

■ Frozen Tears III

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Frozen Tears III, ed John Russell, ARTicle Press, Birmingham, 2007, 928pp, pb, £6.99, 1 873352 59 X.

'Yes, it's a wonderful saying. Dermatologists should inscribe it on their doors. Philosophy as a general dermatology or art of surfaces ...' (Gilles Deleuze in conversation with Robert Maggiori).

If, as Deleuze suggests, good philosophy is best enacted as a dermatological principle, then the conjectural framework that is inscribed on the surface of *Frozen Tears III* is as raging, as sweet and as prescient as chronic teenage acne. All it requires is a good hard squeeze.

The third instalment of John Russell's *Frozen Tears* cycle announces itself as 'THE PLACE WHERE, THE PROPHECY-AS-COMMODITY, AS CURSE OR SALVATION, IS STAGED AS FICTION'. This phrase is a cheeky synthesis of style and content, asserting, as it does, an aggregate of what might possibly happen in the future ('prophecy'), as a regularly available product ('commodity'), articulated in the oft traditional form of storytelling ('fiction'). Already the volume's strapline firmly places the reader outside of average causality, that is to say, quotidian cause and effect, in which experiential relationship to time is central to making sense of text. Here I am considering 'time' as the chronological space that looking takes place within, in terms of both the personal time spent in the act of actually reading and the specific historic timeline or literary lineage within which a work is placed, through looking as an activity in itself.

The materiality of *Frozen Tears III* as bricky-book-object self-reflexively points to its own construction as part of a series, which further suggests temporal compression and sites potential readers outside of an average reading experience. 'III' is rendered in hyper-real mercury numerals emerging from or per-

haps submerging into the glossy pink 'FT' branding mark, while the cover image itself could be a stylised photograph of pea and ham soup, or something more sinister that has been expelled at high speed from Linda Blair's mouth.

Patricia McCormack's polemical contribution to the book, 'Becomings-Cunt: Flesh, Fold and Infinity', is a call for a putsch in patriarchal understanding. It begins: 'This article positions female genitalia as a model through which a project of becoming may be launched. Female genitalia should not be understood as metaphor or as a reflection applied to a becoming after the project. Becoming-cunt engages with the materiality of both becoming and the cunt as fleshy, risky and challenging to the basic paradigms of thought and subjectivity.' McCormack's piece is a broad application of the concept of 'cunt' to traditional approaches to comprehension, and their attendant social appearances in classical and popular culture. Utilising examples that range from *Hellraiser* to the Bible, she redetermines both how cunt is seen and how it may be used to see.

Something of a fictional accomplice to McCormack's text is Andrea Mason's 'Does She Squirt?' in which the story's main character Kelvin – sometime doctor, sometime porn star – is sucked into an anonymous, churning vagina that he had previously been in control of. This sly little story displays the bright nastiness of Alasdair Gray's 1982, *Janine* – itself an ambivalent examination of the politics of pornography – in its use of a cyclical narrative structure. The story's title is also its last line, signalling to the reader that any revelations that may have taken place within the space of the journey (and hence the story) will be deleted, or possibly repeated with another protagonist, returning us to the beginning again. This structural gesture, together with the general unsavoury oddness of the main character's actions – 'Nurse,' says Kelvin. 'The banana please.' – has the effect of making readers' efforts to adhere to the plot pointless, opening up a much more specific (and interesting) discourse on the nature of reading.

The title of Mike Paré's 'The Canyon is Possessed' places the work in a very specific geographic location. This is not the UK, this is not familiar, this is rural America, and yet the tropes of storytelling that he employs to deliver his quasi-memoir afford the reader lots of points of entry (and exit). Essentially this is a list of observations attached to the canyon, through which Paré carefully constructs an eerie sequence of hearsay, and a creepy geography: one character, Gary Hanu's friend, meets a group of men in black robes and his heart explodes; a serial killer in nearby village lynches teddy bears as ciphers for the children he has murdered; Big Daddy's diner feeds burgers to desperate teenagers before they embark on drinking copious amounts of beer and blood in dark crevices of the canyon. This is no average spook story, for while Paré's tale is familiar in terms of delivery, death surrounds it, with no redemption.

Frozen Tears III is, however, a challenge to readability. For while many of the contributions are redolent of (or actually are) legible fiction texts, Russell's selection of so many – over one hundred of the blighters colliding together – combined with their separation from author details, means that the reader is made to feel disoriented.

This formal displacement is not very helpful in terms of locating or fixing the meaning of what we are reading, for we have little to plot ourselves against. That said, at best, the book does embody characteristics of Ramon Llull's 'thinking machine', which advocates the extraction of meaning through the mannered collision of hundreds of lists, in that the sheer denseness of text suggests that it needs to be used, but that it cannot really be read, placing its dazed readers back in control by encouraging them to be always in the present rather than wondering what will happen at the end. ■

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