Introduction

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Last year, the conversation in a seminar class of mine drifted around to the question that every English major asks themselves: "What do I do with an English degree?" The obvious answer was, apparently, graduate school. The professor had some advice on getting in, which was to keep our grades up. "Grades are everything, and"—he gesticulated vaguely in my direction—"editing *The Albatross* won't help you much." I sniffed, indignant, and said, "Maybe not in your day, but scholarship is changing, and so are the appreciated indicators of scholarly potential."

Ignore this professor's remark for a moment. I stand by what I said, that scholarship is changing. The eight exemplary works featured in *The Albatross* Volume 14 each, in their own ways, push the boundaries of what research is or could be. Our journal was named after the albatross in Coleridge's famous poem to encourage students to not shoot down their ideas, and these students have certainly let their thoughts soar. Although each article uniquely complicates the very idea of literary criticism, they also share a palpable belief in the efficacy of literature to engage in exigent sociopolitical work, whether that be feminist advocacy, exploring the Other, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, or ecological literary criticism.

The first three articles of this volume span the height of Romanticism, the depths of the Victorian era, and the interwar period, addressing respectively what it means to know, what it means to be, and what it means to worship. Informed by Jacques Rancière's concept of dissensus, Faith Lapointe explores how bodies in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" (1862) crystallize ideas of otherness in subject. These ideas of the other, or "epistemic fragments" as Lapointe understands them to be, reveal how "discourses can shift to accommodate these fragments, and these works expose how

these fragments are essential to the configuration and development of discourses and space" (22). This paper thus demonstrates the slipperiness of the idea of the body, and how the body may function as a site of epistemic resistance. Braedon Lowey reaches far back in time to ancient Greece, pulling the god Pan into the Victorian era to interrogate how the wild, theriomorphic goat god symbolises the angst of the Victorian poet. Surveying notable authors such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Mackay, Oscar Wilde, and Algernon Charles Swinburne, Lowey argues that Pan was deployed both as a tool to promote social conformism, and, for the Victorian disenfranchised, "an icon of what was, and what could be" (31). Pan becomes a conduit for deviant possibility and plurality during a time period of unprecedented social upheaval. Ella Reedman also pulls an ancient text into a different age, placing Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* (1938) in conversation with the King James Bible, and Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (1911). Holding these theological texts in mind, Reedman demonstrates how Bowen's character of Eddie embodies the novel's section titles—The World, The Flesh, and The Devil—and thus evokes the cardinal temptations of the same names listed and disparaged by Aquinas. Eddie, through his manipulative relationship with Portia, reveals how religion and British interwar society exchange power with each other to maintain rigid social structures.

The next three works grapple with twentieth century texts and films, finding myriad allusions and historical references in both. Alexandria Brooks examines a small excerpt of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) concerning an aural, musical "hum" that serenaded pre-war British luncheons, evoking both Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Maud" (1854), and Christina Rossetti's "A Birthday" (1861). Discussing even more intertexts, such as the King James Bible and *Hamlet* (c. 1600), Brooks reveals how *A Room of One's Own* intersects disparate literary influences to supply a feminist critique of the male-gendered power structures of the author's time and place. In an ambitious postcolonial analysis of David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and

Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* (1968), Ethan Webb illuminates how both of these films are suspended between history and fiction on the one hand, and complicity in colonial projects and stealthy struggles against them on the other. Whereas T.E. Lawrence oscillates between a "romantic hero" and an "exo-British outcast" (54) Ho Chi Minh assumes a kaleidoscopic identity as an anti-imperialist Vietnamese nationalist, "'the George Washington of his country'" (55) a raiser of armies, and a devout pacificist, "with the ultimate goal of advocating for radical anticolonialism" (55). Shifting from film back to text, Alexander McLauchlan explicates how the narrative symbolism of animals in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985) evokes the eponymous whale in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) to illustrate "American imperialism's broader continental violence" (62). Drawing out the implications of the violence in the interactions between the Glanton gang and other-than-human characters, McLauchlan concludes that "animal's—and nature's—cosmic battle with man" (66) permeates McCarthy's novel, and inflects its allusions to the whale as an exploited resource, and a distillation of the evil of the material world.

The final two essays both address evolving cultural imaginations, albeit in drastically different contexts. In an interrogation of Wayson Choy's *All That Matters* (2004), Alayna Hucul clarifies the role of women, specifically the characters of Stepmother and Poh-Poh, in continuing the cultural processes of the Chinese diaspora. Through a comparison of "Old China ways" (72) with the novel's setting of 1920s Vancouver, Hucul illustrates how Western influences empower Chinese women, and restrict their agency: "Outside the domestic sphere lies the danger of Westernization, and where the men who move throughout the public sphere freely may fall victim to it" (76). Ultimately, Hucul determines that "the women, who have limited access to the male-dominated spaces that lie outside the female-designated sphere of the home, end up being those to encourage cultural connections in their families" (79). Finally, Sarah Evans explores the ecocritical impulse of "rewilding" in Robert Macfarlane's *The Lost Words* (2018) and *The Lost Spells* (2020). In our zeit-

geist, when words like "acorn" are replaced by "database" in the *Oxford Children's Dictionary*, Evans underscores the rhetorical faculty of ecological language, and how "reintroducing language radically transforms the reader as nature takes over the centre of their imaginative landscapes" (82). Addressing the power of naming, of speaking poetry aloud, of "[r]estoring nature's names to the dictionary" (88), we are prompted to contemplate the vexed relationship between language, and the other-than-human realm.

All of these seemingly disparate articles have at least one thing in common: the belief that literature is more important now than ever before. Its social and political exigency of course cannot be understated, but also, amidst the ebbing and flowing vicissitudes of our postmodern world and changing planet, literature assists readers in orienting themselves, like the fig tree that Odysseus clings to during his encounter with Charybdis. So, how do I respond to my professor's scathing remark? I say: the erudition of our contributors has helped not only myself, but surely the rest the larger UVic English community by demonstrating the true reach and potential of academic prose, and inviting us to blaze trails in our own endeavours just as they have in theirs. I encourage you, reader, to investigate how our intrepid authors communicate these ideas and themes in many dazzling ways throughout *The Albatross* Volume 14.