

Editorial Introduction

Global Borders: Power, Fragility, and ‘a kind of fiction’ (Editorial Introduction)

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Borders. To what extent do they determine identity? Borders may be as solid and politicized as a wall between two neighboring nations, or as enchanting as the demarcation between a cultivated garden and a wild or commons, or as permeable as the barricade of a cell membrane to a virus. Borders signal sovereignty, territory, and property. But any attempt to use borders to shape the world into an orderly, comprehensible grid of identities and affiliations is premised on a fiction of containment. With the gentlest wafting of pollen from a summer breeze or a bee’s wing, the fixed categories borders inscribe can blossom into hybridities.

Yet the existence of borders does not suggest that all who encounter them are equally powerful or equally vulnerable. As Joanne Sharp observes, the creative possibilities enabled by the limits and obstacles that a border imposes are marked by an “asymmetrical hybridity.”¹ A border is a site of both creation and oppression, power and vulnerability. While this “Global Borders” special issue of *Studies in Religion and the Enlightenment (SRE)* will celebrate the creative possibilities of hybridity at various borders, the editorial staff are mindful that these hybridities are not “free combinations.” Border hybridity is often the product of asymmetrical geopolitical relations.²

Nevertheless, what the last few months have brought home to the global community is just how vulnerable all states and their populations are to something as seemingly insignificant as a breath or a droplet. In 2020, face masks have become the most important border. A microscopic virus has, on the one hand, reinforced global inequalities (including differential access to healthcare, economic safety nets, childcare, employment, and safe and hygienic work and living conditions) and, on the other, turned the tables on one of the most powerful and exclusionary entities in the world—the federal government of the United States of America during the years 2016-2020. Over the course of 2019-2020, the US government leadership has traversed the full gamut from imprisoning refugees at the US-Mexico border, excluding international students, and describing COVID 19 in Sinophobic racist terms to finding its agents forced to release migrant children at the border and its own citizens denied entry to Canada and European nations on the grounds that US tourists pose a health risk to the rest of the world.

Envisioning power as a global infection, Walter D. Mignolo, one of the foremost critics of the imbrications of colonialism and modernity, argued that borders are “places of dwelling” and identified the nation-state as a “virus” that has “invaded the planet over the past two hundred years.”³ Crucially, Mignolo described “modern Western epistemology” as “territorial” and argued that “territorial epistemology presupposes ‘the frontier’ rather than

1. Joanne P. Sharp, *Geographies of Postcolonialism: Spaces of Power and Representation* (Sage Publications, 2009), 3.

2. Sharp, 3.

3. *E-International Relations*, “Interview – Walter D. Mignolo,” June 1, 2017, <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/69529>.

the border. On the other side of the frontier exists the void, namely space to be conquered or civilized. Territorial epistemology (modern and postmodern) cannot be decolonial; it is an imperial epistemology.” In short, a frontier separates place from space, the home—to be valued and protected—from territory to be acquired or resources to be extracted. Borders, even those located more in the mind than in material reality, can do violence to those who strive to acknowledge the fundamental interconnectedness of the peoples, creatures, and ecosystems that borders are intended to keep separate. The erection of borders would seem to deny what Jane Bennett has called the “vibrant matter” of things—the network of relations between the animate and the inanimate world.⁴

Borders are imagined between humans and other species and between humans of different cultures. A striking instance of the violence of borders occurs in Romesh Gunsekera’s 2012 novel *The Prisoner of Paradise*, set on the island of Mauritius in 1825. The narrative centers on Lucy Gladwell, an orphaned English expatriate, as she navigates colonial society and falls in love with Dom Lambodar, a dashing Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) translator. Lucy is a young woman of her time, with all the yearnings and frustrations of one who reads *Lalla Rookh* as much as she reads Mary Wollstonecraft. Circumscribed by the borders of her aunt’s beautiful tropical garden, she is even a little like the Abyssinian prince Rasselas about whom she also reads. For both Lucy and Rasselas, the borders of the beauty in which they live are an enclosure. The garden and estate promise safety and pleasure while concealing a prison.

