

REVIEW ESSAY

COLLINGWOOD'S WHALE, CHAKRABARTY'S CONUNDRUM, AND BRAUDEL'S BORROWED TIME

HISTORY 4° CELSIUS: SEARCH FOR A METHOD IN THE AGE OF THE ANTHROPOCENE. By Ian Baucom. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. Pp. 140.

THE FLOATING COAST: AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE BERING STRAIT. By Bathsheba Demuth. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2019. Pp. xiv, 416.

ABSTRACT

As R. G. Collingwood noted toward the end of his life, the physiologically limited “time-phase” of human observational capacity cannot but deliver a fundamentally anthropocentric and temporally myopic conception of the world as eventful, destructive, and devoid of larger, perhaps cyclical, regularities. Developing at around the same time, Fernand Braudel’s project of a history of the *longue durée* of human interactions with the environment aimed to subvert the short time-phase of a history accessible to immediate human experience. Although Collingwood and Braudel aimed at a conceptual merger of natural history and human history, neither of them could have foreseen what Dipesh Chakrabarty has described as their collapse into each other, which was effected by humanity’s transformation into a geophysical force that produced massive, likely irreversible, and certainly long-lasting climate change. Looking at two very different examples of a rapidly growing body of literature on an extractivist orientation as a key factor in anthropogenic ecological transformations on both local and planetary scales, this review essay suggests that an “intra-active” (in Karen Barad’s sense) view of human-environmental relationality might help us conceptualize forms of temporality that are capable of superseding Collingwood’s anthropocentric “time-phase.”

Keywords: temporality, anthropocentrism, climate change, R. G. Collingwood, Fernand Braudel, Dipesh Chakrabarty

Though it astounded me, it is in no way remarkable to Nuer, that the tree under which mankind came into being was still standing in Western Nuerland a few years ago and would still be standing had it not recently been burnt down.

—E. E. Evans-Pritchard¹

Shortly before his untimely death in 1943, R. G. Collingwood identified a dilemma that has begun to ring only too true to us: “The natural world which

1. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, “Nuer Time-Reckoning,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 12, no. 2 (1939), 216.

human scientists can study by observation and experiment is an anthropocentric world; it consists only of those natural processes whose time-phase and space-range are within the limits of our observation.”² “These limits,” Collingwood argued,

have been greatly enlarged by the apparatus of the modern scientist, but they still exist, and are ultimately imposed on us by our constitution as animals of a definite size and living at a definite rate. Animals much larger or much smaller than ourselves, whose lives ran in a much slower or a much faster rhythm, would observe processes of a very different kind, and would reach by these observations a very different idea from our own as to what the natural world is like.³

Collingwood was writing well over a century after James Hutton and Charles Lyell had knocked the bottom out of James Ussher's short biblical chronology, thus opening up the dark abyss of geological time. As an archaeologist and a philosopher of history, Collingwood was, of course, aware of the considerable time depth that one can achieve through inference from written and material evidence. And like Henri Bergson before him, he regarded Darwinian evolution as “resolv[ing] the very ancient dualism between changing and unchanging elements in the world of nature by maintaining that what had hitherto been regarded as unchanging was itself in reality subject to change.”⁴ Like many of his contemporaries, Collingwood remained disturbed by the implications of Lord Kelvin's second law of thermodynamics, and he resorted to historical analogy to blunt the dire prospect of what tended to be called the impending heat death of the universe:

The shorter our standard time-phase for an historical event, the more our history will consist of destructions, catastrophes, battle, murder, and sudden death. But destruction implies the existence of something to destroy; and as this type of history cannot describe how such a thing came into existence, for the process of its coming into existence was a process too long to be conceived of as an event by this type of history, its existence must be presupposed as given, ready-made, miraculously established by some force outside of history.⁵

“Outside of history,” so conceived, that is. At around the same time that Collingwood was making these arguments, Fernand Braudel was grappling with precisely the issue of what Collingwood described as our short standard time-phase. Braudel's doctoral dissertation, published in 1949 as *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, was a manifesto for a different form of historical time: that of the exceedingly long term, of slow incremental or even cyclical change, of gradually transforming structural constraints that—like

2. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), 24.

