Rebecca* and *Nine Coaches Waiting*. I particularly enjoyed what I later learned literary critics named the “female Gothic” narrative: a young orphaned woman secures a position as governess (or librarian or secretary) in an isolated (and usually castellated) house full of mysterious rooms and menacing characters, one of whom typically marries her at the end.

What would attract a young boy to these books?

The answer to this question—as in so many Gothic novels with their tangled domestic histories—lies in my own family’s story. After having lived for many years in a cozy ethnic neighborhood in Philadelphia, my parents moved to a new suburban development in New Jersey. A foreign and frightening place it appeared to them, especially my mother who had neither car nor job. She was a stay-at-home mom, and I was her stay-at-home son. New Jersey seemed perilous to her, with its wide streets, its vacant fields, its unfamiliar people. Her anxiety over this strange new place made her very protective of me, especially after my Byronic brother enlisted in the navy when I was ten years old, and I was the only child at home. It didn’t help that I was small, unathletic, bespectacled, and skittish—in other words, ostentatiously defenseless.

In her excitably maternal imagination, nameless dangers lurked behind shrubs and at the bottom of cul de sacs and in the vast stretches of parking lots. These were no places for me; after all, I wouldn’t even be able to *see* an assailant if I lost my glasses. There were no other children my age close by, and she considered any destination that required my

crossing a road far too dangerous. The only safety was inside the ten rooms of our house and within our fenced back yard.

When not in school, I spent my days converting games for “two or more players” into activities for one child; reading books and imagining myself in their landscapes; and exploring every corner of the house that my mother daily cleaned. I knew precisely what was stored in each box neatly piled in the hall closet; I rearranged the bottles of shampoo and lotion in the bathroom by color; I alphabetized my parents’ LPs; I organized my books according to height. Like those orphaned governesses, I was trapped in a house with nothing to do but uncover mysteries. The only problem was that there were no mysteries in my family’s house.

Gothic fiction invited me into other houses where I could lose myself amidst hidden passages and cobwebby attics and forbidden doorways that led to unused wings with rooms where mirrors reflected dusty and shadowy corners; houses with rooms even whose names suggested the secrecy and quiet inscrutability of the past—the drawing room, the library, the morning room, the west tower, the conservatory. I read these books both for what they mirrored of my life and for what they offered that was so totally different. The frisson created by all the ambiguities in the Gothic moreover gave me a heuristic through which I would many years later come to understand my own childhood experiences: how home can be both a haven and a prison, how the flip-side of safety is suffocation, how rescue may only come in the arms of something (or someone) forbidden and allegedly dangerous.

These books also cultivated my reading tastes: as an undergraduate, I enrolled in every available course in nineteenth-century British literature; my doctoral dissertation focused on Victorian and Edwardian fiction. The impact of Romantic and Victorian writing on my prose I leave to you, dear reader, to discern.

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Khost’s institutional and pedagogical context is writing studies, and he compellingly argues that the practice of literary affordance not only broadens the scope of challenging assignments for students but also welcomes the expertise and passions of (especially non-tenure-track) faculty trained in literature who teach largely composition courses. He provides an astute analysis of the administrative predicament faced by writing program administrators and by work-seeking teachers with advanced degrees in literary studies, and he offers “literary affordance as an agreeable compromise,” grounded in “the togetherness in support of the greater good” (119). His hope that “non-writing expertise” can be brought to “the service of writing” (121) reflects a strategic resourcefulness and a generous spirit of collaboration that can advance this professional field in collegial and intellectually inclusive ways.

I read this book, however, from a somewhat different perspective, namely that of a literature professor (albeit one whose teaching has been steeped in composition pedagogy). Over the past decade I’ve witnessed a dizzying decline in English majors, as well as a widening gap between student interests and abilities, on the one hand, and college-level reading and writing expectations, on the other. This has given me recurring doubts about the value of traditional engagements with my subject (such as “research”

papers, argument-based analyses, and reviews of critical material). How effective are these assignments for the majority of my students who struggle to read any literary text longer than 150 pages, who are unlikely to pursue an advanced degree in English, and who may take only one college-level literature course (mine)? To what extent do these traditional assignments interfere with a goal that I can't help but believe may be far more vital: encouraging them to regard the reading of literature as a regular, productive, and enjoyable practice?

