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Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) triggered critical attention towards community as a cultural, critical or ideological concept. Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* denounced George Bataille's focus on the individual in order to thwart "a thinking of community" ([1986] 1991, 23). Nancy conceived community as a transcendent alterity that "is not a communion that fuses the egos into an Ego or a higher We [but a] community of others" (15). Subsequent critical responses—Rorty (1989), Agamben (1993), Blanchot ([1983] 1998), Esposito (1998)—stressed elements within Nancy's proposal—respectively, the roles of contingency, exposure, secrecy and obligation—in the weaving of a given community. *Community in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (henceforth *Community*) discusses the usefulness of these texts as a framework to apply to the systematic analysis of fiction. Fully assuming Nancy's denunciation of the "dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of the community" ([1986] 1991, 1) in modern thinking, the contributors to *Community* aim to "explore the strategies of working and unworking, construction and deconstruction of communities" (vii) in the short-stories and novels of twelve established authors. They value some attempts at analysing the construction of fictional communities (Miller 2005; 2011) but lament the fact that most literature has failed to adapt the conceptual articulations of community "in a systematic manner" (vii).

Community avoids centring upon a particular communality. Each contributor writes two chapters on the idea of community in two separate authors, who are "loosely grouped" following "a criterion of affiliation to a distinct narrative tradition" (3). Without being detrimental to the volume, these implicit associations—as far as chapters are nevertheless self-contained—reveal as fruitful as problematic. Although aspects of interpretation can justify linking James Joyce to Edna O'Brien, or Alex LaGuma to J. M. Coetzee, some other connections seem elusive, particularly as the chapters on individual authors who are paired—such as Evelyn Waugh and V. S. Naipaul—are in fact some chapters apart. Such intended systematicity is more palpable in the

introduction (1-47). Julián Jiménez Heffernan sets out a critical framework which is an invaluable tool when applied to further discourses, authors or periods. Criticising the “double limitation” in academic literature of being “over-specific in the choice of its narrative corpus” or “over-ambiguous in its conceptual grasp of the notion of community” (3), he explains how “categories like imagined communities (Anderson) or knowable communities (Raymond Williams) have become normal [critical] currency” (31). However, he denounces the entrenchment of “most applications of the notion of community to current literary studies” as being caught in “an explanatory frame” neglecting their critical tenets, and thus “fully compromised” (18) by them. Jiménez Heffernan clinically exposes how texts on fictional communities (Auerbach 1978; Page 1999; Kella 2000; Wegner 2002; Hurst 2011) have been largely restricted to a particular community and generally have failed to problematise community as a critical construct. This is also true for a number of other works (Sabin 1987; Michael 2006; Britton 2008; Lübecker 2009; McNally 2013; Boswell 2014).

That said, the introduction is robust and non-compromising; it offers clear textual approaches, which the ensuing essays exemplify. It situates modern thought about community within a “metaphysical tradition” (7) of transcendent models of community requiring an implicit alienation. With the contention that “current debate on community is shaped by Hegel’s original dialectical questioning” (9) of the separation between political and civil aspects of communal life, the author finds in Karl Marx and Ferdinand Tönnies an axiology which necessitates the individual as an indivisible and untranscendable “figure of immanence” (3). Consequently, the author clarifies that community has not yet been thought of “in a non-immanent way” (22). Using Nancy’s *unworked* or *inoperative community*, Jiménez Heffernan notes how Western fiction has “proved an invaluable platform where community-models have been relentlessly tested, discarded or confirmed” as writers have “sought to formulate a kind of community that had not as yet existed” (2). Using the concept of “original position” (Rawls 1971, 22) as a hypothetical time-spatial situation, Jiménez uses critical responses by Maurice Blanchot, Roberto Esposito, Giorgio Agamben, Stanley Fish, Richard Rorty, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Jean-François Lyotard (27-31) to outline the preconditions to a community—such as transcendence, partition, singularity, finitude, exposure and communication. He establishes how most of the characters in the novels analysed “are born into *Gesellschaft*, even if their immediate environment is one of suffocating *Gemeinschaft*” (36), to which they can respond in various ways (37). Characters in James Joyce’s “The Dead” (1914) discover their finitude within the borders of the community but only in communication with larger society; protagonists in novels by Don DeLillo, J. M. Coetzee and V.S. Naipaul achieve self-awareness precisely because of the lack of community ties; those in Katherine Mansfield and Evelyn Waugh only do so after an awakened realisation of finitude, which triggers their eagerness for community.