Lucy confronts this realization almost at the same moment as the ecstatic revelation that she and Dom Lambodar love each other. As they drift together in a small boat on a vast ocean, Lucy tacitly realizes that her own country—the seat of the British Empire and a nation still in the process of abolishing the slave trade—would never recognize who she and Dom Lambodar are as individuals or accept their love. Lucy is starkly confronted by her desire for freedom (from guilt, from social strictures) and the prospect of moral and emotional imprisonment if she remains in colonial society. For Lucy the sea represents purity, possibility, freedom, communion and an escape into the realms of poetry from the corrupt colonial society of which she is an unwilling member. As Lucy and Dom Lambodar gently drift, she realizes “We can’t go anywhere better, really, can we? To be free? Not your island, not mine. There is nowhere we can go, is there, that is untainted.”⁵ Lucy soon drowns after attempting to immerse herself in the purity of the borderless ocean. Dom Lambodar survives, though his boat crashes along the “black barrier reef” of the “half-submerged line of rocks and stony coral.”⁶ In the world of *The Prisoner of Paradise*, the coral reef is a symbolic border between the human and the nonhuman, the land and the sea, a postcolonial future of love and unity and the colonial present of subjection and division.

Indeed, in situating Lucy’s epiphany on the ocean, Gunsekera contributes to a historical tradition of representing the ocean as a place beyond borders. As Steven Mentz has argued, “Oceanic freedom functioned in the early modern period as a compelling cultural fantasy, in which the ceaseless change and instability of the sea countered human existence on land.”⁷ But as the contemporary disputes in the South China Sea demonstrate, oceans can also be divided or traversed by borders. Territorial borders may be imposed upon oceanic space; oceans may function as borders between land territories; oceans may be seen as networked spaces (or routes) of diasporic experience, the consequence of the transatlantic slave trade, as Paul Gilroy explored in *The Black Atlantic* (1993); or oceans may be the

4. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2010).

5. Romesh Gunsekera, *The Prisoner of Paradise* (Bloomsbury, 2012), 371.

6. Gunsekera, *Prisoner of Paradise*, 373-4.

7. Steven Mentz, “Toward a Blue Cultural Studies: The Sea, Maritime Culture, and Early Modern English Literature,” *Literature Compass* 6/5 (2009), 997-1013, 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2009.00655.x; 998.

medium that accounts for the cyclical nature of immigrant history, articulated by Kamau Brathwaite using his concept of tidalectics.⁸ Oceans divide and connect; they facilitate both imperial violence and postcolonial solidarity.

The Prisoner of Paradise could be seen as both a continuation and a complication of the symbolic importance of coral in Gunesekera's earlier novel *Reef* (1994), also an exploration of colonial networks, power, and fragility. In his 2013 introduction to the 20th anniversary edition of *Reef*, Gunesekera explains

The real beauty of a coral reef is in the way it renews itself and creates the strongest of structures with the most delicate of life forms. If the fragile polyps are damaged, the reef crumbles. It is a lesson we have been slow to learn.

A novel is like a reef. A structure of words nourished by the imagination of readers who renew it and keep it alive—and whose imaginations, in turn, are nourished and renewed by the book.⁹

Coral reefs can be destroyed, reduced to markers for a “municipal parking lot” (118), as they are in the novel, or they can be protected, like coastal mangroves: a vibrant, life-giving and life-protecting ecosystem. Frontiers are violent; borders do not have to be—they may be interfaces of mutual care, respect, and creation.

Increased scholarly attention to the ocean signals one of the more exciting recent developments in the interdisciplinary humanities. More of the world's surface is covered by water than by land, and yet the ocean depths and the ecosystems they support remain shrouded in mystery. From a disciplinary perspective, the “turn” toward spatiality in the humanities has resulted in a cascade of oceanic, transoceanic, and hemispheric perspectives in literary studies, visual art, the sciences, and the environmental and “blue” humanities.¹⁰

