

work at the Thomas Mann Archive in Zürich. Hence, let's celebrate and aspire to the real utopian form of scholarship that Kitcher's study provides in such simple richness and sincere intensity.

PETER HÖYNG earned his PhD in German literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1994. He joined the German Studies Department at Emory University in 2005. In the spring of 2013, he was a Fulbright Senior Research Fellow at the *Institut für Kulturwissenschaften* in Vienna. Höyng's research centers thematically around four distinct areas: (a) genre-wise, he predominantly explores dramatic texts within its performative contexts, (b) geographically, his research tilts toward cultural creations emanating from Austria, (c) topically, he pursues the works of assimilated German-Jewish figures, and (d) the interaction between literature and classical music as evident in his ongoing research on Beethoven's intellectual profile. He has published forty essays, edited and co-translated Hugo Bettauer's 1922-novel *The Blue Stain*, edited a volume on the Jewish dramatist George Tabori, and wrote a monograph on historical representations on stage in late eighteenth century.

*Comparative Encounters between Artaud, Michaux and the Zhuangzi: Rationality, Cosmology and Ethics.* By Xiaofan Amy Li. Transcript 4. Oxford: Legenda, 2015. x + 176 pp. Hardcover •\$55.00 (\$99.00 USD).

*Reviewed by Louis Komjathy, University of San Diego*

To the uninitiated reader, Li's study appears to be a comparative literary and philosophical analysis of Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), Henri Michaux (1899–1984), and the *Zhuangzi* (*Chuang-tzu*, Book of Master Zhuang). That is, on some level, the book compares an early twentieth-century Smyrnan–French avant-garde writer, a twentieth-century French–Belgian surrealist writer, and a fourth-to-second-century BCE Chinese Daoist text traditionally attributed to the obscure Chinese Daoist elder Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi [Master Zhuang]; ca. 370–290 BCE), although Li also questions these characterizations (1–12, *passim*). While the selection may seem strange and unexpected, Li makes a convincing case for its viability (7–25). Rather than a conventional comparative study, the book attempts to engage in a creative imagining and cross-pollination: “the book itself will be a translatory and comparative medium between the personae that embody Artaud, Michaux and Zhuangzi's works and thought. Indeed,

these personae can only speak in the way imagined above because I have put these words in their mouths, because I have understood and translated them thus" (3, also 8, 16). That is, Li is more interested in insights and interpretive potential derived from innovative engagements than in the "original meaning" or "contextually accurate interpretations" of the various texts. This approach partially insulates the book from more serious and sulfuric criticism, a type that is warranted for other comparative, especially philosophical, appropriations and misinterpretations of the *Zhuangzi* and other Daoist scriptures.

*Comparative Encounters* consists of an introduction, five primary chapters, and an epilogue. The chapters are as follows: (a) "Variations on Perspective: Clearing the Methodological Grounds"; (b) "Rationality and Knowledge: Order and Chaos, the Sage and the Child"; (c) "Cosmology: Spirals of Time and Space"; (d) "Cosmology: Nature beyond Form"; and (e) "Ethical Alternations: The Gift, Indifference, and Agency." As the book's subtitle and chapter contents indicate, Li primarily organizes her comparative, or "dialogic" and "interactive" (22), study in terms of the themes of rationality, cosmology, and ethics. While I find this creative imagining to be inspiring and insightful at times, the emphasis on "rationality" and "ethics" are especially problematic with respect to the *Zhuangzi*, which I will address momentarily.

To begin on an appreciative and sympathetic note, Li's work provides a new and noteworthy model for "comparative encounter." As far as I am aware, it is the first Western-language publication to engage the *Zhuangzi* in terms of comparative literature. As such, it is radical in the best sense of the word: it is innovative in its selection of authors/texts and it takes interpretive risks that lead to unexpected insights as well as an alternative comparative methodology. Here I believe that Li might have pressed the boundaries even further by utilizing an alternative mode of writing permitted in the Transcript series, an approximation of which appears on pages 1 and 2. In addition to the opening methodological chapter, which considers translation, comparability, and literary self-theorization, there are a number of interesting interpretations that offer areas for deeper engagement, further reflection, and broader application. Some of these include Li's discussion of madness (2, 4-5, 25, 27-28, 31, 36, 43-44, 46, 57, 65-66, 74, 92), perspectivism (7-8, 12-14, 30, 48-55, 61-63, 68-74, 76, 98, 125, 128, 130, 146, 149), multivocality (35), the material conditions of writing (36), as well as the importance of considering alterity (161) and utilizing methodological eclecticism and interdisciplinarity (162). In the process, the book succeeds in employing the *Zhuangzi*, at least as a persona imagined by Li, to elucidate Artaud and Michaux, and vice versa. However, as I am less familiar with the latter two authors, I must leave it