In recent years I have developed writing assignments that, having read *Rhetor Response*, I would now say invite literary affordance. I've asked students to reflect on how literature has complicated or refocused their insights about issues important to them, how their lives help them understand elements of a literary text and how that text helps them understand elements of their lives, how they see the world differently because of a story or poem or play. I have wanted these assignments to prompt what Khost (after Richard Rorty) calls "unmethodical" reading, a response that is "inspired" by, in Rorty's words, "an encounter with an author, character, plot, stanza, line or archaic torso which has made a difference to the critic's conception of who she is" (52). We can't easily calibrate inspiration on a rubric, but that's no reason to exclude it from our teaching goals. Rorty's own literary affordance—his reference to Rainer Maria Rilke's poem, "Archaic Torso of Apollo"—reminds us of the super-charged potential of our engagements with art, in which contact can produce transformation: "You must change your life."

Peter Khost helps me appreciate just how valuable these "unmethodical" writing activities can be, and how they also participate in a history of readerly uses of literature. He also confirms my hope that once a reader "has done something desirable with or through a text, then this person may be more inclined to consider the text's meaning" (178). Perhaps one remedy to the crisis in the Humanities is to give our students the opportunity to experience just how much literature can alter the color of their minds.



Restaino, Jessica. *Surrender: Feminist Rhetoric and Ethics in Love and Illness*. Southern Illinois UP, 2019.

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I will admit I was, at first, reluctant to begin reading Jessica Restaino's book. I am interested in rhetorics of the body and am planning on a new course focused on rhetorics of health, so it seemed a valuable resource, but I was worried it would be too sad. *Surrender* is an ethnography of Restaino's deep friendship with Susan Lundy Maute, focused on the last few years of Maute's life with terminal breast cancer. Together, Restaino and Maute seek to understand a rhetoric of terminal illness and the role language plays in experiences that seem beyond words. Though there are indeed passages of the book in which Restaino's frank discussion of Maute's symptoms and vivid expressions of her grief make for emotionally difficult reading, one also gains a fuller sense of both Restaino and Maute, and the book is ultimately as much about friendship as it is about

illness. Restaino's book is an engaging read that expands the boundaries of the scholarly monograph, traditional research methodology, and the very topics that we in academia are allowed to consider. Though I *was* at times overwhelmed by the grief and sorrow at the center of the book, Restaino's emotional honesty is what exemplifies the importance of personal investment in research and what can be achieved when we let go of the strictures of traditional research methods and allow ourselves to be deeply immersed.

Though worthwhile for its depiction of this friendship and research project, I found Restaino's book most valuable in how it questions long-accepted research methodologies and challenges readers to undertake similar projects and "make space for research and writing work that confounds or overwhelms us" (145). *Surrender* weaves together personal memoir with reviews of the scholarly literature and Restaino's arguments for new methodologies and ways of thinking the field might pursue. After the introduction, there are four chapters named "Stage IV" through "Stage I" to "In Situ," reflective of the classifications of cancer. Between chapters, Restaino includes interludes she titles "Bloodwork," which are brief excerpts of Maute's writings, interview transcripts, or bits of text message conversations. These sections display the intimacy of Restaino and Maute's friendship and provide a further glimpse into the ways in which they worked together to grapple with the challenges of Maute's illness and the questions hovering at the end of life. She explains that the title "Bloodwork" is used "to indicate this human flow as well as the experience of 'getting bloodwork,' a routine process in the life of any cancer patient" (7). In reflecting on my reading, it seems to me that "bloodwork" might also characterize Restaino's methodology. This work is, at times, quite literally bloody. She describes helping to care for Maute when she is hospitalized toward the end of her life and dealing with internal bleeding. Yet, beyond the very literal bloodiness, the depth and intensely personal nature of this research also makes this work "bloody." Restaino allows the research to go far beneath the surface; her pages expose intimate moments of friendship and personal reflections on grief.

Some of these intimate moments relate directly to Maute's experience of cancer and the various effects she suffered toward the end of her life. It is the effort to put language to these experiences that motivates Restaino's research in the first place. Together, Restaino and Maute cultivate a rhetoric of terminal illness. Physical pain, limited mobility, and the inevitability of an untimely death are areas of human experience that often lie beyond words. It is this inexpressibility that Restaino examines in partnership with Maute. She writes: "such struggle through loss in words is, indeed, worthy research, worthy of our attention if we want to understand how language functions to usher us through some of the most necessary, most profound experiences of our lives" (25). Rather than shying away from such difficult and physical work—work that may seem beyond the scope of writing and rhetoric—Restaino dives into this difficult territory and encourages readers to follow. Together, Restaino and Maute seek ways of talking about their experiences that move beyond common cultural metaphors of the valiant warrior fighting disease—a trope that Maute soundly rejects. In exploring the function of language in navigating terminal illness, they do not come to any firm conclusions, but instead find value in the questions themselves.

This valuing of uncertainty extends beyond the subject matter of Restaino's work and into the methodology itself. It is here that the book makes its most important con-

tribution. Restaino's exploration of research methodologies is valuable reading for anyone involved in qualitative research and would be especially useful for those interested in health humanities, disability studies, feminist methodologies, or those who engage in ethnographic and/or community-based research.