Even the conventional division between water and land becomes more symbolic than actual when rivers are considered. Riverine systems are the arteries of world and connect land interiors to the oceans beyond coasts. In North America, for instance, inland water sources complicate the relationships between US state borders, indigenous rights, and environmental concerns. In the last few years, the controversy over the Dakota Access pipeline (NDPL) and the protests of the Standing Rock Sioux tribes, among others, highlighted the conflict between petroleum corporations and the right of indigenous communities to protect themselves from the contamination of drinking water and the violation of sacred land. Indeed, millions of gallons of crude oil spilled from the NDPL in December 2016. Pipeline protests have spread recently, with the Wet'suwet'en nation protesting the Keystone XL pipeline in British Columbia, Canada, charging that the pipeline violates the terms of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). However, one great victory for indigenous rights was achieved this year. On July 9, 2020, the

8. Nathaniel Mackey, “An Interview with Kamau Brathwaite,” in *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*, edited by Stewart Brown (Mid Glamorgan, 1995), 13-32.

9. Romesh Gunesekera, “Introduction,” *Reef*, 20th Anniversary edition with a new introduction by the author (Granta Publication, 2014), n.p.

10. See particularly Robert Tally's Palgrave Macmillan series *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies*; Mentz, “Toward a Blue Cultural Studies”; Hester Blum, “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies,” *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (May 2010), 770-779; Prasanna Parthasarathi and Giorgio Riello, “The Indian Ocean in the Long Eighteenth Century,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2014), 1-19; the volume *Turns of Event: Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies in Motion*, ed. Hester Blum (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 151-172; Stefanie Hessler, ed., *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science* (MIT Press, 2018); and Elizabeth DeLoughery and Tatania Flores, “Submerged Bodies: The Tidalectics of Representability and the Sea in Caribbean Art,” *Environmental Humanities* 12, no. 1 (May 2020), 132-166.

US Supreme Court’s 5-4 decision in *McGirt v. Oklahoma* recognized the jurisdictional borders between individual states in the USA and indigenous nations, specifically the Muscogee and other nations of eastern Oklahoma.

There are borders within imagined geographies of religion, too, such as the border between the Christian “West” and the “Muslim world” that Samuel P. Huntington influentially but controversially outlined in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996). Huntington claimed that “Islam has bloody borders.”¹¹ This assertion is particularly pointed since Huntington considered religion the bedrock of civilization and decried the “secular myopia” of anyone who would deny that “religion is ... possibly the most profound difference that can exist between people.”¹² Indeed, Huntington saw religion as “the principal defining characteristic of civilizations.”¹³ Huntington very specifically described civilizational identities as they manifested after the end of the Cold War. Taking a longer view of historical borders, scholars such as Ian Almond have countered this “clash of civilizations” narrative by arguing that, in fact, there were many instances of collaborations between Christians and Muslims from the medieval period to the nineteenth century.¹⁴ This perspective does not deny the many outbreaks of physical violence between Christians and Muslims, but rather recognizes that the portrayal of that violence in Western media often extends from the realm of imagined geography—from the description of a border as if it is really a frontier. I have increasingly thought about the violence of religious frontiers since the US presidential election of 2016 and, particularly, after a visit to the Missions of San Antonio, Texas in December of that year. That visit to the Missions painfully impressed upon me the continuing power of religious borders when those borders are really frontiers of the historical imagination.

The San Antonio Missions—Mission Concepción, Mission San José, Mission San Juan, Mission Espada, and what we today call “the Alamo”—were founded by Franciscan friars in the eighteenth century. It was a poignant experience to wander through these beautiful sites of communion, community, and solace at Christmastime while reflecting on the divisiveness of current political rhetoric toward Muslims, Mexicans, and indigenous peoples.

The buildings of Mission Concepción, founded by friars from the College of Santa Cruz de Querétaro, Mexico, are examples of Spanish Baroque architecture and show signs of Moorish influence. At the time of my visit, a gallery displayed installations informing the visitor of the often productive, often fraught relationships among the missionaries and the indigenous peoples, particularly the Coahuiltecas, who settled around the missions, but also the Apaches, Kiowas, and Comanches who remained nomadic. Further, a local newspaper clipping pinned to an indoor message board noted that “Migrants [are] a reminder of [the] Holy Family’s Story.” But amidst the beautiful eighteenth-century architecture, art, and

11. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, with a new Forward by Zbigniew Brzezinski (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011), 254-8. Huntington in fact insisted on his continuing use of the phrase “Islam has blood borders,” which he originally used in his (in)famous *Foreign Affairs* article of 1993 (see note on 258).