3. *Ibid.* Writing about a decade earlier, Collingwood's contemporary, the Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll, would have agreed. According to von Uexküll's *Umweltlehre*, it is the species-specific perceptual apparatus of the subject that creates habitable environments, including upper and lower thresholds of perceivable temporal flows and rhythms. See Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans, with A Theory of Meaning*, transl. Joseph D. O'Neil (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

4. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, 10; see also *ibid.*, 134–35.

5. *Ibid.*, 26.

mathematical “envelopes”⁶—set the limits for the kinds of events that registered within the structures of relevance of humanly experienced time. Devoting merely the last third of his almost 1,200-page tome to discussing the political history of the lifetime of the sixteenth-century Spanish monarch, Braudel laid out what he would come to describe as a structural panorama of the slow-moving, wave-like undertow on which “events” rode like specks of dust, occasionally lighting up like fireflies in the depth of night, but had been conditioned by the *force majeure* of a *longue durée*. The Fall of Constantinople? The Battle of Lepanto? Such “events” were mere blips in a much longer story; they were marginally consequential for, but ultimately structured by, centuries—if not millennia—of Mediterranean human geography.

And yet, in Collingwood’s sense, even Braudel’s *longue durée*—“a history whose passage is almost imperceptible, . . . a history in which all change is slow, a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles”⁷—remained the history of an anthropocentric world, a history pegged to “man in his relationship to the environment”⁸ (in the sense of cumulative human reactions to the changing affordances of a gradually mutating natural world).⁹ In the end, Collingwood somewhat enigmatically suggested that the future of natural science lay in its realization that it constituted a form of historical inquiry.¹⁰ Although Otto Hahn, Lise Meitner, and Fritz Strassmann’s successful 1938 nuclear fission had already begun to populate Collingwood’s world with new isotopes, he stopped short of advocating a move, in the physical sciences, that was analogous to what Hannah Landecker has described as a transition from the history of biology to the biology of history (in the case of bacteriology).¹¹ Still, as Karl Marx might have said, the nature that

6. Fernand Braudel, *On History*, transl. Sarah Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 31.

7. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, transl. Siân Reynolds, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 1:20.

8. *Ibid.*

9. To be fair, Braudel did use impressionistic historical data and the scant climatological literature that was available to him to speculate about anthropogenic causes of the late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Little Ice Age; see Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World*, 1:267–75. But—to mention merely one pertinent example—the controversy about a “reverse greenhouse effect” (due to the depopulation of the Americas in the wake of the Spanish conquest) still lay decades in the future. For a brief overview of this debate, see Dagomar Degroot, “Did the Spanish Empire Change Earth’s Climate?” *Historical Climatology*, 29 February 2016, <https://www.historicalclimatology.com/features/-did-human-brutality-trigger-preindustrial-climate-change>, and Degroot, “Did Colonialism Cause Global Cooling? Revisiting an Old Controversy,” *Historical Climatology*, 22 February 2019, <https://www.historicalclimatology.com/features/did-colonialism-cause-global-cooling-revisiting-an-old-controversy>.

10. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, 174–77.

11. See Hannah Landecker, “Antibiotic Resistance and the Biology of History,” *Body and Society* 22, no. 4 (2016), 19–52. According to Landecker, “in the history of biology, ideas of bacteria change. In the biology of history, the bacteria of ideas change. The bacteria of today are not the bacteria of yesterday, whether that change is registered culturally, genetically, physiologically, ecologically or medically. Bacteria today have different plasmids and traits and interrelations and capacities and distributions and temporalities than bacteria before modern antibiotics. It is not even clear that ‘bacteria’ remains the only or the most salient category with which to think about antibiotic resistance. This biological matter, chewing away its own ontology, is historically and culturally—and materially—specific to late industrialism, produced in and by previous modes of knowledge” (21).

