

**Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies**

**Volume 29, Issue 1: General Edition**

**November 2024**

**ISSN 1833-3419**

**Submissions Editors**

Amelia Birch & Daniel Elias

**Book Reviews Editor**

Erica Steiner

**Web Editor**

Daniel Elias & Locki Kenyon-Quigley

**Editorial Collective**

Amy Alexander

Sharen Bart

Amelia Birch

Rachel Denham-White

Daniel Elias

Locki Kenyon-Quigley

Emily Marshall

Sam Mayne



Erica Steiner

Laura Warren

Georgia Whittaker

**Advisory Board**

Ned Curthoys, University of Western Australia  
David Konstan, New York University  
Carolyne Larrington, St. John's College, Oxford  
Sue Broomhall, Australian Catholic University  
Tony Hughes-d' Aeth, University of Western Australia  
Andrew Erskine, University of Edinburgh  
Marina Gerzic, University of Western Australia  
Lyn Parker, University of Western Australia  
Lachlan Umbers, University of Western Australia  
Jodi McAlister, Deakin University  
Helen Young, Deakin University  
Alicia Maravelia, Hellenic Institute of Egyptology  
Hsin-Pey Peng, Zhaoqing University  
Louise D'Arcens, Macquarie University

**Copyright**

All work published by *Limina: a Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* is subject to the Creative Commons (BY-NC-ND) licensing arrangement. Authors retain copyright of their articles and may republish them anywhere provided that *Limina* is acknowledged as the original place of publication, and that the work is not published again within the first twelve (12) months of the article's initial publication in *Limina*.

**Submitting to Limina**

Details about the journal and how to submit can be found at [www.limina.arts.uwa.edu.au](http://www.limina.arts.uwa.edu.au).

**Cover Image**

Digital image by Henry Be, Trinity College Library. Retrieved from [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com).

**Adhikari, Mohamed, *Destroying to Replace: Settler Genocides of Indigenous People*, Critical Themes in World History vol. 3, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2022; paperback, pp.xliv + 179, 15 b/w illustrations, 5 maps; RRP \$18.00 USD; ISBN 9781647920494.**

From its heartbreaking cover illustration, taken from 'Oscar's sketchbook', a young Queensland Aboriginal boy's record of life in the 1880s, depicting black shooting black in the name of white settlers, until its exhaustively researched final pages, *Destroying to Replace: Settler Genocide of Indigenous Peoples*, tells harrowing stories that must be read, studied and digested by all who wish to understand and move forward from bloody and destructive pasts. Emeritus Associate Professor Mohamed Adhikari may have begun his career researching identity and politics in South Africa, but he has since become an authority within the field of Genocide Studies, with a particular focus on settler colonialism and genocide.

Conceived as a textbook, *Destroying to Replace* seeks to raise as many questions as possible. It begins with a discussion of key concepts, first discussed at the International Network of Genocide Scholars conference held at Sheffield University in England in 2009. Despite that relative recency, through his extensive suggestions for further reading, Adhikari makes it clear that not only is the practice of genocide almost as old as man himself but that many independent observers have seen and documented it. Many of their stories had been lost in the mists of time and are only now being brought to light. Adhikari argues incontestably that genocide persists and that only by understanding the past and applying it to the present can societies look towards a peaceful future.

Adhikari delivers what he promises, starting with his preliminary exploration of essential concepts related to genocide: the meaning of genocide itself, the settler colonialism that initiated it, focusing on Western Imperialism as a result of industrialisation; civilian-driven versus state-directed violence, 'exterminatory violence' (xxi), and their consequences in the devastation of Indigenous societies themselves. One of Adhikari's key concepts is the denial of the destruction by the settler societies themselves, despite first-hand contemporary observations. In his opening chapter, Adhikari explores the work of Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959) in bringing the term 'genocide' to life in 1944, and points out that there remains contestation of its definition and causes. However, his four case-studies, chosen to represent a broad time-scale, different settler origins and different traditional societies – on the conquest, enslavement and deportation of the original Canary Islanders, the 'improvement' of Queensland's Aboriginal people, the annihilation of California's native American societies, and the genocide of the Herero people of present-day Namibia – leave no doubt as to the cause and outcomes of genocide, regardless of how it is defined.

Throughout *Destroying to Replace*, Adhikari quotes extensively from primary sources, representing differing and opposing points of view, and explicitly invites students to themselves interrogate the sources he presents. His well-chosen illustrations, which include contemporary engravings and photographs, are illuminating and poignant and maps help to define the areas affected.

In his reflections and conclusions, Adhikari provides an overview of the range of motivations that brought settlers into conflict with Indigenous Peoples. For example,

market forces which promised profits for the exploitation of mineral resources, soils and natural vegetation, and which led to the expropriation of traditional lands. Or, to the moral justifications applied by those settlers, to the extent the Indigenous People were considered not only an inconvenience, but even inherently evil and therefore legally culpable for whatever cruelty the perpetrators could dream up. Not to mention the diseases settlers brought with them and the sexual violence they perpetrated, against which most Indigenous People were defenceless.

While Adhikari's purpose is to elucidate the past, which he does in excruciating detail, two questions spring to the mind of a teacher who may be tasked to use the book with students. The first is 'how do we make use of this material', and the second is 'how can we move on from a violent past to a more hopeful future?' I will consider these questions as they apply in the Australian situation. Adhikari has presented the Queensland experience, and while settler Australians often grew up with some knowledge of the Tasmanian experience, and for Western Australians, the so-called 'battle of Pinjarra', it is now apparent that these events were mere drops in the ocean of violence that was perpetrated across Australia. Growing up in a town in the south-west of Western Australia, with Aboriginal friends, neighbours, classmates and work colleagues, we knew little of the journey they and their families had endured.

Australians in 2024 are grappling with the aftermath of the most divisive referendum in Australian history, where there was little middle ground between a 'yes' and a 'no' vote – which quickly became equated with 'you don't want us.' Bringing the painful past into the present helps to validate that feeling of dispossession, dislocation and social breakdown experienced by Aboriginal Australians. Wider knowledge and acceptance of these truths by non-Aboriginal Australians may help pave a path to healing. While a national apology has been made, perhaps Aboriginal Australians may move towards forgiveness for the sins of the past, as has happened in one place in Northern California (xiv).

This could be achieved by exploring Memory Studies as a means of dealing with the wounded memory and intergenerational trauma that continue to cost Aboriginal lives today. As Dr Maria Yellowhorse Braveheart notes, healing collective trauma involves 'confronting it, understanding it, releasing the pain of it and transcending it' ([Healing Collective Trauma](#), n.d.). For that to happen, governments and communities must continue to do all in their power to promote education for all Australians. Communities must also recognise and cherish moments of reconciliation as they occur, such as when thousands of Perth people attending the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra's 2023 Christmas Spectacular, witnessing Gina Williams singing 'Silent Night' in Noongar language, spontaneously switched on their mobile phone light in a gesture of shared emotion.

