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Éva Riveline, *Tempêtes en mer: Permanence et évolution d'un topos littéraire (XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015. 535 pp. Figures, bibliography, and index. €59.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-8124-3557-7.

Review by Hanna Roman, Dickinson College.

Éva Riveline's work, *Tempêtes en mer*, is a well-researched and insightful contribution to scholarship about the interpretation and representation of the natural world in literature. Riveline's study adds to a broader scholarly trend that seeks to bridge the artificial disciplinary gap between "literature," "knowledge," and "science" in early-modern and Enlightenment Europe. Specifically, this book contributes to a growing body of scholarship that investigates the ocean as a key site and a fruitful source of philosophical and literary activity.[1] By capturing and analyzing in great detail the realm of experience of storms at sea, Riveline complicates and brings nuance to Alain Corbin's argument that, before the mid-eighteenth century, the ocean was seen as a terrifying and deserted void,[2] " "

In the introductory section, Riveline addresses the need in critical literature for a comprehensive study focusing on the role of storms in literature, especially for the early modern period. This is followed by a "preamble" which discusses the ancient sources that fed the construction of the *topos* of the tempest and provided models for its different moral instantiations in literature. This provides a useful toolbox for the reader, who then better understands the kinds of analyses that will be applied in the three major sections of the book. The book is divided into three principle parts, whose titles are "Poétique de la Tempête," "Les Hommes dans la Tempête," and "Philosophie de la Tempête." The fact that the topic of storms at sea is addressed thematically instead of chronologically makes for a seamless study, revealing the endurance and importance of a literary trope and the ways in which it affected aesthetics, philosophy, and ethics. A wide audience of humanities scholars and interests is therefore addressed.

A quotation from the end of the book aptly summarizes its overall methodology: "Le récit de tempête est un déséquilibre, une tension: dans son écriture, c'est l'expression d'une tension entre le désordre de la nature et l'ordre du langage, entre le *voir*--la tempête est un spectacle--et le *dire*--le récit en est la traduction" (p. 503). Throughout the work, Riveline focuses on the different aspects of this "translation" or *mise-en-langage* between experience and expression. In the first section of the book, she begins by defining the word "tempête" and tracing the cloud of meaning that has surrounded it over the centuries. She constructs a lexical network around the word such that the reader is brought into the experience of making meaning over time. In this way, the

“tempête” is no longer just a word, but becomes a complex interface of feelings, experiences, states of being, and paintings. “ ”

Two sections in the first part of the book, entitled “Décrire la tempête” (pp. 171-200), and “Donner à voir” (pp. 201-56), are strong and noteworthy as they dive into the connections between writing and painting that entered into so many contemporary discussions about the sublime and about the general importance and utility of the different arts. The former section serves as a case study of the history and development of the idea of the sublime in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The latter discusses the passage from idea to word to *tableau*, showing the parallels between written and painted *tableaux*, and capturing the processes and meanings of the visible at the time. This is but one example of how Riveline moves between the specific example of the storm and the larger aesthetic and philosophical issues of the early modern period.

Having established the lexical and rhetorical toolbox of the subject in the first part, the second part of the book turns to the interpretation of human experience of storms at sea, seeking clues about the impact of the watery world on societal norms. How are fear, death, religion, courage, and acts of violence experienced at sea? How do literary works share these experiences, reflect reality, build new realities, paradigms, cultures of experience, knowledge, and belief? Building upwards from stories at sea, Riveline looks for the “discours social de la tempête” (pp. 384). She questions what models this discourse imitates, changes, or creates, as well as how these accounts might be read as templates for or against society on land. One particularly interesting part of this section is the discussion of courage and cowardliness and their relationships to contemporary social hierarchies. In contrast with the argument that the ocean was a void, this part of the book reveals how the sea was actually full of terrors, monsters, experiences, and beliefs, an upside-down world that is the satanic parallel to terrestrial creation. Religion and rites thus come to factor into Riveline’s analysis, as well as questions about the related meanings of nature and humanity, and what it means to deviate from these, to experience a storm within and without. She explores these topics through themes of fighting on ships, cannibalism, as well as the utopian and dystopian aspects of literature on storms. An analysis of the trope of shipwrecks and resulting encounters with other peoples would have been interesting in this section of the book. The possible relationships between storms and the transportation of enslaved peoples also would have been a welcome addition here.

