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Charlie Louth and Patrick McGuinness, eds., *Gravity and Grace: Essays for Roger Pearson*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2019. viii + 231 pp. Notes and index. \$99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-78188-787-5.

Reviewed by Scott M. Powers, University of Mary Washington.

This Festschrift pays tribute to Roger Pearson, Oxford professor of French, highly esteemed for his publications on Voltaire, Stendhal, and Mallarmé, and for his English translations of Zola. The terms “gravity” and “grace,” chosen by the editors to reflect both the rigorous style of Pearson’s criticism as well as its wit and humor, form the two interlacing threads that weave their way throughout the collection. Inspired by the terms’ rich polyvalence, the fifteen contributors present thought-provoking analyses of an array of modern poets and novelists engaged in themes and styles that oscillate between heaviness and lightness, solemnity and gaiety, death and redemption. While a few essays treat these themes within the field of nineteenth-century French literature, often in reference to Pearson’s works on Mallarmé, others consider more contemporary writers both within and beyond France. And while the majority of the pieces represent important contributions to literary criticism, the collection also offers fascinating essays in cultural and translation studies. The volume does not arrange the chapters in any definitively logical (chronological, thematic, geographic) manner. Rather, in keeping with the theme of grace, each essay is presented as a singular *gift*. In her introductory poem, Angela Leighton aptly describes this publication as a “leap-poem” that “scramble[s] frontiers” and whose “words go jumping free from page to eye” (p. 5).

Of the five essays on writers of nineteenth-century France, three work directly with the notions of gravity and grace. Kate Rees’s “‘Marcher droit sur un cheveu’: Tightrope Walking and Prose Poetry in Flaubert” presents “Hérodias” as a “hybrid model of poetry and prose,” and, as such, she places the short story in conversation with Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris* (p. 40). Much like the tension between the real and the ideal at the heart of the poet’s prose poems, “Hérodias” is presented as performing a delicate balancing act between the lyrical and the material. Rees examines two types of movement in the short story—the “grace” of Salomé’s dance whose ethereal spectacle would seem to transcend time, and the “gravity” of walking, notably the linear trek across the desert that pushes time forward. Analogous to Baudelaire, the text’s prosaic elements—the “gravity” of the real—undermine its own lyricism, and vice-versa. The final paragraphs of the study proceed to a meta-level by placing the tensions between gravity and grace in Flaubert’s short story within a broader discussion of interpretation and its breakdown.

Kate Etheridge's "Grâces sataniques": Laughter, Redemption and Poetic Self-Awareness in *Les Fleurs du mal*" turns from the aesthetic resonances of gravity and grace to a discussion of the poet's treatment of the religious notions of condemnation and redemption. Drawing from Baudelaire scholars' understanding of the poet as neither wholly religious nor wholly secular, Etheridge identifies a type of secular grace in *Les Fleurs du Mal* and in "De l'essence du rire" as ironic and partial. Whereas the poems and the essay foreground the tainted (or fallen) nature of all humanity (our hypocrisy and ennui), Baudelaire attempts to transcend his fate by "framing his tortured condition as one of grandiose tragedy" (p. 82). Etheridge rightly points out the irony of a poet who seeks to achieve a redemption of sorts by presenting himself as part of a condemned humanity. Here, grace is satanic for it is both partial (or imperfect) and fueled by pride. Important juxtapositions in *Les Fleurs du Mal* between movement and stasis highlighted in the argument neatly complement other essays of the volume that present gravity and grace as largely a tension between paralysis and mobility.

Tim Farrant's "Gautier, Leconte, Mallarmé: Gravity Redeeming Grace?" approaches the poles of gravity and grace in Leconte de Lisle's early works within a broader presentation of the poet as an heir to the romantic exoticism of Gautier's *Émaux et camées* and as a harbinger of Mallarmé's portrait of the poet as detached yet central to society. More specifically, Farrant argues that the pessimistic currents of Leconte's poetry—its "fealty to the base and the material"—form "a gateway to Mallarméan, absolute poetic grace" (p. 94). Farrant's essay contributes to the recurring association in this volume between gravity and condemnation by establishing that in the early *Poèmes antiques*, written in the wake of the Republican defeat of 1851, "stasis is fated; decline, fall, and annihilation unavoidable" (p. 99). And yet, Farrant is more interested in the subsequent collection, *Poèmes barbares*, whose "well-ventilated layout," he suggests, is "gravity perhaps ceding to grace" (p. 100). If, in these poems, tragedy and death abound, beauty ultimately springs forth from the ashes of destruction. If images of rocks and destruction endow the collection with an oppressive gravity, they are also what enables grace. An important point made here and elsewhere in the volume is that grace cannot exist without gravity.