to specialists to determine the interpretive accuracy and analytical viability. For this, readers may benefit from recognizing at least two major subtexts, namely, cultural hybridity and interculturality (7–12, 16–17, 23, 34, 98, 160, especially 11) as well as postcolonial concern for received Eurocentric and Orientalist constructions of China as “irrational” (9–11, 60, 72), although the latter is debatable in a contemporary context.

In terms of critical engagement, Li’s overall project, which might raise issues of the ethics and politics of appropriation with respect to the *Zhuangzi* (cf. 3), and the previously mentioned subtexts require deeper reflection. As a scholar of Chinese religions in general and Daoism in particular, I find some of Li’s claims problematic and less convincing. While the book does not purport to be a sinological publication, it contains a variety of mischaracterizations and deficient arguments about the *Zhuangzi*. Briefly, Li suggests that the text, often referred to in the Daoist tradition by its honorific title *Nanhua zhenjing* (Perfect Scripture of Master Nanhua [Southern Florescence]), was only categorized retrospectively as “Daoist” (2, 5). Beyond superficial hyper-relativist and social constructivist views, and as discussed in my *The Daoist Tradition: An Introduction* (2013), there is not only intratextual evidence for a self-conscious, emerging Daoist religious community in the texts of classical Daoism, but recent revisionist scholarship also suggests that the Sima family and some segments of the Jixia (Chi-hsia) Academy exhibit strong Daoist syncretist tendencies, perhaps even affiliation. Along these lines, Li’s own advocacy of and adherence to conventional views of the *Zhuangzi* as a “philosophical text” lead to some questionable interpretations. This is partially due to the influence of unreliable scholarship (e.g., by Chad Hansen, Thomas Michael, and Brook Ziporyn), scholarship that is, interestingly, indebted to the very same redactor (Guo Xiang [d. 312]) with whom Li takes issue (2, 5, 8, 34–35). That is, modern readings of the *Laozi* (*Lao-tzu*; Book of Venerable Masters), also known as the *Daode jing* (*Tao-te ching*; Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power), and the *Zhuangzi* are largely Xuanxue (Hsüan-hsüeh; Profound Learning) constructions mixed with colonialist, missionary, and Orientalist legacies. We must thus work to reimagine these texts, both in terms of their religio-cultural source-points and their contexts of reception, including as understood within the Daoist tradition. Although the *Zhuangzi* contains “philosophical dimensions,” there is the question of literary categorization. Is it a contemplative, esoteric, gnostic, mystical, mythological, philosophical, and/or religious text? While Li addresses the question of genre and formalistic categorization (2, 11, 19, 29, 34, 76–77), the *Zhuangzi* is not a work of quasi-fiction or philosophy, unless one is