In the third part of the book, Riveline focuses on the role of religion and divinity in the representation of storms. The idea of using storms as a way to study the meanings and understandings of creation and human agency with respect to God is a fascinating approach to the larger question of the roles of belief and religion in the early Enlightenment. Yet Riveline seems to align with Paul Hazard’s thesis that the world of the eighteenth century entered a crisis and became fragmented as authors had to search for another causal agent outside of God. In the section “Sciences du vent, vent de la science,” the philosophical and scientific tradition of storms is discussed. The analysis of the combination of science and religion and the changing relationship between these two forces in these texts is an important topic in Enlightenment studies. Riveline concludes that natural science and the rational methods that accompanied it could not handle the mystery of storms, and that they were henceforth placed into the domain of poetry. A more nuanced analysis would be helpful here, for there were a number of natural philosophical texts that continued to rely heavily on the Bible, mythology, and the power of belief in their ordering and interpretation of the physical world. This kind of analysis could open up Riveline’s book to an even broader range of interdisciplinary studies. Her method of starting

from the basis of the language, from the poetics and manners of expressing storms, is indeed a key step to understanding not only social discourses but also the development of historical and scientific cultures of knowledge in the early modern period. A study of the poetics of storms could only be enriched by a more detailed discussion of contemporary scientific practices and discourses, all the more so as natural history at the time was rooted in the interpretation of long-standing textual traditions as well as emblems and often included the history of mundane time and human experience.

Although parts of Riveline's book could benefit from a more complicated analysis of the relationships between religion, belief, and natural philosophy in the early modern period, the book as a whole constitutes an important contribution to literary studies of the ocean, for it calls into question the image of the ocean as a void or an uninspiring, deserted space. Riveline's method of bringing poetics and aesthetics together, demonstrating how the theme of storms trained people to see the world differently, makes for a coherent, well-constructed study. Accounts of storms and shipwrecks were not only meant to depict one concrete event, but also to show the range of human emotions and behaviors in the face of terror. The tradition of texts about storms, which stretches back to antiquity, set an example for writers, asking them to think not only about the style in which they wrote but also how this style captured and transmitted their perceptions and interrogations of the world, as well as the morals and lessons they wanted to convey. From deep textual analysis, Riveline builds towards the construction of morality and ethics, an important link to be made in the study of aesthetic philosophy, which was not simply about the experience of emotions such as pleasure and terror, but about the application of these experiences to the questioning of social order, dynamics, and practices. In this way, Riveline is able to analyze texts from a range of styles and disciplines—from religion to literature to travel narratives—in a more holistic manner that provides an excellent model for literary studies to come.

## NOTES

[1] Among the important literary and historical studies of the ocean, see, for instance: Margaret Deacon, *Scientists and the Sea, 1650-1900: A Study of Marine Science* (London: Academic Press, 1971); Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); John Gillis, *Islands of the Mind: How the Human Imagination Created the Atlantic World*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Michael S. Reidy and Helen M. Rozwadowski, "The Spaces In Between: Science, Ocean, Empire," *Isis* 105, no. 2 (June 2014): 338-51; Jonathan Lamb, *Scurvy: The Disease of Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Margaret Cohen and Killian Quigley, eds., *The Aesthetics of the Undersea* (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2019); and Margaret Cohen's digital project from Stanford University, "Imagining the Oceans," <https://arcade.stanford.edu/colloquies/imagining-oceans>.

[2] See Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, chapter 1.

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