*Destroying to Replace* could be a pivotal resource for Australian students in upper secondary years, or introductory university courses. However, some tightening of agricultural terminology would be needed to bring it into line with Australian usage, including the replacement of 'stock' with 'livestock', the use of the term 'pastoralists' and 'pastoralism' when referring to the grazing of livestock on natural pasture, and restricting the use of the terms 'farmers' and 'farming' to the sedentary land-use which involves the cultivation of the land, whether for food or fodder crops. In Australia, the terms 'squatter' and the 'squattling frontier', are used colloquially to describe the process whereby settlers moved with their livestock into land they considered to be 'unoccupied', ignoring its occupation by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people used spears and boomerangs for hunting, and not bows and arrows, as mentioned by Adhikari.

Adhikari's suggestions for further reading are so extensive as to make further comment unnecessary, however, I will briefly mention some relevant sources not

mentioned by Adhikari. Jacqueline Wright explores changing cultural perspectives on Katherine Susannah Pritchard's ground-breaking 1929 book, *Coonardoo*, read by generations of Western Australian school students. Bevan Carter examines early maps and accounts of the Swan River Colony by settlers and government officials that identify conflict between local Aboriginal groups and settlers. Raymond Evans, pre-eminent author on Queensland history, recently presented his current thinking on Aboriginal dispossession in Queensland, and as published online contains an extensive list of further reading.

In the words of the series editor, Alfred J Andrea, 'this book should be required reading by every student of world history, but especially by those who enjoy the fruits of lands wrested at great human expense from Indigenous Peoples' (xvii).

Margo Warburton<sup>1</sup>  
*University of Western Australia*

**Acknowledgments:** my thanks to Bevan Carter, Mary Blight, and Dr Natalie Warburton for sharing their insights on this painful subject.

---

<sup>1</sup> ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8213-0903.

**Browning, Barbara, *The Miniaturists*; Durham: Duke University Press, 2022; paperback, pp.221; 22 b/w images; RRP \$32.95; ISBN: 9781478018919.**

When I opened Barbara Browning's *The Miniaturists*, the first page begins 'with a question of feminist methodology' (1), before diving into everything from gynarchivism, (a phrase which Barbara coins for the 'various ways in which women store certain information in their bodies' (1)), insect parables, and the work of entomologist William Morton Wheeler. And that's just within the first chapter. Professor of Performance Studies at New York University, Browning honed her trademark 'fictocritical' style, (a combination of autobiographical and essayistic prose) through her earlier novels such as *The Gift* and *I'm Trying To Reach You*. Her latest book comprises eight sections of different lengths, all musing on various facets of miniaturism.

After the free-wheeling examination of entymology and feminism in the opening chapter, Browning's second chapter functions as a miniature biography of the crime scene 'dollhouse' artist Frances Glessner Lee, and chapter three focuses on 'Shrinking' movies across a variety of cultures. Chapter four covers multiple subjects, including the history of the Schoenhut toy piano, and Browning's own experiences with 'fictocriticism': which in the context of this novel becomes the tiny snapshots of a creator she forms when researching their artistic work through the Internet. Chapter five, 'gulliver phantasies', analyses the 'shrinking' narratives in the works of Jonathon Swift and Lewis Carroll, after which she goes on to discuss the phenomenon of miniature writing, or *micrographia*, in chapter six. The penultimate chapter, 'lead paint and other poisons' covers miniature portraiture and artists with dwarfism (notably the disabled painter Sarah Biffen), and chapter eight is interested in microbiology, parasites and microscopes.

All throughout the book Browning provides no singular perspective on miniaturism, or what it means to be miniature. Instead, the theoretical elements of each chapter feel like a separate essay, written in a semi-serious critical style. Browning does include her own reactions to pieces of scholarship, especially if, like William Morton Wheeler, their racist and/or misogynistic perspectives are condemnable by today's standards. But her work feels more like a catalogue of her sheer enjoyment of learning – peppering the text with lengthy quotes from her current reading list, as well as favourite artists, movies, songs, poems, and creative works.

The tone of each chapter is varied, with some being more scholarly than others. For example, in 'gulliver phantasies', Browning records her experiences reading the various academics, from Phyllis Greenacre to Sandor Ferenczi, that discuss the fetishized undertones of tiny characters such as the Lilliputians, or Alice and the hookah-smoking caterpillar. However, one of the most engaging elements of *The Miniaturists* is the sheer variety of tangents Browning includes in each chapter. The discussion travels rapidly from the sexual anxiety written into these novels, with the tiny Lilliputians measuring Gulliver's body for clothes according to just his thumb – the 'typical genital symbol' (113) – to the prevalence of 'miniature' people as a potential expression of Carroll's and Swift's germaphobia, as Browning comments 'maybe it's obvious to you that germs are very tiny things, though one's fear of them can be quite overwhelming' (118).

Browning's 'fictocritical' writing style is a distinctive mix of essay and autobiography in this book. She varies between separating her life-writing sections by paragraph breaks,

to just including her autobiographical segments as they bleed into her literary criticism. The further I read, the more I began approaching her work with a sense of decoding it, piecing together her lateral connections. For example, chapter three's analysis of the 1989 film *Honey I Shrunk the Kids* traverses from examining the on-screen 'bungling dad' to an account of her eight-year-old self interacting with her father while he was drunk, then moves to her mother whom she describes as 'neither large nor small' (67). The text then recalls a Lhasa de Sela song, 'Soon this Space will be too small', redirecting Browning's train of thought towards pregnancy and death with the reflection that '[m]aybe [Lhasa de Sela] was just too big for this space' (67). One can read her work as stream of consciousness, but I perceived it more as a stream of intentional thought; Browning frequently observes where her mind is going as she is in the process of writing the text, and then deliberately articulates this wayward journey for the reader.

Despite its episodic and segmented presentation, Browning appears keen to present her work as a *story*, writing 'I began this story with by saying "I first encountered the work of Phyllis Greenacre"...' (115) in chapter five. Likewise, no section is self-contained, and some even feel like diary entries, as when familiar characters from previous chapters re-enter not just the story, but Browning's life: one such footnote marks how 'Zachary wrote me back!' (140). Interspersed between her essayistic prose, Browning writes about her relationship with her partner, her son, and her day-to-day academic life. She develops a chatty familiarity with the reader, frequently quipping about racy personal details (such as including a charcoal sext of herself), and her partner S is equally a vital part of a narrative, as she shares his reaction to miniaturist subjects. There is a charming relatability to these moments. As Browning is describing her passion for 'sucking up written languages', she writes how she and her partner 'begin each day with half an hour or so of this kind of activity over coffee ... He's currently deep into Wilhelm Bolsche' (29).

