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Bowie, Malcolm. *Selected Essays of Malcolm Bowie*. Ed. Alison Finch. Oxford: Legenda, 2013. Volume I: *Dreams of Knowledge*. Pp. xxii + 260. ISBN: 978-1-907975-48-6. Volume II: *Song Man*. Pp. xviii + 332. ISBN: 978-1-907975-49-3

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This carefully prepared collection features a large and generous sample—over one hundred pieces—of Malcolm Bowie’s writings for both specialists and general audiences, facilitating access to his insightful, intelligent, and eloquent analysis of a broad range of topics in literature, music, the visual arts, and beyond. Alison Finch has provided just enough material about the essays and their author to be helpful to readers without overwhelming them. Volume I includes, along with a preface and biography of Bowie, his writing for a scholarly audience, divided into sections on Proust, modern French poetry, and psychoanalysis. Volume II includes shorter pieces often intended for a general audience, including many reviews first published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, program notes from Royal Opera House productions and many other venues, divided into the four large categories of music, European culture and literature from the Middle Ages to 1900, European culture and literature after 1900, and psychoanalysis and theory, along with a year-to-year bibliography of Bowie’s writings delineating which writings have been included in these volumes and which have not. The editor’s introduction and a consolidated index appear in both volumes. Titles of the newspaper pieces have often been altered to indicate more precisely what the article is about; what was published in the *TLS* as “Trajectories of a Mind in Crisis,” for instance, becomes “Henri Michaux: A Mind in Crisis.” Essays are grouped thematically rather than chronologically even within each subsection of the volume, allowing the reader to progress from one topic to a related one; original publication data is provided on the first page of each piece.

It is impossible to sum up essays and reviews on such a broad range of topics. Readers familiar with Bowie’s authoritative books on Proust, Mallarmé, and Lacan will find much here to complement that work, but there is no sense of redundancy between the material in the monographs and what is collected in this volume. Bowie’s style appeals both to generalist and specialist readers; his clarity makes it possible for all to follow the argument even in his more technical writings, while the sharpness of his insights make his pieces for general audiences appealing to specialists as well. His writing always strikes a balance between sophistication and accessibility, often with a dose of wit (see especially his delightful self-review of *Proust Among the Stars* [II: 203-6]), allowing us to travel with him through our own areas of expertise and amateur interest.

His readings are always marked by a resistance to easy answers that would attempt to reduce or deny the complexity of the text under analysis; the role of the critic is to illuminate that complexity, giving close attention to the way the text functions and how it guides the reader to a range of potential interpretive moves. While he is a highly trustworthy guide through the intricacies of the text, as he himself writes in an essay on Mallarmé, “somehow the passage through imbricated levels of utterance towards some final state of achieved propositional clarity is never quite the point” (I: 152). That is not to say that Bowie is content simply to demonstrate repeatedly the impossibility of clarity. In all cases he appeals to theoretical models to the extent that they can illuminate the particular case at hand. As he puts it in a 1998 review, “the really interesting difference, as far as literary studies and the modern humanities more generally are concerned, is not between theory and empirical research but between good ideas and bad, and that being able to tell the difference, case by case, is a primary responsibility of intellectuals” (II: 291). Bowie’s reviews often contain the best indications of his own goal as a critic: “The question has really to do with the rhythm, drive and momentum of artistic meaning, and with the bifurcations, simultaneities and stratifications that occur inside a single time-bound

artistic process” (II: 27). Or as he writes in his 2000 review of pianist and critic Charles Rosen, criticism “must enlarge the reader’s sympathies, while sharpening the focus of his or her attention; it must aid and inform judgment; and, above all, it must give pleasure. Imperatives such as these resound with their own glorious incongruity against all that is sleek, slick and commodified in the domain of contemporary cultural commentary” (II: 49). These volumes testify to Bowie’s near forty-year commitment to that critical ideal and the exceptionally broad and deep body of work it yielded.