Collingwood's Renaissance thinkers contemplated and that Braudel's Mediterranean peasants inhabited was fast becoming the second nature of a species that was uniquely prepared to transform its rapidly expanding ecological niche. Yet neither Collingwood nor Braudel would have dreamed of any of the "four theses" with which Dipesh Chakrabarty, in 2009, sent seismic tremors through his discipline of history and the humanistic social sciences more generally. The first thesis of Chakrabarty's justly celebrated essay¹² was that the collapse of natural into human history, which was effected by humanity's emergence as a geophysical force, posed urgent, but ultimately aporetic, questions: How do we reconcile Collingwood's humanly observable shallow time-phase with the deep planetary geological time that had led, again in Collingwood's terms, to the coming into existence of the fossil energy resources (which are remnants of millions of years of photosynthetic energy transfers) that have been laid to waste over an astonishingly short *durée* (a Braudelian conjuncture, at best), leading to devastating climatological effects that will persist for millennia to come?

John Tyndall's discovery of what eventually came to be called greenhouse gas effects dated back to 1859, and the impending depletion of fossil fuels had been noted by, among others, the founder of British anthropology, Edward Burnett Tylor, in 1881.¹³ However, it was not until the Club of Rome published its first report in 1972 and the oil crisis of 1973 that a sense of global ecological malaise even entered international public discourse. And it was only after another generation had passed, and four assessment reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had been published, that Chakrabarty issued his anguished call for a post-anthropocentric, and arguably post-natural, "planetary" history. A good decade later, the social sciences and humanities scholarship on what we might call Chakrabarty's conundrum—how to reconcile short-term human historical agency with the temporal depth of its geophysical conditions of possibility and its unwitting portent of an incalculably distant planetary future—has exploded.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the two books I discuss in this review essay are neither representative nor more than indicative of some of the variegated directions this scholarship has taken in recent years. They couldn't be more different in tone and scope, either. Ian Baucom, whose *History 4° Celsius: Search for a Method in the Age of the Anthropocene* I discuss here, is a literary scholar and the author of an extended meditation on the infamous 1781 *Zong* case as a prism through which to analyze the inherent violence of finance capital (the *Zong*'s captain Luke Collingwood—hopefully no relation to the gentle-minded Oxford don—threw 132 enslaved Africans overboard to collect maritime insurance premiums

12. Chakrabarty's "Four Theses" essay is now collected (in an updated form and with other more recent writings on ecology and history) in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 23–48.

13. Edward B. Tylor's astonishingly prescient formulation in the discipline's first textbook, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* (London: Macmillan, 1881), is worth quoting: "Within the last century the civilized world has been drawing an immense supply of power from a new source, the coal burnt in the furnace of the steam-engine, which is already used so wastefully that economists are uneasily calculating how long this stored-up fossil force will last, and what must be turned to next—tide force or sun's heat—to labour for us" (204–5).

on them); Bathsheba Demuth, author of *Floating Coast: An Environmental History of the Bering Strait*, is an environmental historian with a penchant for public scholarship who is interested in multi-species entanglements in the American and Russian Arctic during the long twentieth century. Baucom's *History 4° Celsius* is a short and dense book that operates a bit like a manifesto in which the author dialogues with Chakrabarty, Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Achille Mbembe, Paul Gilroy, and a wide array of scholars in postcolonial studies and the so-called new materialism. Demuth's *Floating Coast* is a carefully delineated, conceptually innovative, but (with a few striking exceptions) stylistically quite conventional narrative that is rich in vivid detail from which theoretical reflections emerge organically, as it were.

