

H-France Review Vol. 18 (November 2018), No. 214

Patrick McGuinness and Emily McLaughlin, eds., *The Made and the Found, Essays, Prose and Poetry in Honour of Michael Sheringham*. Oxford: LEGENDA, Modern Humanities Research Association, 2017. X + 190pp. Index. ISBN 978-1-910887-17-2.

Review by Verena Andermatt Conley, Harvard University.

The late Michael Sheringham (whom his many friends endearingly referred to as Mickey) taught at Oxford University for many years. As write the editors, Patrick McGuinness and Emily McLaughlin—his students who later became his colleagues—in consultation with Michael before his untimely death in 2016, they decided to assemble a volume that would be less of a standard Festschrift than a lively collection of essays, prose and poems in his honor. The twenty-seven pieces included in the volume testify to the friendships Sheringham had cultivated and to the influence he had in the realm of modern French studies. With the clever title, *The Made and the Found*, the editors and contributors allude to two of Sheringham's major publications, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires* and *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*.^[1] In the same title they allude to a question Sheringham was wont to ask, "where does finding end and making begin?" The twin terms explore the relation between culture and the everyday, be it literary or simply lived. To honor the spirit of Michael's life-long endeavor, the pieces address this double concern of the made and the found through attention to whatever is quotidian in literature, be it wanderings, objects, language or genres. Faithful to Michael's own meanderings through the everyday in literature, the academic world or the countryside, presented in a refreshingly aleatory fashion, the articles are interspliced with poems and short prose pieces by British, French and a few American contributors. The tenor of the pieces is consistently high. Next to academics (some of whom, like Ann Smock, are "crossing over" to find their calling in a more creative style in order to avoid a stifling academic discourse while dreaming of a university without constraints) the volume includes some of today's acclaimed French poets, many of whom were Michael's personal friends, Yves Bonnefoy, Jacques Réda, Jacques Roubaud, Anne Portugal, Michel Deguy, Pierre Alféri as well as their British counterparts, like Stephen Romer, all of whose short poems or prose pieces pay homage to Sheringham and his interest in French literature. Next to the creative pieces, the articles merit careful reading for those interested in constructions of the everyday in modern French culture. While the editors impose no apparent order through sections or subtitles, the texts nonetheless lead up to Sheringham's own contribution, "On Turning Points, A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of All Souls College on Sunday, 2 November 2008," that crowns the volume. Stretching from Saint Augustine's famous moment of conversion upon hearing a child chant "Tolle, Lege" to Samuel Beckett's insistence that the only real event is birth,^[2] the sermon reminds the listeners that life is not made of punctuating events but of constant change. While one could

argue that events need not be heroic but are in and of themselves ongoing and always include change, one cannot fail to agree with Sheringham that some might be more “life changing” than others. Delivered in the Chapel of All Souls College where Sheringham was a fellow, intended in most likelihood to be a life lesson for both the assembled students and the colleagues inside and outside the walls of the room, the Sermon situates Sheringham in a highly lettered humanistic tradition, spanning centuries, of French focus yet versed in many different literatures. His words pay attention to the everyday, to language, literature, and to life lessons worth being remembered. His moving speech, written perhaps with the premonition of his own death, urged listeners at All Souls Chapel—and it now does the same for readers of this volume—to get away from too much abject selfhood and think more about relations with others (p. 190). Via Yeats, Sheringham concludes that some events are more life-changing and that we should share the implications of masterful images that turning points provide: we should share what part they have to play in the way we think about ourselves and others. We can ask the question, what in *The Made and the Found* are the turning points that resulted from an encounter with Michael Sheringham and his work in the erstwhile readers who now are contributors? What do they share with their readers? While all the texts are well worth citing, for the sake of this brief review I would like to follow a few entangled threads in the mesh of contributions on the everyday and language with the aim of discerning what turning points mobilized the contributors.

Several articles tackle the everyday directly. In “Little Cuts in Time: Photography and the Everyday,” Suzanne Guerlac reminds us how Sheringham theorized the everyday while also questioning its future. Sheringham enumerates several ways of theorizing the everyday, as a production (Henri Lefebvre), invention (Certeau), acknowledgment (Cavell) or affirmation (Nancy) (p. 19). The everyday grows out of the epic and heroic of earlier times in a turn that, as Jacques Rancière would have it, marks a shift in the *partage du sensible*. Preoccupations with the everyday focus on the small, the seemingly insignificant things that figure in an art of the everyday. It infuses literature but also painting, cinema, or, as Guerlac notes, photography. She ends her finely crafted essay that links early photography to Barthes’s seminar on Proust by taking her turn to speculate if and how the everyday might have a future ten years after Sheringham. Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, she concludes that, to have one, it would have to come into view and receive attention as something other than an exclusively human precinct (p. 31). Marina Warner and Michael Lucy respond to each other by focusing on the making and use of “secret” terms in the everyday, be it that of *rastaquouère* whose genealogy Warner follows creatively from her own family in Cairo to other places and times, and in turn, to the ones in Lucy’s analysis of Proust’s mundane *Salon des Verdurins*, where a word used by the couple remains mysteriously unknown to the narrator—and the reader—and another, the magic, Japanese-inspired word *moussmé* affectively links Marcel and Albertine. Via Leiris, Lucy expertly connects Proust’s prose to linguistic explorations of the day, navigating between Michel Bréal and Ferdinand de Saussure. While many pieces focus on European and mainly French literature—Barthes recurs quite a few times along with Mallarmé, Proust, Valéry, Paul de Roux, Henri Thomas and more, others usher in texts and films from afar, specifically from Senegal and Martinique, that expand the dialogue between Britain and France. James Williams persuasively addresses the everyday through an exploration of the found and the made in Mati Diop’s *Mille Soleils* (2003), a remake of sorts of her uncle Djibril Diop Mambéty’s *Touki-Bouki* (1973), while Clive Scott in a reading of Edouard Glissant, dismisses the Martiniquais poet’s notion of “network” in favor of “meshwork,” or *tissage*, that is, a tangle of interwoven trails (p. 99). Responding to Sheringham’s interest in language, Scott joins in the debate about translation. Critical of “meaning,” he argues for translation as a process of linguistic interpenetration in such