Another series of three essays probes the relationships between gravity and grace in more recent works of French expression. Adam Watt's "Fighting Against the Fall: Gravity and Grace in Beckett's *Nouvelles*" accomplishes the seemingly impossible task of discerning hints of grace in the otherwise funereal existence of Beckett's narratives. More specifically, Watt notes that grace manifests through the act of narrating itself, which he describes as "a palliative for the punishing fact of existence" (p. 148). The author highlights various indications of narrative pleasure, such as moments of sound play that resonate from its repetition of words and alliterations, self-deprecating style, cubist descriptions of changes in natural light, and especially its numerous allusions to literary tradition. Watt associates grace with the comfort instilled in the narrator and the reader alike, thanks to the *Nouvelles*'s inter-textual allusions, which place us within "a wider history of tellers of tales" (p. 152). As Watt delicately shows, a fleeting sense of hope is shored up through various allusions to Proust and Voltaire. Various "glimmers of other textual words" scattered throughout Beckett's novellas afford a gracious, if momentary, reprieve from a nightmarish world (p. 157).

Emily McLaughlin's "Gravity and Grace: Bonnefoy's and Bergson's 'Monde-images'" examines gravity and grace as fluctuations of movement in Bonnefoy's poetry. Inspired by Henri Bergson's writings on the paralyzing effects of language, Bonnefoy's poetics engages in "diachronic motion to resist stasis" (p. 163). In her deft analysis of passages from *L'Été de nuit*, McLaughlin explains

that representation is constantly thwarted; images that are first constructed are subsequently deconstructed. Through the collection's fluid movement from one poem to the next, images conjured by consciousness prove to be temporal, and contingent upon "processes of thinking, dreaming or writing that give rise to them or disperse them" (p. 170). Bonnefoy's poetry depicts experience as "born of a steady opening and closing motion" that cannot be transfixed by determinist thinking (p. 172). Rather, much like the poet's parable of the falling leaf, in which the forces of gravity that enact descension are momentarily thwarted by mid-air hesitations--or moments of grace--Bonnefoy's poetry exposes the unpredictable and gracious crosscurrents of existence.

In his essay on Philippe Jaccottet, Charlie Louth picks up where both Farrant's essay on gravity in Leconte de Lisle as the prerequisite of grace and McLaughlin's study of the image- and language-thwarting fluidity of existence in Bonnefoy conclude. Not unlike Leconte, gravity must be apprehended alongside and as a precondition of grace. However, the Swiss poet does not depict gravity in oppressive terms, but rather as "the actual texture of reality" (p. 179). Grace, more than simply fluid movement, emanates from "the world revealing itself" (p. 181). For Jaccottet, poetry must recognize both the weight of the world and its gracious movements. Louth approaches the poems of *Airs* alongside the poet's criticism of Ponge's poetry as focused exclusively on the world's materiality. In his analysis of the collection, Louth presents the "Jaccottet mode" as "open[ing] toward the 'invisible,' thereby alleviating the world of some of its density (p. 189). In a way that recalls Bonnefoy's falling leaf, Louth highlights the world's elusive grace in images of suspension and hesitation. But rather than embrace grace over gravity, Jaccottet imagines them in equilibrium; life is that which occurs in the gap between them (p. 192).

Two essays explore the tensions between gravity and grace in contemporary texts from other literary traditions. Clare Connors' study of Scottish writer Ali Smith's contemporary novel *There but for the* examines the notion of secular grace. Arguably the volume's densest essay, it engages in the many valences (aesthetic, ethical, social, theological) of "grace" (it is perhaps for this reason that it constitutes the volume's first chapter) and often in reference to important theoretical frameworks--Habermas's conceptualization of the post-secular age, Derrida's notion of the "true gift," Paul Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion"--to tackle Smith's complex narrative. Through her reading of Smith's novel, Connors discusses secular grace as grace erased, or ~~grace~~. In our secular age, grace is certainly felt to be missing, but it also "introduces problems of inequity, partiality, and preference" (p. 12). The first part of the essay anchors a discussion of the novel in questions of ethics. It considers the novel's treatment of ~~grace~~ in the context of global capitalism and global warming, whereby one's gain is another's loss. The essay's second half turns to aesthetics by considering how *There but for the* presents art and imbedded written texts as gifts that participate in the "sharing out, dividing up, partitioning, and shaping of the world" (p. 19). What's more, the novel's engagement in a type of "part-writing," a patchwork of loosely connected parts, does not constitute alienated fragments but offers "the open weave of a work that others can always take up" (p. 20). And in the volume's most politically inflected essay, Laura Lonsdale uncovers important oppositions between lightness and weight in *La plaça del Diamant*, a novel by Catalan writer Mercè Rodoreda set during the Spanish Civil War. More specifically, Lonsdale presents the narrative's complex images of hollowness and petrification associated with various characters as metaphors for the emptiness of symbols of social power.

