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VIII. Reviews

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Reviewed by Elena Mucciarelli.

Review of *Entangled with Colour: New Materialist Explorations in English Colour Writing*,
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The book “Entangled with Colour New Materialist Explorations in English Colour Writing” by Marsha Wienland stems from the author’s innovative dissertation carried out at the University of Tübingen.

The study explores “colour writing” emphasizing the relationality between

color, matter, words, and affects, moving beyond traditional symbolic and figurative uses of color.

Relying on the most recent theoretical explorations of materialism and agential realism, the author employs theories from Karen Barad and Jane Bennett’s “vital materialism” to understand the agency and relationality of color-matter—in the appendix the book offers also an overview of the most recent scholarship on new materialism and could work as a very useful vademecum. Wienland’s theoretical innovative approach aims at explore the *doings* of colour in English colour writings. The choice of the verb “to do” implies a Barthian’s readers’ centred epistemology. What does colour elicit, evoke, activate in the readers? What type of mental and physical movement does a colour engender? In this sense, the author shifts from a hermeneutic of meaning to an epistemology of senses focusing on the experiential qualities of colour. By way of bridging literary analysis and new materialist theories, the study offers a fresh perspective on the agency of nonhuman forces like color in literature. The term *colourscape* a key-notion in this investigation already frames the discussion in terms of network and spatiality. If colour is almost a space of experience, than, as the author says, we are “entagled with colour”.

Starting by beautifully proving the interdisciplinary nature of colour through the image of a color-wheel, perhaps one of the most refreshing aspects of this monograph remains the attempt of the author not so much to deploy a specific lens to any given literary text. Rather, she argues—by way of her attentive reading—for “colour writing” as a genre. Adopting a reading strategy inspired by Nan Shepherd’s writings, which emphasises openness and attentiveness to the experiential qualities of texts, Wienland focuses on “literary texts in which colour plays a prominent role and in which we can experience the agency of material-discursive colour.” (p. 282).

Moving from early colour writings in the fin de siècle through modernist texts and finally zooming in on key texts in the genre of contemporary lyric essays, the book point us to an unexplored path for thinking in terms of literary history of colour writings as a genre.

Starting with Virginia Woolf's "Blue & Green" (1921), "Kew Gardens" (1921) and, more specifically, "The Waves" (1931), modernist texts that use interludes to depict the interplay of light, color, and matter, creating prismatic colorsapes, Wieland shows how Woolf emphasizes the performative and relational aspects of color, presenting it as vibrant, dynamic, and intertwined with human experience. As the author says: " *The Waves* anticipates a colour writing in which colour is not employed for descriptive or symbolic purposes but exhibits an agency of its own and contributes to the experience of a world that is far from static and in which solidity is more a matter of degree rather than kind." (p.105).

After introducing the theoretical field of New Materialims, Wieland focuses on the Material-Discursive nature of colour looking in particular at the 1990s where an interest for and in colour appears in the genre of the lyric essay: color is conceived of as vibrant and agential, entangled with matter, meaning, and experienced through sensory and affective engagement. The theoretical stance is articulated further through the study of three lyric essays, characterized by their fragmentary, associative, and hybrid style, enabling nuanced exploration of color.

The first text analysed in detail is Derek Jarman's *Chroma* represents an exploration of color structured into chapters focusing on specific colours or themes. Jarman uses poetic language, associations, and anecdotes to evoke the textures, materiality, and agency of color, connecting it to emotions, memories, and physical materials. Wieland identifies *Chroma* as a text that creates a kaleidoscopic colorscape, where color is not merely symbolic or descriptive but an active and agential force. She examines how Jarman's text uses sensuous color poetics to evoke color through the shape and sound of words, associations, and sensory experiences. For example, Wieland discusses how Jarman's descriptions of pigments, such as "alizarin crimson" unfold through their material qualities, historical context, and sensory impact, creating a textured and tangible experience of

color. Furthermore, Wieland interprets Chroma as a rhizomatic text, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome to describe its non-linear, interconnected structure. She argues that Chroma builds a network of color associations that extend beyond the text, inviting readers to add their own interpretations and associations, thus making them active participants in the creation of the text's colorscape. Wieland uses Chroma to illustrate her broader argument about the material-discursive dimension of color in literature. She highlights how Jarman's text exemplifies the performative and agential nature of color, its entanglement with matter, and its ability to affect and involve the reader in a dynamic and sensuous experience.

In the next chapter, Wieland presents *The White Book* by Han Kang as a lyric essay reflecting on the colour white through vignettes about white objects like snow and rice, interspersed with black-and-white photographs. Guiding us through her own experience of the text-artifact as she flips through the pages, she confronts us with questions such as "why do these hands hold a piece of white fabric into the camera?" (p. 216). Wieland explores the materiality and emotional resonance of white, presenting it as a nuanced presence entangled with feelings, memories, and textures. We are carefully led to see how colour reading reverberates with emotional resonance and can reflect on personal loss and shared connections. In this sense, the *The White Book* transcends symbolic uses of white and instead presents it as a material-discursive phenomenon entangled with matter, emotions, and sensory experiences. Wieland highlights the materiality of white, showcasing its textured and affective qualities through descriptions of objects like swaddling bands, snow, milk, rice, and peeling white paint. She also analyzes the intermediality of the book, focusing on the interplay between text and black-and-white photographs, as well as the blank white spaces that enhance the visual and tactile engagement with the color. Additionally, Wieland situates the portrayal of white within East Asian cultural contexts, connecting it to concepts of mourning, purity, emptiness, and potentiality. Finally, Wieland argues that *The White Book* invites attentive and participatory reading, encouraging readers to engage with the unfolding whitescapes and contribute their own associations and sensory responses to the experience of white.

The last text presented to us in this fascinating monograph, is Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*. Engaging deeply with the color blue, exploring its relationality with desire, suffering, and memory, this chapter examines how *Bluets* portrays blue as a vibrant and agential force that sparks desire, pain, and emotional intensity, challenging traditional notions of color as static or symbolic. Wieland highlights Nelson's practice of collecting "blue facts"—anecdotes, objects, memories, and observations—to create a material-discursive texture of blue, portraying it as a dynamic presence and how all these items are weaved into the text to create a textured and dynamic experience of blue. Through the analysis of the text's structure, composed of 240 numbered propositions, Wieland sees a resemblance between the interference patterns created during the reading process and the structural colors of the Morpho butterfly's wings. Wieland explores how *Bluets* invites readers to actively engage with the text, reflecting on their own emotional and sensory responses to blue. Additionally, Wieland examines the sensory and relational qualities of blue in *Bluets*, focusing on how Nelson's descriptions of blue objects create a tangible experience of the color. She argues that *Bluets* exemplifies the performative and agential nature of color, as blue becomes a dynamic presence that affects both the narrator and the reader. Through her analysis, Wieland positions *Bluets* as a key example of color writing, showcasing how color can act as a relational, vibrant, and agential force that shapes meaning, emotions, and experiences in literature.

Through the study by Wieland, Colour Writing as a genre seems to gain momentum and ontological stance, as we see the contours of a genre infrastructure, media requirements and affordances, as well as the expectations and communicative competences that according to Bauman represent the diagnostic features of a genre. The book showcases how colour can be an agential and vibrant actant also in cultural production that for the nature of the medium do not afford visual perception of colours. Further Wieland demonstrates how taking colour writing as a genre allow us to explore themes of death, grief, and suffering, using color as a medium to evoke emotions and celebrate its multifaceted nature.

Once we take Wieland's suggestion to consider color writings as a distinct genre, we are then compelled to further explore this genre across different periods and cultures.