inclined to reconceptualize the latter through retrievalist projects like those of Pierre Hadot (1922–2010) and Michel Foucault (1926–984), who emphasize “spiritual exercises” and “techniques of self,” respectively. Perhaps Li wishes to read the *Zhuangzi* as an avant-garde or surrealist work à la Artaud and Michaux. That is, *Comparative Encounters* seems more like an Artaudian and Michauxean reading of the *Zhuangzi* than a Zhuangist reading of Artaud and Michaux, although it is often framed as the latter. Li also lacks a thorough understanding of the technical meaning of mysticism (experiences of the sacred) as explored in the comparative and cross-cultural study of religion. Because she associates mysticism with anti-rationality or irrationality (3, 29, 33, 76), and strangely privileges rationality (27–75), she endeavors to demonstrate that the *Zhuangzi* represents an “alternative rationality” (30–34, 47–48, 51, 73–74) and even a “scientific” or “mathematical” viewpoint (37–39, 76–78, 87–90). This leads to some complex interpretive contortions. Here engagement with consciousness studies, philosophy of mind, and psychology might have led to a deeper consideration of classical Daoist views of consciousness, including the possibility of mystical being and mystical experiencing. That is, intellect and reason are particular expressions or dimensions of consciousness, and the elders of the classical Daoist inner cultivation lineages clearly emphasized other modes of perception and cognition, particularly in the form of “non-knowing” (*wuzhi*), “making things equal” (*qiwu*), and open receptivity (cf. 54, 70). Along these lines, while I appreciate Li’s attempt to consider classical Chinese technical terms supposedly related to the Western categories of “rationality” and “ethics” (31, 54, 126–28), her selection and analysis are somewhat deficient, especially with respect to the technical meaning in classical Daoism in general and the *Zhuangzi* in particular. For example, when discussing ethics, the book focuses on *xing* (“innate nature”), but *de* (“inner power” or “virtue”) is the more relevant category. Both of these dimensions of personhood relate to one’s innate connection with and embodiment of the Dao.

Li also emphasizes the “transformative power” of her type of reflective reading and comparative engagement (25, 31, 74), at times even approaching a key source-point. This is “cultivation” (73, 160). However, because she largely ignores or dismisses the central theological importance of the Dao (Tao; Way) (30, 150–51, 154), the sacred or ultimate concern of Daoists, in the *Zhuangzi*, she also neglects contemplative practice and resultant mystical modes as foundational. That is, a radical (re)reading of the *Zhuangzi* recognizes apophatic meditation, a type of meditation that is primarily contentless, nonconceptual, and nondualistic, as the basis for its “philosophical” views, and perhaps for its distinctive literary expressiveness. It is about transformed ontological conditions. Applying this to the larger

project of *Comparative Encounters*, one might then reexamine Artaud and Michaux in terms of “practice” and “experience.” They even might be reimagined as contemporary contemplatives or mystics, individuals engaging in deep inquiry and seeking something beyond conventional linguistic and conceptual expression. Just as well-frogs and quails cannot understand the visions of sea turtles and the Peng bird, perhaps the supposed “madness” of Artaud and Michaux only appears as such to individuals confined by their own ways of knowing.

These caveats notwithstanding, *Comparative Encounters between Artaud, Michaux and the Zhuangzi* offers a myriad of interesting insights as well as a unique model for comparative literary inquiry. In its pages one encounters a creative intercultural dialogue that inspires further and equally radical pairings.

LOUIS KOMJATHY 康思奇 (PhD, Religious Studies; Boston University) is an associate professor of Chinese religions and comparative religious studies at the University of San Diego ([home.sandiego.edu/~komjathy](http://home.sandiego.edu/~komjathy)). He is also founding co-chair (2004–2010) of the Daoist Studies Group and founding co-chair (2010–2016) of the Contemplative Studies Group of the American Academy of Religion, and manager of the Contemplative Studies website ([www.sandiego.edu/cas/contemplative-studies](http://www.sandiego.edu/cas/contemplative-studies)). His publications include *The Way of Complete Perfection: A Quanzhen Daoist Anthology* (State University of New York Press, 2013), *The Daoist Tradition: An Introduction* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), and the edited volume *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation and Contemplative Prayer* (State University of New York Press, 2015). His most recent book, *Taming the Wild Horse: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Daoist Horse Taming Pictures*, was just published by Columbia University Press.

*Dead Theory: Derrida, Death, and the Afterlife of Theory*. Edited by Jeffrey R. Di Leo. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. 242 pp. Hardcover \$97.20.

*Reviewed by D. J. S. Cross, Instituto de Filosofía, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile*

*Dead Theory* collects a series of essays permutating “death,” “theory,” and “Derrida” in various rhythms and to various ends. For some contributors, the volume provides the occasion to respond to the alleged death of “theory” as a period or field: with proclamations of theory’s rebirth in the numerous “studies” now populating the academic landscape (Jeffrey Di Leo, “Notes