The subsequent chapters attest the fertility of these ideas. Pilar Villar-Argáiz reads the influence of Catholicism and finitude in “The Dead” and Joyce’s saturated

communities as being “composed by singularities rather than by homogeneous individualities” (59). Centring on protagonist Gabriel as an outsider, she reveals how Joyce eschews community as an identitarian precondition. On Edna O’Brien, Villar-Argaiz highlights her deliberate intent to transcend “repressive communal impositions” by devising “alternative communitarian forms” (178) in which marginalised characters can be accommodated. O’Brien’s rural and urban communities are made up of recurrent singularities rather than individualities, despite her characters being “socially alienated from their communities” (179) and “experience[ing] an intense urge to escape” (180), just like Joyce’s Gabriel. Villar-Argaiz also sees a “radical openness” (192) in O’Brien’s use of spaces and the permeability of certain motifs indicative of entertaining “the prospect of an alternative community in a future that is still to come” (192).

Gerardo Rodríguez Salas reads Katherine Mansfield’s short stories, along with Maurice Blanchot’s “community of lovers,” as an “antisocietal society or association” (38), and Nancy’s idea of the couple as being torn, between public and private spheres. He interprets the “epiphanic moment between lovers” as a “castrating silence” far from Nancy’s reliance on corporeity to replace language. Rodríguez explicates Mansfield’s fictional pessimism as being due to the fact that her lovers are “too young, immature and artificial” (73) or “romantic and idealistic” (74). He interprets Mansfield’s “The Black Cap” (1917) to show both marriage and adultery as imperfect communities, since individuals fail to compromise in light of the unworking of the organic community. On Janet Frame, the author explores the ironic dramatisation of community in *The Carpathians* (1988). Following two seminal ironies in the critical apparatus—the fact that a “being-in-common that is not a common being” (Nancy [1986] 1991, 62), and its dissolution into unity “ruins immanence as well as the usual forms of transcendence” (Blanchot [1983] 1998, 8)—Rodríguez stresses how Frame denounces the artificiality of self-proclaimed national, racial or spiritual communities through characters who try to come to (their own) terms with nationhood, race or beliefs.

Jiménez Heffernan exemplifies how some characters—Charles Ryder, the Flyte family—in Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) can unwork the organic community into an exceptional, inoperative community through a “craving for distinction” (86). Against received criticism, *Brideshead Revisited* is interpreted not as a pilgrimage towards conversion but “from convention to exception” (87). The transitional aspect of the novel allows it to be read as an “operation on death [...] involving two institutions, England as a historical nation and the Catholic church” (95). However, the author reads *Brideshead*’s melancholic end as redolent of the toils required in order to contemplate an inoperative community: Waugh’s vanishing world has little to be hopeful about. On V.S. Naipaul, Jiménez Heffernan challenges the alleged disengagement and simplicity of his political fiction—*The Mimic Men* (1967), *In a Free State* (1971), *Guerrillas* (1975), *A Bend in the River* (1979)—since these revolve upon the “political impossibility” of “the beginning of a free state” (196). A result of Naipaul’s “distrust of the immanence of communities, whether small-scale or national” (199), his protagonists show a remarkable rejection of organic

communities: they are a “cultural ensemble affording [...] social protection” and yet “little more than a convenient fiction, often the outcome of cultural adulteration” (197). In Naipaul, the lack of structure of postcolonial society is seen as “a flaw, not an enabling condition” (205); revolution becomes an empty signifier, “a parodic performance” or “a word you say rather than a thing you do” (208). Jiménez Heffernan highlights Naipaul’s refusal to simmer politics down to fiction, his novels ultimately being the product of contingency.