Baucom's point of entry is Ghanaian photographer Nyani Quarmyne's image of a little boy standing in the ruins of his home, upon which sea and sand have irrevocably encroached. Taken in the boy's hometown near the historical Fort Williams (from which the *Zong* once embarked on its gruesome voyage), the photo strikingly condenses the paradoxical interplay between what Baucom calls the "force" of history and the "forcings" of climate change: the violent Atlantic modernity of the slave trade and racial capitalism and the devastating effects of global warming on the descendants of the victims of the former processes. Baucom asks his readers to ponder what they see in this photo. Do they see the Black Atlantic as a historical, and so moralizable, epochal "time-phase" that is full of agents and intentions, victims and perpetrators, or do they see the rising waters of the Atlantic as belonging to an essentially amoral geophysical entity that exists "outside of history" (in Collingwood's sense) and is reacting, in however complex ways, to global warming and polar deglaciation? These are false choices, Baucom rightly maintains, and so he, like Chakrabarty before him, remits us to the horns of a massive metahistorical dilemma. We know that the development of an extractivist mindset that did not stop short of degrading human bodies to fungible units of commodified labor in the service of, first, agro-industrial merchant capital abroad and, later, waged industrial capitalism in the metropole paved the way to what, after James Watt and Matthew Boulton began producing their improved steam engine, became an unprecedented source of anthropogenic planetary climatic change.¹⁴ How, then, can we, as Chakrabarty put it, think a global—that is, humanly comprehensible—history together with the unfathomable changes this very history has already wrought on our crisis-ridden present and will impart to a deep, planetary future?¹⁵

14. One wonders how Marx, if he were alive today, might rephrase his biting sarcastic analysis of the "idyllic proceedings" of the "chief moments of primitive accumulation" in light of contemporary climatological science (*Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, transl. Ben Fowkes [New York: Penguin Books, 1976], 915). Surely "the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins" (ibid.) belong in a picture that, as Amitav Ghosh eloquently argued, gave rise, from at least the seventeenth century onward, to "a new economy based on extracting resources from a desacralized, inanimate Earth" (including its human and non-human denizens) to which we owe our current climatological predicaments (*The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021], 38).

15. Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*.

Here, Baucom takes a detour through Lévi-Strauss's critique of Sartre's *Search for a Method* to demonstrate that what Lévi-Strauss called the "historian's code" obscures a fundamental (ontological?) heterogeneity that historicism, beginning in the early nineteenth century, has inevitably failed to register.¹⁶ In an ingenious move, Baucom pulls in Chakrabarty's earlier formulation about the simultaneity of what he called "History 1" and "History 2"; in Chakrabarty's formulation, "History 1" is associated with the secular post-Enlightenment project of a liberal universal history that inevitably occludes an entirely co-eval, though institutionally subjugated, "History 2," in which other-than-human agents and forces (that is, gods, spirits, and ancestors, but also, we might add, animal subjects and "natural" phenomena that take the form of persons) play a consequential—and, often enough, agentive—role.¹⁷ If Chakrabarty's earlier goal was to "provincialize Europe," the question now may well be how to provincialize the "human" without losing sight of the fact that resorting to the language of "species" risks reproducing, as Sylvia Wynter might argue, the overrepresentation of the (white, male, individuated, rational, possessive, et cetera) figure of post-Enlightenment "Man" on a level where global differentials of privilege, deprivation, risk, and vulnerability diffuse into a homogenized planetary threat of human extinction (an issue that Chakrabarty has dealt with at some length).¹⁸

For Baucom, what the apocalyptic prospect of a "History 4° Celsius" (as contemporary climate science predicts it) demands is not only to conceptualize a "History 3" by "braiding together" (46–50) Chakrabarty's "History 1" and "History 2" but to envision (hitherto unrealized) forms of critical theory that can—and, as Baucom never tires to emphasize, *must*—go beyond them. This is a lofty and, indeed, urgent goal. Yet to what extent Baucom's search for a method in the Anthropocene actually delivers on this promise is, to me at least, an open question. As Amitav Ghosh argued, literature, and the arts more generally, may have played a role in getting us into the current mess.¹⁹ But will they get us out of it? As the author of a volume on the life-affirming magic of art,²⁰ Collingwood might have believed they could. I myself am not so sure.

This, however, may be a good point to turn to Demuth's *The Floating Coast*. For despite her book's ostensibly far more modest theoretical ambitions, what it achieves is, to a good extent, precisely the kind of grounding of Chakrabarty's

16. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 258–60. Somewhat surprisingly, Baucom does not cite what might be the most pertinent passage in *The Savage Mind*: "Coded in the system of prehistory, the most famous episodes in modern and contemporary history cease to be pertinent; except, perhaps . . . certain massive aspects of demographic evolution viewed on a world-wide scale, the invention of the steam-engine, the discovery of electricity and of nuclear energy" (260).

17. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

18. See Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003), 257–337; and Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*.

19. Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

20. R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938).

“History 1” and “History 2” in what Baucom, following Lévi-Strauss, calls “infrahistory” and “suprahistory” (39–40). Demuth does so by charting the interference of human ideas, and the actions born from them, over the short “time-phase” of the long twentieth century in the changing, but millennia old, energy circulations on both sides of the Bering Strait. Although Demuth cites neither Latour nor much of the “new materialist” literature (early on, there is a footnote mentioning Jane Bennett’s work), her book is full of actants: not just bowhead whales, walruses, reindeer, caribou, foxes, and wolves but also plankton, krill, sea currents, ice sheets, climatic fluctuations, peat bogs, lichen, mosquitos, coal, gold, tin, steam engines, oil lamps, corsets, parasols, margarine, and then some. And its overarching themes are energy conversions, the cycles of life and death, the violence of enclosure, regimes of labor and their transformations, the temporalities of the US market and the Soviet plan, and the respective utopias into which eminently shortsighted human agents on either side of the Bering Strait aimed to enroll a staggering multiplicity of life forms, environmental features, materials, products—and Beringia’s indigenous populations as well. As Demuth puts it,

Looking away from what so often counts as history embeds people in the chain of energy conversions foundational to all life. From this perspective, capitalism and socialism are not laws of history that separate the human from the nonhuman; they are ideas about time and value that shape particular relationships with the basic matter of existence, matter that has its own influence over human ambition. (10)

In so formulating her book’s central concerns, Demuth discards neither Braudel’s short-lived *histoire événementielle* nor Chakrabarty’s “History 1” and “History 2” (every chapter devotes considerable space to Chukchi, Yupik, or Iñupiaq views and practices concerning the matters at hand). But as if to literalize Marx’s (Justus von Liebig-inspired) organic metaphor of a metabolism between society and nature,²¹ she returns again and again to the topic of how human ideas and actions are subject to what Andrew Pickering called “the mangle of practice”²² or, in a different sense, to Karen Barad’s “intra-activity”²³: the recalcitrant nature of matter (in Pickering’s case) and the fact that relationality takes ontological precedence over entification (in Barad’s case).

This is all the more remarkable since the arc of Demuth’s narrative chronicles what might otherwise be seen as the mere movement of modern extractivist frontiers from American (and, much later, Soviet) whaling at sea to shore-bound experiments at walrus hunting and fox farming, attempts at *Rangifer* cultivation in the tundra, and mining. All of these endeavors were extremely shortsighted in their disregard of the havoc they wrought on the environment, on other life forms, and on prior Beringian forms of life. These experiments in Arctic extractivism were all characterized by catastrophic boom and bust cycles, and all were

21. John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

22. Andrew Pickering, *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

23. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

undertaken for the sake of diametrically opposed utopian aspirations—each one as anthropocentric in its orientation toward the appropriation of an objectified “nature” as the next. Native hunters once practiced (and, to some extent, still hold on to) an ethic of reciprocity with the prey that gave itself up to death at human hands—that is, provided that proper ritual invocations and ethics accompanied the slaughter. Now, the transformation of living energy resources into utilities, defined by humans in terms of either their capitalist market value or their capacity to help speed up the wheel of the dialectic, has turned death into a matter of course.

Still, while being ruthlessly decimated, bowhead whales and, later, walrus were not the inert resources they were made out to be. They learned to evade the increasingly industrialized machinery of death that had been unleashed against them. Foxes and reindeer proved unwieldy too: they were prone to ill-understood population surges and crashes that were caused, at least in part, by the very methods that aimed to extract value from their pelts and meat (heedless as both market- and plan-oriented strategies were of local climatic fluctuations and their impact on Arctic ecosystems). Pressed into waged killing by starvation or disease, indigenous Beringians also became (however unwilling) accessories to the ecological debacle unfolding around them. Even when the foreign alpha predators that, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, had descended upon these multiple Arctic life forms turned upon themselves (in subjecting prospectors and, later, imported waged laborers in American mines and incarcerated ones in Soviet Gulags to utterly inhumane working conditions), what seems to have dawned on few of those involved in designing the moral and ecological catastrophe unfolding on either shore of the Bering Sea was that they themselves were “intra-agentively” part and parcel of the “nature” they were despoiling. They were consumers, rather than stewards, of the energy stored in the animal and mineral resources upon which they ruthlessly preyed in an effort to advance (however divergent) anthropocentric goals.