12. Huntington, 254.

13. Huntington, 253.

14. Ian Almond, *Two Faiths, One Banner: When Muslims Marched with Christians across Europe’s Battlegrounds* (Harvard University Press, 2009). Almond’s contribution is a crucial intervention in Western representations of the Ottoman Empire. That the eighteenth century is elided in his thoughtful historical account—Chapter 4 ends with the Siege of Vienna (1683) while Chapter 5 resumes the account with the Crimean War (1853-6)—underscores the importance of the post-2010 wave of scholarship on the complex relationship between Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire during the Enlightenment. For an overview of this scholarship, see Samara Anne Cahill, “Anglo-Muslim Relations in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture,” *Literature Compass* (2020), doi: 10.1111/lic3.12601 (forthcoming).

sacred space of each of these missions was one jarring juxtaposition that has remained with me ever since as a symbol of the longterm violence of religious borders.

In one chapel at Mission San Juan Capistrano, an ornate image of La Virgen de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe) was displayed. Surrounding the central image were insets narrating the story of La Virgen's appearance to Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin near the hill of Tepeyac in Mexico in 1531. La Virgen de Guadalupe is one of the most beautiful, beloved, and recognizable images of Christian hybridity for Catholics in Latin America and all over the world. So it was particularly painful to see an image of La Virgen only a few steps away from a plaque commemorating the 540th anniversary of San Juan Capistrano's defeat of the Ottoman army of Mehmed II at the Siege of Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) in 1456. Worse, the message of that plaque was reinforced by the violent imagery of an adjacent statue of San Juan Capistrano. San Juan was depicted clad in armor, serenely gazing heavenward, arms upraised in a gesture of gratitude for a providential victory. Yet the saint's foot rested on the depiction of a severed head of what, given the conventional moustache, was clearly intended to be a Turkish soldier. I have never seen such a stark juxtaposition of sacred hybrid beauty and violent religious triumphalism. If, as Huntington claimed, "Islam has bloody borders," it is difficult—in front of such an Islamophobic statue—to claim that Christianity's borders are any different.¹⁵

The articles in this special issue on "Global Borders" survey a range of border types—the physical borders of gardens, the intellectual borders between religions and cultures, and even the borders between disciplines and literary genres. While the focus throughout rests on the creative possibilities of borders and on the pleasures of intellectual and material cross-pollination, we nevertheless remember the "asymmetries" of hybridity that Mignolo and Sharp describe, particularly in light of recent border conflicts.

Perhaps the most highly publicized border dispute of 2020 has been an economic one—the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union. "Brexit," as it has been called, was finalized on January 31, 2020 after complicated negotiations regarding whether the customs border between Northern Ireland (part of the UK) and the Republic of Ireland, which remains in the European Union, should be a "hard" or "open" or "smart" border. Continuing complications threaten to derail the Brexit agreement of January. And in a further complication of oceanic borderlessness, an Irish Sea "border" between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK appears now—or, at least, as of the writing of this introduction—to be the new trade reality of the UK.

Beyond economic problems, militarized violence is also erupting at multiple borders around the world. Russia's annexation of the Crimea has destabilized the border of eastern Ukraine. Violence continues at the border between Israel and Palestine; disputes have continued to escalate in 2020 between China and India along their shared border, known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC); India also shares a Line of Control with Pakistan and the violence directed against Muslim-majority Indian-administered Kashmir by the Hindu-majority Indian government has escalated tensions between the neighboring nations. Finally, the treatment of immigrants at the US-Mexico border continues to attract public outcry, particularly in the wake of the physical and infrastructural pressures of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Even before 2016 the US-Mexico border was a controversial symbol of American imperialism and cross-cultural creativity in response to nationalist exclusivity. Perhaps the