Paula Martín Salván interprets sacrifice in Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* (1955) as being prompted by “communitarian interests” (105). Intersecting the love triangle between Thomas Fowler, Phuong and Alden Pyle with the competing ideologies in 1950s Indochina, Martín challenges more conventional allegorical interpretations, since characters reject larger structural societies. Martín highlights that Fowler is critical of “communities that demand the death of their members” (111) and he is ostracised by “all the other characters who have a political community” (115). Phuong’s symbolism is similarly denied, and she is perceptively interpreted as a character whose “illegibility” entails a “subversive potential” (117). Dispelling more political interpretations, Martín shows the intimation of finitude to fuel commitment: Fowler’s fears enable the inoperative community of lovers in “the presentation to its members of their mortal truth” (Nancy [1986] 1991, 15). Analysing Don DeLillo, Martín reads the isolation of his characters as a sign of the times. She explores some of his textual articulations; the neighbourhood in *Underworld* (1997) and *Cosmopolis* (2003) acts as a community in which language, beliefs and social rites enable transcendence. His “communities of conspirators and terrorists” (224) emerge against institutionalised power and underwrite the difficulty of significant political action, and the crowd offers an unworked community which entails an opportunity for transcendence. Martín acknowledges how none of these communities offer a viable or permanent solution for DeLillo’s characters, stressing how the longing for community “goes unfulfilled” and yet it “shapes the borders of the postmodern experience” (233).

María J. López explores Alex La Guma’s Marxism as an effective means to fight totalitarianism in both political and literary terms. Examining his use of ghosts as devices which signal an existential frontier between communities, López aligns them with Nancy’s idea of the inoperative community as “one of otherness and death” (130). Thus, she shows how La Guma uses spectral figures in *In the Fog of the Seasons’ End* (1972) and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979) to mirror the haunting of communities under Apartheid, but interpreting their symbolism as “the promise of justice” where “human bonds of family and community may be renewed” (136). In contrast, she perceives J. M. Coetzee’s focus on the isolated individual as resistance to the loss of individuality on entering the tribe or community, “understood as immanence, fusion, political project or nationalism” (242). López nevertheless finds a communal dimension in Coetzee’s epistolary fiction in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) and *Age of Iron* (1990), following the idea that “each writer, each work inaugurates a community” (Nancy 1986, 68) in both fiction and life.

Mercedes Díaz Dueñas explores the operative communities in Robertson Davies's *The Cornish Trilogy*—*The Rebel Angels* (1981), *What's Bred in the Bone* (1985), *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1988)—to underline the importance of shared “mythical predestination and common secrets” (157) for various communities (art, academia, family, religion). In Margaret Atwood's futuristic dystopias—*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009)—Díaz sees the “human compulsion to erase finitude and the obsession for immunity” in Atwood's enactment of the “will to bring about operative communities” (255) to provide transcendence under totalitarianism. Traversing through Atwood's “well-defined operative communities” (268), Díaz highlights how language and its suppression act as means of oppression. In her dystopias, survival entails precisely moving away from the immunity these communities offer.

Community in Twentieth-Century Fiction is not without formal problems. It does not include a case for fiction to exemplify more powerful reflections on community than other more inter-personal genres, such as drama; the corpus and implicitly comparative approach used could be deemed subjective; contributors redefine concepts from the introduction which were better explained there; some of the texts discussed, such as Atwood and DeLillo's recent output, can hardly be considered twentieth-century fiction; and the volume lacks a conclusion to encapsulate and connect ideas throughout the various essays. The rewards of the collection as a whole, however, greatly outweigh these shortcomings. The wide-ranging selection of texts aptly covers the century and is illustrative of its political geography, with inspired and informed close-readings which unearth the pervasive presence of aspects of community in fiction through abundant textual evidence. The volume thus becomes more than a mere addition to the sustained attention to community in literary studies in this century (Berman 2001; Durrant 2004; Michael 2006; Lee 2009; Hurst 2011; Miller 2011) and it paves the way for further research within a potentially prolific field of study.

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