Demuth's analysis is particularly fascinating when it alights on the contrast between American and Soviet civilizing missions and their eschatological tenor. This is especially true of her discussions about the kinds of ideas that make people act, and act upon others, if only to safeguard futures of endless capitalist growth and prosperity or the coming of supreme justice and equality under socialism. On Demuth's account, both missions essentially revolved around ideologically manipulating conceptions of homogenous linear time that were ill-adapted to a context in which a variety of ecological, social, and economic temporalities intersected in complex and oftentimes utterly unpredictable fashions. Indigenous Beringians knew how to cope with a capricious and always potentially deadly nature. Foreigners did not. Neither American entrepreneurs, missionaries, and state agents nor Soviet planners, ethnologist emissaries, and, later, NKVD officers found themselves capable of whipping this seeming chaos into rationally calculable shape—and they largely blamed the natives of Chukotka and Alaska (or, since Tsarist times, each other).

Where the Americans tried to instill a spirit of Christianity-tinged possessive individualism among the relatively egalitarian Iñupiaq and Yupik peoples, the Soviets found native Chukotka teeming with shamans and kulaks. Both Americans

and Soviets dealt with noncompliance with the futures designed for their Arctic charges (in however contradictory manner) by casting them as racial inferiors, in the first case, and as incorrigible denizens of a past that was incompatible with humanity's energetic stride toward socialism, in the second case. Conversions did occur in both cases. Violent resistance occurred too. But the majority of the population on both shores of the Bering Strait stoically adapted to both the eventful and the "slow" violence enacted upon them and their ways of life by their foreign benefactors. In the end, they—and the whales—survived Collingwood's short "time-phase" of a (however humanly long) twentieth century and the murder and mayhem that were enacted in the name of value extraction and inflicted on the shores of the Bering Strait. Perhaps that is what counts, for now. But of course, since 2015, Royal Dutch Shell (or, as it is now named, Shell) has been attempting to drill for oil in the melting ice of the Bering Strait.

Indeed, as Demuth speculates at one point, the icy volatility and always potentially lethal character of Arctic nature (from which Beringian lifeways built a Maussian gift economy between humans and other life forms) may have afforded much of the so-called global North the illusion of nature as a stable storehouse of extractable energy. The passage is worth quoting at length:

The planet without Beringia's cold has existed before, and great and plentiful life has existed along with it, but never in the experience of *Homo sapiens*. The sea ice, while it seems to exist altogether elsewhere, moderates the extremity of storms and regulates the global circulation of air and water, keeping the climate stable. This stability underwrote the agrarian and industrial ideals that foreigners brought here, ideals that Beringia's changeability helped to shape into particular expressions on sea, on shore, on the land. Now the ideologies of the twentieth century, in trying to make the world home to universal rules of growth and using fossil fuel to do so, have made the world profoundly less stable. As a consequence, Beringia might—should its icy shape continue to corrode—by sheer force of disastrous presence reshape ideas in the twenty-first century. (317)

In the end, even Braudel's Mediterranean *longue durée* may have been borrowed time.

In a gentle nod to narrative experimentalism, Demuth imagines the life of a bowhead whale born around the time of the American Revolution and killed—by traditional Beringian means—just as Eric Hobsbawm's Age of Extremes was ending and the world had begun to pretty much irrevocably cross the tipping point toward an incalculably long period of human-induced planetary warming. This is a creature whose lifespan certainly meets Collingwood's criterion for an experience of time that yields a different world than the one we observe and reckon with. What might that imagined whale, intelligent and communicative, as we know cetaceans are, have to say to us about this tale of human sound and fury? Alas, with Ludwig Wittgenstein, we can only assume that, if a whale could speak a language humans can comprehend, we wouldn't understand it.

STEPHAN PALMIÉ

University of Chicago