The four final chapters very heavily feature Browning's experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. She is often candid about time and place in these chapters, writing how she came back to certain sections of the book after a long period of lethargy. The narrative becomes tinged with her sense of claustrophobia, paranoia, and insignificance during the pandemic years, and her academic connections begin equating to her time spent in lockdown. However, Browning still writes with a great sense of positivism and hope in her accounts – a description of Lewis Carroll's 'morbid fear of breathing contaminated air and a gulping appetite for air he considered clean' morphs into a tranquil scene of Browning and her partner on the Hudson pier 'drinking in the fresh breezes' (120).

*The Miniaturists* feels like more than just a book; it is a multi-layered project crafted into a deeply personal reading experience. The chapters are an engaging exploration of 'the miniature' as a concept throughout human history, and the author's love for the esoteric will no doubt appeal to readers who enjoy learning for the sake of learning. *The Miniaturists* as a whole is deeply varied in its themes and what the author intends to convey, but if I were to detect a common through-line, Browning delights in sharing the poignant and positive effects of other people's actions in her life, and vice versa: 'after I made my own miniatures of Julietta's crime scenes, I gave them to her ... they were quickly appropriated by her daughter, who began making her own miniature things' (55).

To use the obvious pun, this feels like a book about 'the little things' that count.

Rachel Denham-White<sup>1</sup>  
Curtin University

<sup>1</sup> ORCID ID: 0009-0002-1801-0912.

**Duffett, Mark and Hackett, Jon, *Scary Monsters: Monstrosity, Masculinity and Popular Music*; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021; paperback, pp.vii + 273; RPP: \$53.99; ISBN: 9781501313370.**

While monstrosity has undoubtedly become an important, emerging strand of scholarship in recent years, it is 'seldom studied' in relation to popular music (1-2). However, according to *Scary Monsters: Monstrosity, Masculinity and Popular Music*, the myths and discourse surrounding musical figures contain 'significantly more monsters' than you'd think (1). A collaboration between Mark Duffett, an Associate Professor of Media at the University of Chester, and Jon Hackett, Associate Professor in Film and Communications at St Mary's University, *Scary Monsters* covers a wide and varied selection of pop culture from the last hundred years of Western music.

The introduction provides an overview of notable perceptions – or as Hackett puts it 'dominant paradigms' (25) – surrounding monstrosity. These include the etymology and historical usage of monstrosity, and scholarly interpretations such as Foucault's theories of how the human monster came to be pathologized. Foucault provided a secular viewpoint of monstrosity, reframing contemporarily perceived degenerates (typically sick, unhoused or disabled people) as 'individual to be corrected' (10) instead of demonic manifestations of evil.

The introduction's discussion of masculinity has a brief, but useful selection of ideas surrounding gender politics, such as the origins of the term's patriarchy, masculinism and the so-called current 'crisis' of masculinity (5). However, the most interesting part of the introduction was the closing sub-section titled 'Popular music, gender and monstrosity', which effectively communicated the commodification and classification of the music industry and how it directs buyers into specific genres and spaces. The authors point out the manufactured difference between 'cock rock' and the 'softer, more romantic teeny bop', which, by comparison, were intended to performatively normalize 'aggressive, dominating and boastful' masculinity as an ideal in popular culture (19-20).

*Scary Monsters's* eight chapters are arranged in chronological order from the 1900s to the present day. However, their style and subject matter can be separated into two distinct groups: character study chapters, and more research-led concept chapters. The character studies make up the majority of the book, with five out of the eight chapters dedicated to individual performers or bands.

These studies begin with 'King Kong and the Promotion of Lead Belly' which focuses on criminal-turned-celebrity folk singer Huddie Ledbetter, AKA Lead Belly, and the racist American media commentary that likened him to King Kong. 'The Manager as Monster' evaluates Elvis Presley's infamous manager 'The Colonel' and questioning whether he was as truly as controlling as he was perceived by the public eye. In 'Extreme fandom as monstrosity', Duffett provides a lengthy analysis of Mark Chapman (John Lennon's murderer) and his double identity – either insane fan or a logical, mentally troubled person – in his television appearances over the years. 'Masculinity on Trial', focuses on the frontman of French band *Noir Desir*, Bernard Cantrat, with Hackett discussing the 'retrospective aestheticization' of Cantrat's murder of his lover Marie Trintignan (176). The final chapter addresses the notorious serial paedophile Jimmy Saville, as Duffett argues his specifically constructed media personas allowed him to remain blameless until the expose.

The more research-led chapters include a discussion of Gaston Leroux's iconic

Opera Ghost in response to musical technology, an analysis of monstrous Frankensteinian imagery within the genre of glam rock, and the uses of horror imagery as an explicit, but also coded, outlet for African-American rap bands to explore the political economy of black life.

In this co-authored book, Duffett and Hackett's writing styles effectively gel together to provide a seamless textual experience. However, the structure and layout of the book is more than a little confounding. The subtitle of *Monstrosity, Masculinity and Popular Music*, indicates that masculinity as a concept is going to be questioned. But apart from the introduction, the wide majority of the book focuses on specific people through the case studies. The book's nucleus is on media witch-hunts, as the authors sift through statements from witnesses, interviewees and biographers to dissect these cultural personalities. Some sections, such as the glam rock thematic chapter, could have benefitted from some judicious editing, while other sections had the potential to be fleshed out into multiple topics, such as the case of the chapter on gothic rap, based primarily on the output of the band Gravediggaz. To Hackett, this group is essential to exploring 'aspects of wider historical or cultural phenomena that are often sidelined' (138); however, for the reader unfamiliar with their work, he provides a limited analysis of their music, lyrics and music videos in relation to horror, only utilizing four pages of a twenty-two-page chapter for this purpose. I would have welcomed up to three chapters of content on this subject: one for Gothic imagery in rap, one on the cultural importance of message rap, and one purely focused on the band.

