

that a reader of literature has the feeling of “being transported” (25–124) and speculated on the distinctive role played by the brain’s two hemispheres in how people respond to literature and why they engage with it at all (192–97).

These more recent works are not as widely read as those from the late 1960s and the 1970s. This may be partly because Holland had moved further and further away from any attempt to provide fresh insights into works of literature. He was always more interested in human nature than in hermeneutics. Indeed, his sustained concern for “the human” might help explain why some of his writings have been translated into so many languages, including Japanese, Korean, and Mandarin. Ultimately, Holland may best be remembered as a literary theorist, some of whose writings will never relinquish their global appeal because they invariably focus on the relation between reading literature and human identity.

Nicholas O. Pagan
University of Malaya

Toward a Nonlinear Literary History

TO THE EDITOR:

Wai Chee Dimock’s judicious editor’s column “Historicism, Presentism, Futurism” (vol. 133, no. 2, Mar. 2018, pp. 257–63) makes a compelling case for a contrapuntal presentism and historicism, a “strategic presentism,” drawing on the debates in Victorian studies initiated by V21. I am struck, however, by the ways in which these debates still adhere to a familiar concept of time based in the discipline of history, for which a linear chronology of past, present, and future remains central.

New critical discourses about time—what Joel Burges and Amy J. Elias allude to as the “postmillennial emergence of time studies” in their introduction to *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present* (New York UP, 2016, p. 14)—challenge this linearity and the methods related to

it. Centered in studies of contemporary literature and art, the new temporalities dismantle the teleology of linear chronology and reconceive time as multidimensional and multiplicitous. A range of nonlinear descriptors for time appears in these studies of the contemporary: *heterogeneous, pluralist, disjunctive, disruptive, discontinuous, simultaneous, doubled, foreshortened, fractured, enfolded, interwoven, conjoined, crisscrossing, coexisting, dissident*, and so forth. As Burges and Elias write, “the present has emerged as an experience in the simultaneity in which temporalities multiply. . . . The present may be grasped as textured and stretched, latent and current—a mediation of presence and distance in time” (3–4).

Like the Burges and Elias volume, the essay anthology *Time: Documents of Contemporary Art* theorizes a new temporality of the present (MIT P, 2013). In her introduction to this volume, the editor, Amelia Groom, argues that contemporary art questions

the idea of time as an arrow propelling us in unison from the past into the future. . . . [O]nce the twentieth century’s fetishization of teleological progress is abandoned, history’s time reveals itself as a concoction of chance encounters, arbitrary inclusions, systematic exclusions, parenthetical digression, abrupt U-turns, inherited anecdotes, half-remembered facts, glossed-over uncertainties and forgotten back-stories. (12–13)

In their contribution to Groom’s volume, “The Plural Temporality of the Work of Art,” Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood contrast “chronological time, flowing steadily from before to after, [as] an effect of its figurations: annuals, chronicles, calendars, clocks” with what they call “the diagrammatization of time . . . [that] allows one to speak of diverse events happening in different places as happening at the same time” (39). For Groom, time as represented in contemporary art is neither nostalgia nor postmodern pastiche (17). Rather, the con-

temporary arts “mark a thickening of the present to acknowledge its multiple, interwoven temporalities” (16).

Can these nonlinear temporalities be adapted for our methods of doing literary history? In particular, can they break the powerful hold of periodization as a defining methodology? Literary history has conventionally borrowed its methodology from the discipline of history itself—designating periods in the past with bookends of time, seeing them as developments through time often imaged in organic terms (birth, growth, decline), and analyzing them in terms of continuity and change. The Renaissance, the Restoration, classicism, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, realism, naturalism, modernism, postmodernism—these are familiar categories of literary history. As a philosopher of history, Hayden White long ago identified the figural and narrative tropes that underlie these teleological methodologies of historical analysis (e.g., *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1990). More recently, in “Past/Future,” Elias notes that the discipline of history “moves not from the past to the present, but from the present to the past. . . . The present becomes foreshadowed, foretold, pre-figured, in the events of the past, as the historical narrative takes the shape of a coherent story. . . . This is the basis, in fact, of the cause-effect logic of periodization” (*Time: A Vocabulary of the Present* 43). In *On Literary Worlds* (Oxford UP, 2012), Eric Hayot produces a manifesto of his own against “the near-total dominance of the concept of periodization in literary studies” (149).

What methods of literary history might we substitute for a periodization based on clear delineations of past, present, and future? Groom emphasizes the usability of Einstein’s 1955 observation, “For those of us who believe in physics, the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion” (qtd. in Groom 13). Elias observes, “Yet while presentism often opposes ‘past’ and

‘future’ to ‘the present,’ the dialectical counter to time as diachronic history (past/future) is in truth not another kind of historical time (the synchronic). The opponent is duration—timeless time, homogenous time—whose synchronic partner is the Event” (35). The “event” in this sense is a lived time that contains other times—in whatever discordant, palimpsestic, and multidimensional form.

I suggest that we can devise a new literary history whose methods are attuned to the temporalities of contemporary time studies. I agree that a contrapuntal dialogue between presentism and historicism contains rich possibilities. History writing—including literary history—is in my view always heuristic, narrating the past through the lens of the present and implied or anticipated future, however thoroughly immersed in the archive the historian might be. And presentism is never purely presentist but is always informed—as the present itself is—by the past and future within it. That said, I think nonlinear concepts of time can free up new ways of doing literary history, ways that are attuned to historical contextualization without being limited to ideologically weighted periodizations, that take into account the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and (dis)continuities of lived temporalities in cross-cultural, intercultural, and transcultural worlds.

Susan Stanford Friedman

University of Wisconsin, Madison

Reply:

I thank Susan Stanford Friedman for deepening our discussion of historicism, presentism, and futurism, bringing a meditation on linear and nonlinear time to bear on all three. A departure from linearity would indeed have a profound impact on our discipline, institutionally as well as intellectually. The chronologies of our scholarship, the division of subject matter and the attendant job descriptions, and the knowledge of literature that we try to convey