15 . Despite my criticism of the divisiveness of this and other representations of San Juan Capistrano throughout the world, I join with those who deplore the thefts of several works of sacred art from Mission San Juan Capistrano. See Sue Calberg, "Vandals and thieves strike at Mission San Juan Capistrano," *KHOU.com*, February 18, 2017, <https://www.khou.com/article/news/local/texas/vandals-and-thieves-strike-at-mission-san-juan-capistrano/409552806>.

most famous literary response to this complexity is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). More recently, Cristina García has explained

The border that separates Mexico from the United States is more than a geographic divide. It is a charged wire that attracts and repels, an invitation, a threat, a political imposition, a lively ongoing dialogue, a series of perforations. At the border, languages and cultures collide, mingle, explode, redefine themselves. New lexicons are continually born there, identities negotiated, alternate realities built. There is no shortage of misery either, or exploitation, or trip wires of misunderstanding. Yet the border remains, as always, a fertile place for dreaming.

There isn't just one border but many borders on both sides of the Rio Grande. To be Mexican, Mexican-American, or Chicano/a is to be part of grandly diverse and complex communities with multiple allegiances and multiply hyphenated identities.¹⁶

A "fertile place for dreaming" encapsulates the power and fragility that borders represent: power can sometimes only be countered by dreaming, yet few things are more fragile than a dream. Dreams are counterfactual, but they may envision a future that ultimately materializes. In this sense, literature rather than politics may furnish global citizens with the most productive ways of countering and encountering borders. For instance, since going viral, Myriam Gurba's trenchant critique of the novel *American Dirt* (2019)—a lopsided fictionalization of the immigrant experience of crossing the US-Mexico border—has inspired changes in the publishing industry, including greater awareness of the prevalence and dangers of white saviors and of those who irresponsibly ventriloquize and appropriate the experience of others.¹⁷ This issue of *SRE* is mindful of the pain caused by borders even as it celebrates the generative possibilities of using borders to produce richly hybrid communities, identities, and natural and artistic creations.

Indeed, the articles in this special issue all emphasize the permeability of borders. While Thomas Bullington and Nicole Jordan show the power of literal cross-pollinations and transplants across the borders of the plantations of South Carolina and the gardens of Rio de Janeiro, Chandrava Chakravarty charts Dean Mahomet's syncretic evolution as a writer who traversed national and cultural borders, and Kathryn Duncan challenges disciplinary and cultural borders by reading Fanny Price, Jane Austen's most maligned heroine, in terms of a Buddhist understanding of suffering and happiness. Taken together, these four articles indicate the power of borders both to subtend the "slow violence" of colonialism and to furnish spaces of creativity, collaboration, hybridity, and postcolonial and anti-imperial response.¹⁸

Bullington argues that "stories ... leave a physical mark" on the landscapes we inhabit. Pushing against the border between literature and garden history, he argues that imperialistic narratives of the "botanical hero" link literature and landscape. His article focuses on the literary lenses—such as cultural fantasies, narratives, tales, myths, tropes, and Beth Fowkes Tobin's concept of the "imperial georgic"—that can account for a "consumerism that assumes the form of a narrative of 'the East.'" Tales of "Chinese

16. Cristina García, "Introduction," *Bordering Fires: The Vintage Book of Contemporary Mexican and Chicano/a Literature*, edited by García (Vintage Books, 2006), xv-xxvii ; xv.

17. Myriam Gurba, "Pendeja, You Ain't Steinbeck: My Bronca with Fake-Ass Social Justice Literature," *Tropics of Meta*, December 12, 2019, <https://tropicsofmeta.com/2019/12/12/pendeja-you-aint-steinbeck-my-bronca-with-fake-ass-social-justice-literature/>

18. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard UP, 2011).

abundance” inscribed a fantasy of Eastern wealth onto the South Carolina landscape for both the planter Eliza Lucas Pinckney (1722-93) and Louis XVI’s royal gardener, André Michaux (1746-1802). Intriguingly, Bullington extends Pinckney’s self-fashioning as an entrepreneurial cultivator of indigo into the present day, analyzing how a contemporary author may still portray Pinckney in terms of a “Confederate nostalgia” that upholds heroic white womanhood while marginalizing the experience of slaves and appropriating indigenous knowledge.