Occasionally the authors will relate back to the introductory 'dominant paradigms' (25), such as Duffett's Freudian breakdown of Elvis's absent father complex in chapter three which briefly connects to the 'masculinities' section of the introduction. However, each of the eight chapters is completely separate from the others and the book ends on Jimmy Saville's chapter with no overarching conclusion. This leaves the introduction (arguably the most coherent section) feeling somewhat underutilized. In fact, the strongest correlator between the chapters (outside of the umbrella terms of 'monsters, masculinity and music') is the music industry, and how artists are commercialized, commodified, interpreted, villainized, and occasionally lifted up as art pieces. In my opinion, one of the most compelling sections of the book is in chapter five, where Duffett examines how the murder of John Lennon was positioned as artistic desecration, akin to 'slashing a Picasso', instead of just being accepted as a tragic loss of life (120). Therefore, the intense focus on marketing and the spread of information, which was briefly foregrounded in the introduction, arguably should have been a much larger part of the authors' setup. Perhaps a punchier title could have been *Scary Monsters: Monstrous Masculinities within the Popular Music Industry*.

These negativities should not give the impression that I disliked *Scary Monsters*, as I found most of the chapters fascinating. But the layout of the book and the chapters is a choice that I am still puzzling over. Overall, I regard this compilation as a useful collection of interviews and ideas for musical majors or biographers of each individual featured, and the reader should expect a 'true-crime'-esque experience that exposes the deliberate (or indirect) monstrosities of the music industry. However, as a contribution towards musical masculinities as whole, perhaps this book should be treated as a starting point, not a comprehensive study.

Rachel Denham-White<sup>1</sup>  
Curtin University

<sup>1</sup> ORCID ID: 0009-0002-1801-0912.



**Johnston, Phillip, *Silent Films/Loud Music: New Ways of Listening to and Thinking About Silent Film Music*; New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021; paperback, pp. xxii + 223, 38 b/w illustrations; RRP: £28.99, ISBN: 9781501366413.**

An American composer working in Sydney, Philip Johnston has made a name for himself in the discipline of silent film music, with his contemporary and jazz scores composed for various silent films, notably the works of Georges Méliès. This experience of writing scores directly informs the semi-academic and semi-autobiographical text of *Silent Films/Loud Music*. His opening ethos (and one which reverberates continually throughout the book) is that silent film music, although a vital art form, is rarely discussed in any academic or cultural sense. Therefore, this text is intended to champion the contemporary score for the silent film.

Johnston makes it very clear that this particular art form is not just 'background music' performed live, but a 'living kinetic dialogue between artists and across centuries' (xviii-xix). He firmly maintains that a contemporary score 'brings film back to its original heritage as a spectacle' (xix). Therefore, his book has the obligation to explore multiple contributing facets to his main argument. Firstly, he must examine the history of film music and the 'widely held beliefs about what film music *is*' (xx), as only then can Johnston provide his own investigation into the variety of experimental silent film scores.

As a result, the prelude and the first two chapters are a lengthy foundation and contextualization of silent film music and how it was received before the invention of talkies. Early on, Johnston throws a lot of definitions at the reader, the most significant being 'synchronicity', 'asynchronicity' and 'polysynchronicity' to frame his central argument (15). Synchronous scoring is music which follows the narrative, and asynchronous music provides subtext, telling us something different than what we see on screen (xvii). As a silent film itself is a 'fixed text' for which the music can change with every single showing (14), he invites the third term 'polysynchronous' to describe and celebrate the unlimited possibilities for silent film music. These three definitions return in the following chapters and are the most significant pieces of information introduced in the book.

His opening chapters, 'Music for Silent Films: From Synchronicity to Polysynchronicity' and 'Scores for Silent Film: Then and Now', are history-heavy and cover the etiquette of non-diegetic music in early cinema (music heard by the audience and not the characters). These two chapters are frequently broken up into long lists of music theory topics, such as the expectations for a film score (masking noise, providing continuity, communicating meaning) (4), or including all the prerequisites for a silent film score in the early twentieth century (live music, delivered by one artist, continuous through the entire film) (34-35).

Across the next six chapters, Johnston utilizes the same structure of introducing several musical case studies as talking points. Chapter three examines six different pieces of music from various composers all writing for Georges Méliès short films, as the author attempts to convey the diversity in approaches to contemporary scoring (63). Chapter four uses Johnston's set-up of what was 'expected' in a 1920's film score and then provides four case studies that break from this mould, using specific examples of the contemporary

scores for *Sherlock Jnr.* (1924) or *The Golem* (1920). In chapter five, Johnston uses his own work as examples of polysynchronicity, such as his score for Todd Browning's *The Unknown* (1927) where the music suggests a reversal of the roles of hero and villain (108). Johnston's love of jazz as a musical medium is featured in chapter six, as 'Jazzin' the Silents' stresses jazz's techniques of improvisation as an essential part of silent film music. Chapter seven touches on silent film music used in contemporary media, such as 2012's *The Artist*, and chapter eight explores the challenges of writing music for silent mediums such as comics and graphic novels. Each individual chapter asks a variety of questions for each film score and composer, such as what were the creator's intentions in composing certain sections of the score, and how effective is it at conveying the narrative and/or causing the audience to react a certain way. However, Johnston typically provides a very narrow focus for each film; just one specific scene or movement within a score. While each of his points is interesting, because he introduces so many separate texts in each chapter, there are disappointingly few opportunities for an extended discussion of any single score, or even multiple sections of a single film.

Lastly, chapter nine features interviews with other contemporary composers such as Richard Einhorn, Ken Winokur, and Gus Macmillan, and includes an autobiographical summary of Johnston's own methods. The tone of this section is distinctly different to the rest of the book, as Johnston is no longer educating the audience, but rather providing answers to a series of pre-asked questions about how he writes music. Unfortunately, the final section has no noticeable conclusion, the author does not tie the interviews and his own words together, nor does he wrap up his argument as a whole, thus ending the book on a rather sudden and disjointed note.

*Silent Films/Loud Music* comes with the caveat that it will most likely be impenetrable to those who haven't studied film music. As the majority of the content discussed only exists within a certain field of academia (specific recordings for films over a century old), it is likely that a portion of the audience won't be able to access the featured media. This is not a criticism of the book, but an included aspect of the reading experience. Should this book make it to a second edition, this would be a prime candidate for providing further information through direct links in an e-book, or noting where these scores exist in publicly accessible collections in archives, libraries, or online.

Therefore, the target audience for this book seems to be those already in his area of study, as the author provides multiple quotes from fellow musical artists, and includes photocopied sheet music in the appendix. As a result, I would argue that readers should treat Johnston's offering as a textbook rather than an academic discussion. The work includes a large number of concepts and definitions in only 200 pages, and the very act of reading it requires homework, to provide context to the content. Therefore, my personal highlight of the book were the first two chapters, as on their own they provide an engaging introduction to the history of film music. Also, despite the onslaught of new information in each of the chapters, the author's main concept of polysynchronicity is a consistent theme throughout the text and to those in the know, *Silent Films/Loud Music* will most likely live up to the 'New Ways of Listening and Thinking' listed in his title. As a whole, this book provides an extensive (if not quite comprehensive) look into Johnston's own perception of silent film music and composing.