In honor of Pearson's translations, this volume includes two essays on translation theory. An essay by Clive Scott offers original literary translations of poems by Baudelaire and Nerval to

demonstrate translated texts not as recuperating meaning (in the accusative mode), but as holding the potential to generate the future of the original (in the vocative mode). As Scott demonstrates through commentary on his translations of “La Mort des pauvres” and “El Desdichado,” the translator has the potential “to ‘free’ the text [all the while] betray[ing] its formal ancestry” (p. 137). Accordingly, Scott presents translations as “gifts” (acts of grace) of a new “translationese of the floating world...that is infinitely mutable” (p. 144). Although Scott does not speak in such terms, he suggests that the translator is at his best when he liberates the translated text from the original source’s gravitational pull. An essay by Patrick McGuinness further explores the gravitational metaphor by analyzing “translated” texts that have no original—“where the poet frees themselves [*sic*] from the laws of translational gravity while at the same time opening those laws up for examination, scrutiny, [and] creative engagement” (p. 209). McGuinness examines how fake translations “create a sense of the absent original’s ‘gravitational pull,’” and to what ends (p. 211). He takes as one example Canadian writer David Solway’s *Saracen Island*, which Solway presents as the translation of a collection of poems by Andreas Karavis, a Greek fisherman. On the level of the texts themselves, McGuinness demonstrates that “the fiction of translation’s gravitational pull is [itself] part of the literary product” (p. 213). On another level, the figure of the fictitious poet allows Solway to become someone else, and as such, the “original text” is not that which gives birth to the translation but that which is paradoxically born of it. In another example, McGuinness analyzes British author Christopher Reid’s *Katerina Brac* within the context of a Cold War culture of translation in which English translations legitimized Eastern European poets’ original and “raw” texts. *Katerina Brac*, McGuinness compellingly argues, presents a striking example of “fictional translationese: a graceful attempt to replicate the laws of translational gravity by implying that poems are, as translations, still weighed down and pulled back by their originals” (p. 217). The pseudo-translation’s deliberately heavy language dramatizes all that is lost in translation. As such, Reid’s efforts provide political commentary on “muffled human relations” and the “coercions of language” (p. 219).

Two additional essays analyze themes in French culture beyond literature. Anne Green’s essay traces changes in the status of gloves in nineteenth-century France from symbols of both gravity (ceremony, solemnity) and grace (refinement, civilization) in the early decades to symbols of decadence and deceit during the *fin-de-siècle*. While references from texts such as the *Physiologie du gant* presented glove-manufacturing as “emblematic of France’s evolution from barbarism to civilization” (p. 29), by the 1880s, aristocrats “exasperated by the lower classes’ adoption of gloves” began “appearing in public barehanded” (p. 31). In referencing passages by Zola, Edmond de Goncourt, and Villiers de l’Isle Adam, Green shows that gloves, aided by the onset of industrial mass production, became “divorced from their earlier associations with distinction, grace, and truth” to denote precisely the opposite (pp. 34–35). In her analysis of political satire during the July Monarchy, Natasha Ryan studies the evolving nature of lithographer Pierre Numa Bassaget’s *pièce à porte*. Through its characteristic slide-out panel, the *pièce à porte* that would typically invite the reader to discover an eroto-comedy behind closed doors was subsequently used by Numa as a political weapon. Conditioned to expecting a vulgar bedroom scene, readers were shocked to find, rather, a serious scene with a striking political message. Through her comparison of publications in the satirical journal *La Caricature*, Ryan shows that the *pièce à porte*, traditionally erotic and comedic in nature and “wholly lacking in both gravity and grace,” becomes altogether politically grave by in fact eschewing grace (p. 55).

Three more essays deserve mention. In just three pages, T.J. Reed’s brief essay identifies in Voltaire’s writings an attempt to solve, through wit, one of the Enlightenment’s main challenges:

“how to make its serious ideas palatable, attractive, entertaining” (p. 24). Reed casts Voltaire’s very wit as a form of grace easing the weightiness of modernity. And while not directly engaged in the analysis of the novel’s eponymous themes, two contributors present studies that pay tribute to Roger Pearson’s publications on Mallarmé. Bertrand Marchal’s essay considers *Le Livre de Mallarmé* as “un livre sur rien” (p. 91). Mallarmé’s modernity lies in its revealing that “derrière le voile il y a ce ‘Rien, qui est la vérité’” (p. 91). Damian Catani’s essay presents a “critical reappraisal” of Mallarmé’s efforts to rehabilitate William Beckford’s *Vathek*. While Catani explains that Mallarmé was interested in rescuing Beckford’s work from oblivion because of its “satirical gravity,” he is most interested in how Mallarmé goes about doing so, namely by presenting a popularized (anti-elitist) version of *Vathek*, and by establishing its “Frenchness.”

As Festschrift, *Gravity and Grace* presents an array of essays concerned with distinct issues in multiple disciplines and diverse national contexts and time periods. And yet, a core series of contributions offers a remarkably sustained and rich reflection on the interplay between the aesthetic and ethical notions of gravity and grace.

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Scott M. Powers
University of Mary Washington
spowers@umw.edu

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