The origin point of Restaino's project is inviting Maute to speak to her Rhetoric of Sport class and discuss her experience of her body as both an avid and talented athlete and a person with terminal cancer. This leads to what appears to have been, at least initially, a fairly standard qualitative research project. Restaino records interviews and gathers her and Maute's writings in response to her questions. However, Restaino soon feels the inadequacy of these methods: "While I had initially positioned myself as the qualitative researcher I vaguely knew how to be... I soon found myself struggling within the strictures of that role. I wrote interview questions, but we went off the script quickly" (26). It is this being "off script" that seems to best characterize the methodology that develops. Rather than sticking to her original plan—and the traditional boundaries and processes in ethnographic research—Restaino allows the process to unfold more naturally. While it still involves a great deal of writing and recording, she finds that she cannot maintain that kind of objective researcher position if she wants to be able to get at the experiences of terminal illness, friendship, and loss at the core of her project. Traditional methods are simply inadequate when research includes the bodily care Restaino provides for her friend. Rather than a scholarly distance, this work requires "increased focus on the researcher role in itself. My argument is thus that when we constrain ourselves methodologically we are also likely to constrain ourselves subjectively" (65). In freeing the project from such constraints, rather than a researcher-subject relationship, Restaino and Maute evolve into co-investigators in a project in which both are subjects. Restaino argues that the research subject "might be *both* researcher and participant, or perhaps even multiple, complex, and entwined subjectivities of each" (35). Their friendship and desire to understand and help one another become central to the methodology of the project, in which self-reflection or self-study are crucial for understanding the linguistic dimensions of the experience of terminal illness.

Though the book seems to spend rather too much time attempting to define itself—there are moments in each chapter in which Restaino rearticulates exactly what this book is doing—it becomes apparent that these efforts are necessary in Restaino's questioning and expansion of a research methodology that embraces uncertainty. Restaino hopes to carve out a path for others to follow—not necessarily or not only in the subject-matter, but in both carefully considering and thoughtfully incorporating love (and "blood") into one's research. Such research requires breaking down the traditional boundaries and rejecting any illusions of objectivity. Restaino explains that her "hope is that my sharing this project might encourage others to embrace similar kinds of research collaborations when they arise rather than to dismiss these exigencies as too emotional, too personal, or just not 'real' research" (15). Her book goes further than merely encouraging readers to take up this challenge. In her final chapter, she provides questions to scaffold a project like hers that "welcomes uncertainty, weakness, or even awfulness as valued, usable data toward the generation of particular kinds of texts and knowledge" (148). By providing guiding questions, Restaino may help future researchers to feel somewhat more comfortable with the potential discomfort of this kind of research.

Questions like, “Do I feel at times helpless?” (149) may be a source of encouragement for researchers to continue through feelings of helplessness or confusion, rather than abandoning a project as too difficult—or even “unacademic.”

Restaino boldly puts her blood on the page in *Surrender* and leaves the reader thinking about the expanded possibilities for academic work and research methodology. By tackling difficult subjects with such care and humanity, Restaino shows us the value in pursuing the personal—of love itself—as a methodology. Thus, Restaino’s work is taboo not (or not only) for openly discussing the bodily realities of terminal illness, but for her advocacy of love, loss, and friendship as topics deserving of serious scholarly attention.



Mailhot, Terese Marie. *Heart Berries: A Memoir*. Counterpoint, 2018.

Tracy Lassiter

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This was a difficult book to read.

It’s not because the book is too long; it’s a slender book of only 141 pages, including the transcript of an interview at the end. And it’s certainly not because Terese Marie Mailhot’s prose style is inaccessible—quite the contrary. With her writing, Mailhot easily draws you in and makes you feel every nuance of emotion she’s expressing. What makes this book challenging is the impulse—the need—to stop constantly to make note of lines that hit like a boxer with a one-two punch. Consider these: “I punctured a friend’s chest with a fork. He heard me when I said no” (104). “I wanted to know what I looked like to you. A sin committed and a prayer answered, you said” (10). “You were different from the men who made a challenge out of hurting me” (56). “I was the third generation of things we didn’t talk about” (110). Even if I hadn’t been making notes for this review, I would have been making note of these lines for their sheer intensity and lyricism.