Rachel Denham-White<sup>1</sup>  
Curtin University

---

<sup>1</sup> ORCID ID: 0009-0002-1801-0912.

**Muthukumaran, Sureshkumar, *The Tropical Turn: Agricultural Innovation in the Ancient Middle East and the Mediterranean*; Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2023; paperback, pp. xx + 294, 27 b/w illustrations, 10 maps, RRP US\$34.95; ISBN: 978-0-520-39084-3.**

Sureshkumar Muthukumaran's *The Tropical Turn* explores the translocation and subsequent cultivation of plant species from Southeast Asia to the Middle East and Mediterranean. Despite the importance of agricultural practices in shaping the development of ancient cultures, such processes are too often overlooked by non-specialist scholars. Though a range of other works have investigated this phenomenon, Muthukumaran's *The Tropical Turn* is a significant contribution to the discussion of ancient agriculture, trade and cross-cultural interaction.

In the introduction, Muthukumaran sets up the aims, scope and limitations of the book, outlines the prior scholarly treatment of Eurasian crop exchanges, and then provides the historical context necessary to understand the analysis and discussion which make up the majority of the book's length. The subsequent chapters focus on a selection of agriculturally, commercially and culturally significant cultivars, namely: cotton, rice, citrus, cucurbits, Indian lotus, taro and sissoo tree. Muthukumaran skilfully navigates the available archaeobotanical, lexicographical, and textual evidence to trace the transmission of these cultivars from southeast Asia to the Middle East and Mediterranean. He investigates how they were cultivated in these new environments, what they were used for, and whether they obtained any cultural significance over time. As well as geographical, the evidence analysed by Muthukumaran necessarily spans an impressive temporal range, from the Bronze Age to the early medieval period. The book is punctuated throughout with a selection of informative greyscale maps, botanical drawings, photographs and artwork.

Muthukumaran does not make any radical new claims in *The Tropical Turn* but does effectively promote what can be described as a 'gradualist' model in his interpretation of the westward diffusion of South Asian plant species. He argues that this diffusion took place over a longer period than is generally thought, beginning in the Bronze Age, and continuing through to late antiquity and beyond (5-6). In contrast to Andrew Watson's hypothesis of the early medieval 'Arabian agricultural revolution' (Watson, 1974, 5-6), Muthukumaran further asserts that this process cannot be ascribed to the influence or action of any single group in any particular time period (63). This being said, he does at some points acknowledge that political actors played a significant role in crop transfer (220). Muthukumaran indicates in his introduction that a number of more recent scholarly works still draw on Watson's model (6), despite the criticism it has received from Samuel Delwin (2001), Michael Decker (2009), Anna Kelley (2019), and others. It is apparent then, that the issue of when and why crop exchanges between South Asia and the Middle East and Mediterranean took place has not been settled, or at least critiques of Watson's interpretation have not been successful in communicating their refutation of his model.

While Muthukumaran's 'gradualist' interpretation of crop transfers and his criticism of scholarship which frames them as 'revolutionary' phenomena confined to specific time periods are not wholly original, they make a significant contribution to the

refutation of these 'revolutionary' models. It should be noted however, that only a few small segments of *The Tropical Turn* are devoted to explicitly arguing these points. The majority of the book focuses on exploring the evidence in a more open-ended fashion, as Muthukumaran writes:

This book, in essence, offers an ecological reading of long-distance connectivity in the ancient world ... with the aim of assessing the motivations behind and impact of this phenomenon and ancient Middle Eastern and Mediterranean societies (6).

There are a few other ideas discussed in *The Tropical Turn* that bear mentioning. Tying into his longer timeframe for crop transmission, Muthukumaran places great emphasis on the Bronze Age trade in Lapis Lazuli. He argues that the trade networks along which these semi-precious stones were carried westward through Iran were important precursors to the routes along which plant species were later transmitted (26-28, 49). Additionally, in the concluding discussion of the book Muthukumaran proposes that the transfer of plant species from South Asia to the Middle East and Mediterranean be broken down into four steps: familiarisation, experimentation, routinisation, and indigenisation (208).

Muthukumaran's methodology is perhaps the most impressive aspect of this work. Though the geographical and temporal scope of *The Tropical Turn* is broad, making use of often neglected Bronze Age sources, when it comes to the specific cultivars that are discussed in detail the focus is sensibly restrained to a select few. He examines only those plant species which were capable of being cultivated in the Middle East and Mediterranean, avoiding discussion of the wide range of plant products that were imported to these regions but never successfully grown there. The treatment of the often difficult to interpret textual and material evidence for the selected cultivars is particularly thorough. Muthukumaran is careful to acknowledge when the available sources do not provide concrete evidence for the presence, cultivation or consumption of a particular plant species, noting in his discussion of one popular cereal crop that 'serious history... cannot be written on the basis of a solitary grain of rice' (112). In his analysis of obscure terms derived from the impressive range of ancient languages considered in *The Tropical Turn*, Muthukumaran regularly outlines the different ways they can be interpreted and in cases where he favours a particular interpretation, his reasons for doing so.

*The Tropical Turn* is accessible to classical scholars, historians, and archaeologists, as well as undergraduate students in these fields, though they may struggle with some of the more technical passages. Both established academics and students will find it a useful source in the study of ancient agriculture, globalisation and long-distance trade networks across Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Archaeobotanists and other scholars specialising in subjects covered by the book will likely be familiar with at least some of the material discussed. However, they may still find it beneficial for the wide temporal and geographical range it covers, or conversely for the specific detail given to the main cultivars discussed.

Though overall Muthukumaran's main arguments are clear and the structure of the book easy to follow, there are perhaps some concepts which would have been more effective had they been interspersed through the work rather than confined to a particular section. In particular the previously mentioned framework for understanding crop transmission in stages of familiarisation, experimentation, routinisation, and indigenisation is a useful model, but one which is not introduced until the conclusion of the book. While Muthukumaran does touch on some of these concepts in the earlier

chapters, fully incorporating this model into these chapters would perhaps have provided readers with a useful framework for understanding the transmission and adoption of these cultivars. Admittedly however, the lack of evidence for some stages of specific crop species' adoption in the Middle East and Mediterranean may have made this model difficult to apply to some chapters. In any case, there are no serious faults in the scholarship or structure of *The Tropical Turn*. Muthukumaran's engaging writing paired with his thorough treatment of the evidence should entertain and inform any reader with an interest in ancient agriculture and the contact and exchange between South Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean.