a way that the findings of one language interpenetrate those of another in a cumulative metamorphosis (p. 99).

Following mainly a thread on representations of the everyday and another on language, the twenty-seven texts can be said to expand on numerous turning points. The texts do not, on the whole, problematize the everyday or, in a book that ends on a sermon, politicize something that for many is an unattainable luxury. Many living in poverty do not have an everyday. Others have theirs interrupted by war or, increasingly, by climate change. Perhaps in connection with Sheringham's own modernist writings, few address the present moment. Notable exceptions, with their focus on the contemporary state of the world of art and culture, are pieces by Pierre Alféri and Michel Deguy respectively. Alféri asks the question of the event in relation to narrative and the status of the short story in today's digital world. Deftly weaving his argument through some *flash fiction* from social media that he links to other, more literary short texts, from the haiku in prose by Soseki to Hemingway, from Baudelaire to Fénélon, Carver, Brautigan and Michelle Grandgaud, he discusses the relation between event and narrative. He concludes that in today's accelerated world, events happen everywhere, at any moment and in such a way that narrative suspense has given way to suspension of the present itself (p. 165). One has to write very short stories that are open ended, unresolved and close to prose poems such that a distinction is not just useless but damaging. These stories can be circulated on the numerous available sites. The symbolic and thematic unity of classical short stories has given way in the new ones to a "non-systematic complexity that imagination and thinking solicit" (p. 164). Their assemblage produces new hybrid forms and other experiences (164). While Alféri shows the precariousness of the literary text today, he continues to believe in its possibility. Michel Deguy, however, in a scathing text on tourism in Venice that is both humorous and quite "realistic" excludes the very possibility of art, arguing that its site has been completely coopted by marketing. Uncommonly caustic, Deguy shows how cultural monuments have been transformed into, and replaced by, luxury boutiques whose impact on everyday mass tourism, driven by sales alone, have committed the great humanists of the past to oblivion. Deguy's text problematizes the myth of the charms of an everyday that pervades many literary and critical texts up to Certeau and beyond.

The Made and the Found is a rich volume that will be of interest to friends of the late Michael Sheringham as well as to all those wanting to study the relation between French culture, language and the everyday.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Yves Bonnefoy, "São Domingos, après l'incendie"

Marina Warner, "Cairo Creole"

Marielle Macé, "Sujets de modes d'être"

Suzanne Guerlac, "Little Cuts in Time: Photography and the Everyday"

Gilles Ortlieb, "Micky's Thing"

Alison Finch, “Diabolical Wit in Nineteenth-Century French Literature: Its History and Its Successors”

Jacques Réda, “Poem: L’Urbaniste”

Ann Smock, “Poorly Defined Goals”

Jacques Roubaud, “Poem: Mieux que nous”

James Williams, “Crossing through Dakar at High Noon: Legend, Destiny and the Everyday in Mati Diop’s *Mille Soleils* (2013)”

Gérard Macé, “Des livres mouillés par la mer”

Chris Andrews, “Two Poems: ‘Frieze’, ‘The Changes’”

Anne Portugal, “Poem: Mon selfie avec Michael S”

Clive Scott, “Scots, Translation and Bilingualistic Diversity”

François Bon, “Le Quotidien sans Michael”

Dominique Combe, “Bonnetoy, Barthes, Valéry: la poétique au Collège de France”

Patrick McGuinness, “Paul de Roux between Made and Found”

Dominique Rabaté, “Traversée de La Nuit de Londres”

Anthony Rudolf, “Poem: Pereciana”

Michael Lucey, “Proust’s Bifurs”

Pierre Alferi, “Bref — des nouvelles d’aujourd’hui —”

Laurent Demanze, “Le ‘Hasard heureux’ du contemporain: réflexions sur l’étude de la littérature au present”

Patrick McGuinness, “Prose between Stations”

Michel Murat, “Poet’s Poetry”

Stephen Romer, “Poem: Oxford”

Michel Deguy, “Venise ou le Léviathan de nos jours ou humanisme & tourisme”

Michael Sheringham, “On Turning-Points: A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of ALL SOULS COLLEGE on Sunday, 2 November 2008”

NOTES

[1] Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995; Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

[2] Samuel Beckett, "That Time," in *Collected Short Stories*. New York: Grove Press, 1984.

Verena Andermatt Conley
Harvard University
vconley@fas.harvard.edu

Copyright © 2018 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172