In *Heart Berries*, Mailhot has created a memoir that’s part journal, part postmodern expression. It sometimes reads like it’s dispelling proverbs (“If transgressions were all bad, people wouldn’t do them” [17]), sometimes like stream-of-consciousness, but these impressions are crafted. Her talent was polished by creative writing classes at New Mexico State University and an MFA writing program at the Institute of American Indian Arts. At one point, she signals this intentional crafting to her readers, stating, “I don’t like neat narratives or formulas” (22). Hence, the book unfolds loosely in chronological order, interspersed with memories or flashbacks. But more than writing classes, perhaps what shaped Mailhot most was her difficult childhood, one of abusive parents, neglect, and hunger. She indicates this to her readers in the first chapter of the book, saying, “I’m a river widened by misery, and the potency of my language is more than human” (7).

Mailhot grew up in British Columbia on the Seabird Island Indian Reservation. Her father, artist Ken Mailhot, was an abusive alcoholic who was often absent from the home. Her mother, Karen Joyce Bobb, met Mailhot while he was in prison for abducting a young girl. Her mother also was an alcoholic who frequently was absent from the

home, leaving Terese and her brothers to fend for themselves. Eventually during her teens, Mailhot was in and out of foster care (Lederman). She escaped her home environment to live with a man she married in her late teens; later, he would win custody of their first son while leaving her to raise their second son alone.

Heart Berries details these experiences and her on-again, off-again intense relationship with writer Casey Gray. It was after one of her breakups with Gray that Mailhot checked herself into a mental institution where she was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, an eating disorder, and bipolar II disorder. At the facility, someone gave her a notebook, and the writing she began there eventually became *Heart Berries*, a *New York Times* bestselling book. It's true that Mailhot is unafraid to depict the difficult events that happened to her, but she also is unabashed about sharing her own behavior during the course of her life. She doesn't shirk, for example, from telling us "I remembered I hit myself until there were bruises on both sides of my head... Those nights, I wasn't convinced I was crazy" (61). Through her story, Mailhot asserts that the raw and the dark stories are no less worthy of being heard in the world than any other, particularly because they reveal the lived experiences of those who endured traumatic experiences.

Scholars of various disciplines—including the humanities—are paying attention to trauma lately as the number of child and adult learners experiencing one or more form of traumatic experience enter our classrooms and workplaces. Trauma often is a factor in poor educational outcomes, work and classroom absenteeism, and the connection to other risky behaviors like drug use. The extreme end of untreated traumas is suicide, and the CDC reports that American Indian/Alaskan Natives (AIAN) are the highest population at risk of suicide in the country. Indeed, statistics from a recent CDC study indicate that, since World War II, AIAN men are 71% more at risk of suicide than any other population. For AIAN women, that increased rate is 139% (Bunker). Mailhot's story, then, becomes one of urgency, something she indicates when she says "Crafting truth to be bare as it feels was important" in an effort for her to feel "redeemed" and proclaim her survival (128, 127). In the interview that follows the memoir, Mailhot explains that one of her impetuses in writing her book was to refute the criticism about the "sentimentality" of trauma writing. Mailhot dives into writing about trauma head-on, saying "I took the voice out of my head that said writing about abuse is too much... by resisting the pushback, I was able to write more fully, and, at times, less artfully about what happened" (131). I was reminded here of the work of Melissa Febos, who also shares her story in gritty realism. Like Mailhot, Febos feels that despite the similarity in stories of abuse and trauma, every survivor's story is different. As Febos explains, "We are telling the stories that no one else can tell, and we are giving this proof of our survival to one another" (Febos 51). But don't call Mailhot's story one of "resilience." "It's an Indian condition to be proud of survival, but reluctant to call it resilience," she states. "Resilience seems ascribed to a human conditioning in white people" (7). Whatever she chooses to call it, *Heart Berries* becomes a powerful declaration: "Words I never knew to be—I am," Mailhot tells us. This sentiment makes me want to run to a dictionary, to discover new words I, too, can aspire to be.

Beyond serving as testimony to her survival, it appears Mailhot has another purpose. She relates the gritty details of her relationships because she feels her story, which

is similar to so many other Indigenous women's stories, needs to be told. She feels her work is an effort against the "continuum of erasure" that tries to silence their voices (11). She makes a similar claim in the opening of the book when she states, "The thing about women from the river is that our currents are endless," and the stories emerging from those currents are a form of women's empowerment. Mailhot additionally remarks, "When I gained the faculty to speak my story, I realized I had given men too much...I stopped answering men's questions or their calls" (3). The theme of empowerment echoes in other comments Mailhot makes that are unapologetic about herself, such as when she says, "I wanted as much of the world as I could take, and I didn't have the conscience to be ashamed" (10). She eventually comes to grips with her past, her parents' treatment, her relationship with Gray, and her relationship with her sons. She currently teaches creative writing at Purdue University where she likely dispenses hard-earned bits of writerly wisdom, like this one: "Nothing is too ugly for this world" (22). Let us commence, then, in being brave, in telling our own tales, sullied and sordid though they may be.

Works Cited

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