Douglas Whyte<sup>1</sup>  
*University of Western Australia*

---

<sup>1</sup> ORCID ID: 0009-0000-9806-8289.

essa may ranipiri, *Echidna*; Wellington, Te Herenga Waka University Press, 2022;  
paperback, pp.96; RRP: \$25.00; ISBN: 9781776920099.

Long studied, taught, and translated by white men, Classics has often been accused of upholding colonialist ideals. In recent years, this identity has been welcomingly challenged by an influx of 'revisionings' championed by queer and femme-identifying authors who prioritise decolonising the classical myth and increasing reader accessibility. These 'revisionings' excite me in their capacity to challenge the status quo and disturb the absolutisms upon which our society rests. For this reason, I was delighted to read essa may ranipiri's *Echidna*, an adaptation of Greek, Māori, and Christian mythology centred on the Greek monster Ἐχιδνα.

The author of *Echidna or The Many Adventures of HINENAKAHIRUA as She Tries to Find Her Place in a Colonised World*, poet and visual artist essa may ranipiri, lives and writes on Whenua Ngāti Wairere land in New Zealand. A collection of poetry in the third person, *Echidna* explores the process of self-discovery that ranipiri's modern Echidna undertakes as a queer person attempting to navigate the socio-cultural tension between her indigenous Māori culture and the pervasive colonialist echoes of Christianity and classicism. In reappropriating the half-woman, half-snake 'she-viper' of Greek mythology as a queer, biracial figure, the text explores the key classical theme of monstrosity through a contemporary lens, asking: what is it to live, and to love, as a monster? (11).

*Echidna* opens with a 'Dramatis Personae | He Tāngata' that introduces the reader not only to the characters of the collection but to ranipiri's subversive, contemporary approach to the classical world (9). Gender-conscious, quippy descriptions of each character are interspersed with ranipiri's Māori dialect and colloquialisms as evident in the first of these *dramatis personae*, where ranipiri describes Echidna as an

eponymous character, Greek Mother of Monsters and messy takatāpui wahine [Queer Woman]. Has long snake tails instead of legs. (she/they) (9)

ranipiri's *Echidna* is a monstrous assemblage that rejects both boundaries and binaries. In the first of the collection's seven parts, ranipiri challenges the classical canon by addressing Echidna's murky Hesiodic parentage and deeming her to be 'Born of Eve & Lucifer [the serpent]' from the Bible (15). This imbues Echidna, as their snake-legged daughter conceived in lust, with the sin of her parents, and quite literally leaves her 'indebted to a slither' that marks her as different from everyone else (18). By the collection's closure the reader witnesses Echidna come to privilege her own queer 'pleasure' over the doctrines of the Christian church, and the influence of her 'pakeha', or white New Zealander, family (15, 29).

This tension between Christianity and Echidna's queer identity mirrors the tension between Echidna's Māori culture and her white ancestry. Themes of colonialism, its relationship with modern Classics, and its effect on the biracial individual are evinced in 'Echidna Gets a Name Change', where Echidna attempts to change her name to the Māori Hinenākahirua as 'she don't want to be white washed by the classics no more' (31). Met with the disapproval of her white family members, metaphorically cast as 'the Olympians' in the poem, Echidna becomes insecure that 'she hasn't earned a Māori name'

(31). It is only in the final poem of the collection, 'Hinenākahirua Repairs Something that Needs Repairing', that Echidna's trans and Indigenous identity is validated, her name is changed, and she can overcome the pervasive 'white washing' rhetoric of western society to embody her authentic self (93).

In part four of the text, entitled 'Trickle Down Colonisation and a World Tour,' ranipiri shifts focus to the wider effects of colonialism on the Māori population (47). In my favourite poem of the collection, 'Echidna & Ureia', ranipiri evinces the alienating effects of displaying sacred indigenous material in white institutions (52). Scenes of Echidna and the *taniwha* (supernatural creature) Ureia playing together in the ocean are contrasted with a description of Echidna later seeing 'them again standing in the Auckland War Memorial Museum' as a display (52-54). Echidna touches the carving of Ureia and 'feels them try their best to touch back', exemplifying how this colonial mode of display disconnects the Māori people from their own modes of connection with culture (54). This feeling 'sits inside her for years afterwards' – and it has stayed with me since reading (54).

Alongside ranipiri's implicit condemnation of colonialism, queerness and queer love are the central themes of the collection. Echidna's physical growth and aging is paralleled by her developing realisation of her gendered identity. This realisation is driven by her erotic, romantic, and platonic interactions with multiple queered characterisations of deities from Christian, Māori, and Greek mythology. As readers we bear intimate witness to the naked power of her quest for pleasure and for truth. Echidna's encounters range from introspective discussions of queerness and selfhood, to dazzling depictions of the lust and verve of the queer party scene. In 'Echidna & a Drag Queen named Pipi' Echidna asks Pipi to 'take her out to a bar made of ancestors queerer than all the motherfucking stars' (82). ranipiri gives those ancestors to us in queered characterisations of an array of popular mythological figures, filling the fragmented gaps of the past with queer pride and experience.

Beside the central narrative of Echidna's queer awakening is a complimentary set of seven poems detailing a love affair between Maui-Potiki of Māori mythology and the Greek Prometheus. I found this to be the most captivating element of the collection, charmed emotionally by the solid narrative of the couple's epic devotion and intellectually by the cleverness of the pairing. A testament to their comparative mythology, ranipiri combines both figures' similar mythological arc of discovering fire for humankind into a new, syncretic myth foregrounding their love. Maui's and Prometheus' discovery of fire is reimagined as a side-effect of their intense passion, shrewdly positing their queer love as the real reason behind human survival and civilisation. Evocative and fervent, ranipiri writes:

tips riddled with flame they tuha [spit] together  
make the rock hot      with fluids  
crowning Elbrus in waitātea [semen] (34)

At the text's conclusion, the narratives of Maui and Echidna (now Hinenākahirua) combine. In two snake-shaped poems, ranipiri's protagonists shed the old versions of themselves to embrace their physical and emotional transitions. This emphasises what I consider a key message in the collection: that one must release the constraints of their past to forge a better future, like a snake (person) sheds its skin. This message mirrors ranipiri's rejection of the colonial reception of Greek mythology in favour of rewriting these myths to validate queer and indigenous bodies. ranipiri's brazen defiance of the colonial regime and its compulsory heteronormativity will endear this book to all those who can

identify with Echidna's experience as an outsider, while their subversive revisioning of classical mythology will appeal to those that support the gargantuan challenge that is the decolonising of myth. ranipiri's strength is in their fearlessness, apparent in the crudeness of their prose; but they do not cater to their audience. The Māori dialect abundant in the text is left untranslated, and though it did inhibit my reading of ranipiri's poetry, I support the significance of their unfettered use of the language. ranipiri's *Echidna* is an act of resistance; pushing past the point of comfortability to show that living, and loving, as a monster is the most natural thing in the world.