If Pinckney’s life demonstrates the use of personae and “storytelling rhythms” to construct the female botanical hero, Michaux’s bioprospecting and circulation of botanical specimens left a mark on the North American landscape in many ways, not least in the presence of invasive species. The landscape of the Southeastern US is a hybrid patchwork.

While Bullington focuses on transplants from Asia to North America, Nicolle Jordan attends to the imperial botanical exchange between South America and the East Indies to chart the geopolitics informing the exchange of specie (metal coins) and botanical specimens and resources (including tea, sugar, and opium). King João VI of Portugal practiced an “imperial botany” that instantiated the network of botanical, diplomatic, and commercial ties that turned botanical resources into the “hinges” of empire. Botanical gardens were sites of imperial power. Ingeniously, Jordan uses the experiences of travel writer and naval wife Maria Graham as a thought experiment: How might the fates of the Portuguese and British empires have evolved differently had tea plantations flourished in colonial Brazil as they did in Britain’s South Asian colonies? Further, building on Lucile Brockway’s work on botany and imperial expansion and on David Mackay’s work on “commercial espionage,” Jordan shows how “transnational plant exchange” served as an agent and index of geopolitical power. European wealth and imperial power increased as botanical specimens of crops such as tea, sugar, and spices were transferred between Latin American colonies and colonies in Asia. Further, the participation of elite women like Graham in a domestic tea service characterized by resources extracted from Asia and elsewhere—resources such as tea, sugar, silver, and porcelain china—rendered Graham (and elite women like her) an “agent of empire.”

Chandrava Chakravarty continues the botanical theme with her attention to Dean Mahomet’s oscillation between rootlessness and putting down roots. Similarly to Pinckney, borders provided Dean Mahomet, an Indian Muslim with ties to the East India Company (EIC) with the motivation and opportunity to self-fashion himself as a hybrid observer. Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of the “contact zone” and the suspect portrayal of lands in imperial travel writing, particularly when informed by an Orientalist or Eurocentric historiography, Chakravarty argues that border crossing enabled Dean Mahomet to construct a syncretic identity at the “colonial interface.” Indeed, Chakravarty argues, “multiple border crossings ... liberated Mahomet from the constraints of colonial subalternity” while his “status as a colonized subject ... narrates a different reality of diasporic life.” Using the concepts of planetary consciousness and imagined geography, Chakravarty coincides with Edward Said in seeing distance being mapped onto difference in the colonial imaginary. The fixedness of orientalist conventions functions like Mignolo’s frontier: meaning is conferred *on* the other—the other is not recognized as equal, dynamic, or capable of evaluating difference from a position of unique perspective and authority.

For Chakravarty, Dean Mahomet is an example of what Michael Fisher has called the “counterflows” of colonialism. Despite his “deep attachment” to the EIC, Dean Mahomet ultimately crafted a “counter-hegemonic” perspective on the Occident. He drew upon a number of literary techniques to attract his Western audience while also resisting the “politics of colonial representation.” Dean Mahomet supported certain aggressions against his own people; yet in his writing he also described Muslim and Hindu customs in order to counter

Western stereotypes of non-Christian religions. Ultimately, his many border crossings converted Dean Mahomet into a “fluid, slippery ‘self’” who nevertheless opened up “spaces for reciprocal relation.”

Kathryn Duncan uses a Buddhist lens to read Fanny Price’s responsiveness to suffering in *Mansfield Park* in order to explore the reciprocal relations between the disciplines of literature and religion and between the literariness of characters and how characters might function as practical models of mindfulness. Duncan also complicates the conventional border between the British Enlightenment and non-European forms of enlightenment. Though Fanny has often been seen as the least dynamic and therefore least compelling of Austen’s heroines, Duncan argues that Fanny’s suffering is far from being merely passively endured. Indeed, within a Buddhist interpretive framework, Fanny is the only character in the novel to practice *bodhicita* (“mind of love” or compassion) in helping others to navigate the suffering and desire of human existence. Fanny is not characterized by the “Western” mindset that privileges “action and individualism.” Rather, her behavior is in line with the mindfulness promoted by thinkers such as Shantideva, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Pema Chodron in that Fanny is *en route* to escaping the trap of her own perspective—she has committed to “helping others” and this selfless compassion is the characteristic of the truly enlightened.

