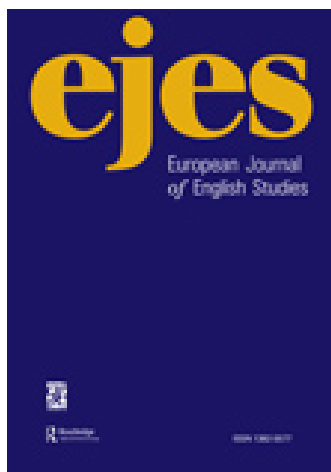


This article was downloaded by: [Florida State University]

On: 06 September 2014, At: 18:34

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



European Journal of English Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/neje20>

Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism

James Bailey^a

^a University of Sheffield, UK

Published online: 31 Aug 2014.

To cite this article: James Bailey (2014) Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism, European Journal of English Studies, 18:2, 221-222, DOI: [10.1080/13825577.2014.895092](https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2014.895092)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2014.895092>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

BOOK REVIEWS

Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism

Paul Ardoin, S.E. Gontarski and Laci Mattison (Ed), 2013

New York and London, Bloomsbury Academic

343 pp., 978 1-441-17221-1, hb. £60.00

As outlined in a short introduction by its co-editors, Stan Gontarski, Paul Ardoin and Laci Mattison, *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism* is committed to 'reintroducing Bergsonian concepts as they evolved across his work', while 'tracing the impact of the resulting philosophy through early students, adopters, and artistic contemporaries, as well as later adapters [...] and contemporary artists' (7–8). To this end, the tripartite structure adopted for the collection works extremely well, neatly separating discussions of key texts and terms from their analysis against, across and beyond the Modernist period. The volume's first part, 'Conceptualising Bergson', comprises close readings of works spanning *Time and Free Will* (1889) to *Laughter* (1900) and *The Creative Mind* (1934), while a longer second section, entitled 'Bergson and Aesthetics', reads instantiations of these concepts within sources as diverse as *Finnegans Wake*, graphic novels and contemporary horror films. A final section aids our understanding of the preceding content; the collection concludes with a detailed glossary of 15 Bergsonian concepts including *durée* and *élan vital*.

What this structure offers, the volume promises, are 'three distinct but inter-related points of entry', through which 'readers should feel free to enter the discourse' (8). Readers are thus encouraged to roam freely across both text and time, moving between 'the Bergson of the early twentieth century' and 'the post-Deleuzian Bergson' (5) in a manner ironically at odds with Bergson's own objection to the conceptualisation of time in terms of space. A discussion of spacetime forms the focus of one of the second section's most entertaining and innovative chapters, Eric Berlatsky's 'Time and Free Will: Bergson, Modernism, Superheroes and *Watchmen*'. After observing how, in modernist texts such as *Ulysses* and *À la recherche du temps perdu*, 'space and time are not separate [...] but blur and collapse' (260), Berlatsky notes how 'it becomes possible to see another contemporary medium as peculiarly "modernist"' (261). This medium is the comic book, the panelled pages of which produce not only a spatial juxtaposition of temporal moments, but also the impression of a predetermined future, mapped out before us as a sequence of framed moments. Reorienting Bergson's objection to spacetime as a critique of comic books, Berlatsky explores whether the aesthetics of the graphic novel are inimical to human agency, locating a Bergsonian warning in the (both literally and figuratively) impotent cast of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen* series. Aware of the events of the already unfolded future but powerless to change them, Berlatsky argues, characters such as Rorschach present an instructive contrast to our own freedom.

While Berlatsky uses the impotent superhero to articulate Bergson's own objection to the perception of time as space and thus free will as an illusion, John Mullarkey's 'Bergson and the Comedy of Horrors' is more surprising still, taking the dead-eyed, passionless killers depicted in contemporary horror cinema to develop Bergson's theory of the comical. Observing how, for Bergson, '[t]he comical is found whenever what we expect to evince signs of life instead displays traits of mechanism' (247), as when humans exhibit senseless repetition or act without emotional reasoning, Mullarkey contends that the same principles converge unsettlingly with those of horror. What is disturbing about procedural killings presented in the *Hostel* film franchise, or the precision-engineered deaths in the *Final Destination* series, is the absence of emotion or intersubjectivity, and the presence of something closer to Hannah Arendt's idea of banal evil. The other chapters in this section link Bergsonian thought to decidedly more conventional sources, yet still yield provocative readings. Paul Ardoin's excellent essay 'Perception Sickness: Bergsonian Sensitivity and Modernist Paralysis' is enhanced by his later entry on habit and perception in the volume's Glossary. Relating the virtues and dangers of enhanced artistic perception to Aldous Huxley's 'Half-Holiday', Ardoin traces the ever-sharpening attention of the story's protagonist until it reaches a precarious peak of violence. The strength of Ardoin's essay, like many others in the collection, lies in the skilfulness with which it balances close reading with both the intricacies of Bergson's ideas and a careful attention to modernism – in this case, arguing convincingly for 'a tendency in modernist *thought* [...] to imagine an artist at the dangerous pit of sensibility, diving in at will' (130, emphasis in original).

'Diving in at will': might Ardoin's description of the recklessly perceptive modernist artist serve just as well as a suggestion for how we ought to encounter Bergsonian thought in *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism?* Perhaps. 'The best way [...] to understand a concept like *durée* or *élan vital*, for instance, is to dive into its cross-textual development,' (7) Ardoin, Gontarski and Mattison insist at the outset. Such an approach proves fruitful, elucidating and building upon ideas of free will, artistic perception, comedy and memory. The essays in 'Conceptualising Bergson' remain entirely necessary, however; Jan Walsh Hokenson's account of *Laughter's* fraught critical reception is fascinating and vital for a fuller understanding of the text's return to eminence, while David Addyman's chapter on *Matter and Memory* (1896) finds Bergson more receptive to conceptions of spatialised time than Eric Berlatsky's later essay might suggest. 'Diving in at will' may well be its recommended approach, but the volume still rewards those readers wishing only to wet their toes.

© 2014, JAMES BAILEY, *University of Sheffield, UK.*
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2014.895092>

Under the Shadow: The Atomic Bomb and Cold War Narratives

David Seed (Ed.), 2013

Kent, Kent State University Press

384 pp., 978 1-606-35146-8, hb. \$60.00

On the second page of David Seed's recent study – on the 'shadow' that the Bomb casts across Cold War and, particularly, Science Fiction, narratives – a curious grey