Jewel Oreskovich<sup>1</sup>  
*University of Western Australia*

---

<sup>1</sup> ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8352-3901.



**Rhook, Nadia, *Second Fleet Baby*; Fremantle, Fremantle Press, 2022; paperback, pp.104; RRP \$29.99, ISBN: 9781760991692.**

A non-Indigenous poet and historian from Boorloo/Perth who specializes in Indigenous Studies (which she has taught at the University of Western Australia), Nadia Rhook's interest in – and respect for – the subject matters of belonging and non-belonging in both colonial and present-day Australia are apparent throughout *Second Fleet Baby*, their second poetry collection. Drawing on 'informed imagination to connect with the past, mediated by records, places, intuition, conversations, and the body' as well as by their 'learnt knowledge of colonial processes and structures' (94), Rhook combines their personal archives with historical records on eighteenth century English convict women, especially their maternal ancestor Susannah Mortimer, to challenge assumptions on colonial privilege vis-à-vis patriarchal entitlement.

The book's title first references the Second Fleet of six ships (two storeships and four convict transport ships carrying over 1000 convicts) which arrived in Sydney Cove in 1790, following the First Fleet of eleven ships which left England in 1787 to found a penal colony in Australia. Three of the Second Fleet transport ships carried mainly male convicts, whereas the fourth, *The Lady Juliana*, was the first all-female convict transport ship. The only transport of the Second Fleet not owned by the slave trade company Camden, Calvert & King, *The Lady Juliana* carried over 220 women who were expected to redress the marked gender imbalance of the small colonial population. During their 309-day long voyage, female convicts on board *The Lady Juliana* were issued proper rations, spent long stays in port stops, and – as acknowledged in 'Susannah on the Deck' – enjoyed free access to the deck (92). These generous living conditions, as well as the regular cleaning and fumigation of the ship, were likely to have decisively factored in the low mortality rate aboard this ship as compared to the others, as intimated in 'fleet lives'. *Second Fleet Baby* also evokes Susannah Mortimer's baby, born onboard *The Lady Juliana* and recalled in the eponymous poem 'Susannah Mortimer', as well as 'in one corner of her mind' and 'the midwife'. In a broader sense this baby also conjures the many babies born to women convicts and their descendants in the colonies up to the present time, as suggested by the poems 'These women are the great, great grandmothers of thousands of Australians today', and 'porphyria and convict mothers', dedicated to Mary Wade, a fellow convict of Susannah Mortimer's 'whose descendant is former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd' (22).

A historical poetry collection, 'written in the space of "archival poetics" theorised and realised by First Nations poets' (96), *Second Fleet Baby* finds its foundation in the particular historical narrative of the Second Fleet's voyage. The language of archival sources – namely, the biographic note on Susannah Mortimer (which functions as an epigraph to the collection), taken from Michael Flynn's *The Second Fleet: Britain's Grim Convict Armada of 1790*; explanatory notes on historical details such as the death rate onboard the Second Fleet found in 'fleet lives'; or the dedication of a poem to a historical figure which precedes the poem 'porphyria and convict mothers' – serves as a formal trace of history, both defining and blurring the boundaries between history and poetry, the past and the present. Like the poems, Rhook's notes and references section also stands between

genres: they include publishing information for books used for historical research, but they are often and foremost references to lines of poetry, speeches or talks that inform specific poems, to which sometimes authorial commentary is added to contextualise the quote. In this light, the poet's voice is met by the voices of other poets and historical figures in a truly intertextual web.

Divided into five sections, each containing a variable number of poems which further enhance the dialogue between the language of the archive and the language of the poet, the poems are connected by the common themes of giving birth and motherhood. 'Susannah of the Sea' memorializes being transported away from home, becoming pregnant, and giving birth at sea; 'Settler Dawns' delves into the lives, habits and rituals of white women settlers; while 'Federation Pains' muses on the birth pangs of a nation invoking 'waste land' as 'a legal category employed by European colonisers to steal Indigenous land' (51). 'Fuss or Fertiliser' is informed by the male gaze over the pregnant female body, children and language vis-à-vis meditations on reproduction, namely IVF (undertaken by Rhook), and 'Watching *Free Willy* in the Age of Covid-19' offers vignettes of Rhook giving birth to their own baby while coming full circle with the poem 'Susannah on the Deck', which recalls their foremother.

The poems formally experiment with boundaries of genres and styles, as immediately evinced by the consistent lack of capital letters in the titles, the use of titles redolent of academic or scientific language ('in university I learnt that history is nothing but context'; 'zygote'), and the use of different page layouts and fonts to convey both rhythm and dialogue or suggest commentary. Written in free verse, the lines are often set on the page in configurations which differ from the classical stanza form of verse. For instance, 'in university I learnt that history is nothing but context' is divided into two parts visually marked by the use of italics in the two stanzas serving as an epigraph to the second part. This, in turn, names the ports where the Second Fleet anchored, as well as the oceans they voyaged through, while musing on the fleeting thoughts of the women convicts as they approached their final destination by emulating the movement of the waves throughout the page and the fragmentation of thought processes in frazzled verses. Likewise, poems such as 'in one corner of her mind' challenge the definition of poetry as verse by using the structure of rhythm- and beat-driven prose sentences joined into paragraphs which are only different because of their uneven indentation and their emulation of enjambment in the breaking up of the last sentence of each paragraph. The collection is interspersed with a constant dialogue between past and present – 'this prisoner / spreads rumours / *knowledge is power and evidence*' (20) – and lyrical images:

(...)

as the

ship slaps against the Indian ocean she observes a cluster of buildings  
sloping hills sidling up to the open sea like

an ex-lover testing the distance between  
two once-tangled bodies she moves (30)

In addition, the collection also nods to academic practices, relishing on the use of dictionary entries as both titles and poems ('fleet lives', 'forbear (noun)') and footnotes ('settler dawns') – which always nest in the affective: 'the cry of a White woman, my breath, holds the history of colonisation' (27).