From this perspective, Fanny is not a passive, priggish anti-feminist heroine, but rather someone who strives to bring true happiness to others. Duncan observes that the Buddha privileged experience—assessing the rightness of conduct in relation to each unique context—long before John Locke did. As Duncan argues, rightness is contextual, not doctrinal, and an enlightened person uses the freshness of their personal experience rather than received stories to determine rightness. In this way, Austen’s insights into the relationship between suffering and self-fulfilling, but distorted, narratives dovetail with those of Buddhism. Suffering can lead to healing, understanding, and kindness.

Tellingly, Fanny embodies the flexibility of the border crosser by embodying the *paramitas*—the virtues that enable the seeker of enlightenment to undertake a “going to the other shore.” Like Dean Mahomet, Fanny’s “outsider” status gives her a unique perspective that can help others. Happiness and pleasure are separated when the self is not seen rightly because—to return to Mignolo’s point—the distance between self and other is perceived more as a frontier for self-assertion rather than a border of mutual regard and cooperation. As Duncan concludes, “Fanny’s freedom comes from her liminal status,” the “hallmark of the bodhisattva.” By standing apart, Fanny is paradoxically better situated to help others. A border between the self and chaos can be a generative place of recovery.

If, as *Candide* opined, tending our gardens is the philosophical course of action in a chaotic world, then the proliferation of backyard gardens during the COVID pandemic attests to the intimate relationship between airborne disease, the human body, and the importance of protected, bounded space for the cultivation of nature, the self, family, and community. If there is one good thing that has arisen in the wake of the pandemic—and we must, as a human community, search for something hopeful in this long dark night of 2020—it is the renewed acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, the value of humble but crucial natural resources such as fresh vegetables, and the essential contribution of emergency, health, sanitation, and agricultural professionals. The human body is not separate from its surrounding environment—there is no impermeable border between the human and the non-human.

Penelope Lively speaks to the relationship between the human body, memory, and the changing physical environment when she describes the Egyptian garden in which she spent much of her childhood. Lively remembers the garden as “a kind of intimate paradise, intensely personal, with private hiding places.” Though that garden has now been destroyed

by “Cairo’s urban sprawl,” Lively believes that a memory “must lurk ... the ghost of my own *alter ego*.”¹⁹ The borders of a garden may exclude, but they may also protect a secret realm of childlike delight that can be shared and enjoyed with others who are not so much different from us than we are from our own alter egos. Ultimately, the symbol and practice of the garden resembles the kind of border thinking Mignolo describes and I can think of no better way to conclude such a meditation than to quote the late environmental poet W. S. Merwin’s description of his family’s garden in Hawaii:

It was here on a tropical island, on ground impoverished by human use and ravaged by a destructive history, that I found a garden that raised questions of a different kind—including what a garden really was, after all, and what I thought I was doing in it.

Obviously a garden is not the wilderness but an assembly of shapes, most of them living, that owes some share of its composition, its appearance, to human design and effort, human conventions and convenience, and the human pursuit of that elusive, indefinable harmony that we call beauty. It has a life of its own, an intricate, willful, secret life, as any gardener knows. It is only the humans in it who think of it as a garden. But a garden is a relation, which is one of the countless reasons why it is never finished.

I have admired, and have loved gardens of many kinds, but what I aspire to, and want to have around our lives now, is a sense of the forest. It must be an illusion of the forest, clearly, for this is a garden and so a kind of fiction.²⁰

Any border is a kind of fiction. But what the articles in issue 2.1 explore is not the idea of the border as a frontier of violence and oppression, but rather the border as a potential place for reflection, creation, relationality, and communion—like Merwin’s garden.

19. Penelope Lively, *Life in the Garden* (Fig Tree, 2017), 2-3.

20. W. S. Merwin, “A Shape of Water,” *The Writer in the Garden*, edited by Jane Garmey (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1999), 14.