*Second Fleet Baby* finds its momentum in the grounding of female convicts' bodies

as trappings for colonial expansion in a male-dominated society, in which giving birth, in particular, is a means of settling on stolen land:

the context of this story  
is  
thick  
with criminal women loose  
women strategically-beneficial-for-the-colony women  
'settler-wife' women

women who were free then owned (11)

This preoccupation is anchored in the poet's own body: 'sweetheart there are celestial bodies there are living and breathing bodies / there are bodies marked for immediate medical attention' (90). It is likewise imprinted on the bodies and minds of the historical figures Rhook revisits, namely Mary Wade – 'sometimes I wonder who else lies awake at night thinking how / we were criminals before we were criminal' (22) – and Dame Dorothy Tangey:

it is not as a woman  
that I have been elected to this chamber. it is as a ~~citizen~~ an inheritor of  
stolen land, and I take my place here with the full privileges and rights  
of all ~~citizens~~ settler colonists, and, what is more important, with the full  
responsibilities which such a burden of theft entails (48)

With a historical and poetic framework that allows a vivid exploration of the entwined concerns of gender and race which unflinchingly re-imagines English convicts who had been criminalised by their own government and afterwards engaged in colonising First Nations lands, *Second Fleet Baby* is both a mesmerizing poetry collection and a unique addition to the field of women and post-colonial studies. By weaving archival traces into a collection affectively grounded in their own family's history and writing notes that tease the reader into both researching and imagining beyond the information provided, Rhook has certainly provided an entry point for both undergraduates and professional researchers interested in investigating omissions in the archival history of the Second Fleet and the occupation of Eora land.

Alexandra Cheira<sup>1</sup>  
*University of Lisbon*

---

<sup>1</sup> ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2384-4025.

**Saleh, Sara M., *The Flirtation of Girls / Ghazal El-Banat*; Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 2023; paperback, pp.xii + 106; RRP: \$24.99; ISBN: 9780702266287.**

Australian writer, poet, and human rights lawyer, Sarah M. Saleh is the daughter of migrants from Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon. Her essays, short stories and poems have been previously published in a series of anthologies, and 2023 saw the publication of both her first novel and this work, her first full-length poetry collection. Saleh deals with the migrant experience and within it, the liminal spaces of girlhood and womanhood. By exploring the dialogue between generations of Arab women and the many forms of patriarchal violence they face, Saleh's work is both an intimate and personal meditation, and a reminder of our collective humanity.

*The Flirtation of Girls / Ghazal El-Banat* begins with a single poem as a prelude, entitled 'self cartography' (xi). In what feels like a highly autobiographical exploration of self, the speaker regards the multiplicity of their life and the complexity of their identity in a glittering, unfettered prose. This prelude establishes what will go on to be an intrapersonal exploration of the multifaceted nature of selfhood and girlhood within a condition of dispossession and dislocation.

In the first section, 'forgotten girls,' Saleh calls upon her matriarchal line to give voice to the suffering of the aunts, the mothers, and the motherland. In fact, the motherland, the mother and the mothered quickly become interchangeable in the text as the violation of self and place is treated with a decided parallel. In only the second poem 'Aubade for the Ancestors', Saleh's Palestine is the speaker's 'beloved' sickened and confusing 'cobwebs and thorns for its children'(4). Here the motherland is loved, she sickens, she grieves her children, she is as disoriented and dispossessed as Saleh's migrant mothers are. Later, in 'City/Sitti of Grief', the speaker compares their homeland to their grandmother, and mourns the destruction of their family and of the Palestine they remember from their childhood.

The premise of the middle section of this work, 'flirty girls', is revealed in the first line of the first poem, 'The (Not So) Secret Life of 3arab Girls: Our Raqs is Sharqi (an intermittent Ghazal)', in which Saleh writes 'they can't stop us 3arab girls' (33). Though left unexplained by Saleh, the term '3arab' is used colloquially by Arab people in western countries to mean 'Arab,' with the '3' at the front invoking the Arabic letter of ayn. What follows in this section is a testimony to living resistance, inviting the reader into the subversive spaces of softness and strength created, and fostered, by Arab women amidst a reality of dislocation, tragedy, and patriarchal oppression. The speaker here directly identifies herself, for the first time, as an '3arab girl' and situates herself in this space of resistant girlhood. Possessing a particularly confessional tone, the topics in this section range from recollections of nights out on the town and teenage heartbreaks, to the speaker's experience of sexual assault, and meditations on colonialism, generational trauma, and patriarchal power. The concluding line of 'Woman crying uncontrollably in the next stall responds', becomes a phrase – 'I hear you thank you for seeing me' (35) – interchangeable between speaker and reader as Saleh curates a space for understanding and witnessing that defies difference.

The third and final section of the collection, 'girls who live forever,' deals with what it means for the speaker to live as a modern Arab Australian Muslim woman, who is always literally and metaphorically 'here and there' (63). It journeys into the theme of dislocation from both self and place, and the slipperiness of one's own memory in the romanticisation of homes, lovers, and people you have lost, left or been excised from. This romanticisation is counterbalanced by what feels like a more objective exploration of the suffering traversed in the first section and then conveyed so intimately in the second. This suffering has now been translated into a resolved and defiant dedication to the speaker's heritage.

It feels natural then, that in the final verse of Saleh's 'Afterlude', 'Love Poem to Consciousness', the speaker's resolve is so clear and self-reflexive as she announces:

I know this now, my being contracts and expands  
with the land, boundless.  
I know this too: if ancestral homeland  
gets me killed someday,  
I'll die like our trees, standing up (100).

With the recent events in Palestine a constant spectral presence in the collection, this final message of resistance is particularly salient. Saleh's intimate recollection of the generations of violent oppression and dislocation experienced by her family and her homeland foreground the impact of the Gaza conflict on Palestinian civilians and the enduring trauma of displacement. Divided into three sections dedicated to the exploration of girlhood and matriarchal power within this violence, *The Flirtation of Girls / Ghazal El-Banat* positions this girlhood as key to resistance and speaks to the universality, and sanctity, of feminine experience. Despite its distinctly personal focus, this situates the work's intended audience as all women, young or old, who understand the steadfast bonds of sisterhood and can identify with the heartbreak, loss, grief, and love that the speaker details. It is also a special work for Palestinian, and migrant women especially, who can see their own experiences reflected in that of Saleh's speaker.

It is not often that I am provoked to think and to feel in equal measure, and with such intensity, in reading a collection. I appreciate Saleh's vulnerability, and her defiance; it seems to reach through the page to grip my hands. While I wish that Saleh had explained her choice with the split-title, I find myself satisfied by my own understanding of it. 'Ghazal El-Banat' is not only a direct translation of 'The Flirtation of Girls' but it references a 1949 Egyptian movie of the same name as well as a Lebanese form of fairy floss. In this title, the personal and universal continue to conflate. Saleh nods to each part of her own heritage (Palestinian, Lebanese, Egyptian) and simultaneously reminds her female readers that we can never be contained; that we must always continue to flirt with life, with joy, and with each other, in every language and in every corner of the world.

Jewel Oreskovich<sup>1</sup>  
*University of Western Australia*

---

<sup>1</sup> ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8352-3901.