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Marvelous Things Heard

On Finding Historical Radiancance

Are there many little boys who think they are a
Monster? But in my case I am right said Geryon to the
Dog they were sitting on the bluffs The dog regarded him
Joyfully

—Anne Carson, “Red Meat XI,” *Autobiography of Red*

THE PAST IS STRANGE

I HAVE A PERSISTENT FEAR of being a strange person in a normal world. I know this fear is not uncommon. The world—and I along with it—hopes to be normal, someday. Sometimes, though, it is better not to hope for this. The world has a long history of being strange and surprising, and in difficult times it is useful to think that this strangeness itself can be a resource. As a historian of ancient religion, in the course of my writing and teaching I encounter a great deal of the world’s former strangeness, and as a person in the world I feel the aftershocks of past weirdness in much of my everyday life. This is an essay on the responsibility historians share to put the world’s strangeness to good use. Here, for example, are some weird things from the ancient treatise, long attributed to Aristotle, *On Marvelous Things Heard*:¹

(1) Men say that in Paeonia, on the mountain called Hesaenus, which forms the boundary between the Paeonian and Maedian districts, there is found a wild beast, which is called Bolinthos. . . . They state that this in its general nature is similar to the ox, but surpasses it in size and strength, and moreover is distinguished from it by its mane; for like the horse it has a mane hanging down very thick from the neck, and from the crown of its head as far as the eyes. It has horns, not such as oxen have, but bent downwards, the tip being low down near the ears. . . . [. . .] It defends itself by kicking, and voiding excrement over a distance of about twenty-four feet. It easily and frequently employs this kind of defence, and the excretion burns so severely that the hair of the [hunting] dogs is scraped off. They say, however, that the excrement

produces this effect only when the animal is disturbed, but when it is undisturbed it does not burn. [. . .]

A little further along, we are told, more briefly:

(25) It is said that in the island of Gyaros the mice eat iron.

(26) Men say that among the Chalybians, in an islet situated beyond them, gold is collected by mice in large numbers: that is why also, it appears, they cut up those [mice] that are found in the mines.

(29) In Cilicia they say that there is a whirlpool, in which birds, and animals besides, that have been suffocated, when immersed come to life again.

(42) At Philippi in Macedonia they state that there are mines, the refuse from which, they say, increases and produces gold, and that this is an observable fact.

(43) They say that in Cyprus, at the place called Tyrrhias, copper is produced in like manner; for men having cut it up. . . into small pieces, sow it, and then, when the rains have come on, it grows and springs up, and so is collected.

And so on.

Even in antiquity these stories were marvels. But more highly revered sources, too, texts and practices that were given a great deal of credence, depict a world that has what we might see as quite a lot of strangeness in it. In their world, philosophers could explain how magical spells worked, and an array of gods, angels, and demons were always there to make things more complicated. Sometimes, in fact, what needed to happen to appease the gods was itself extremely strange. What are we to make of the story in 1 Samuel 5–6, in which the God of Israel, to punish the Philistines for capturing the Ark of the Covenant, smites them with hemorrhoids? Naturally the Philistines are eager to do whatever they can to escape this scourge, and so according to 1 Samuel 6:4–5 (KJV), they ask their priests, “What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him?” They answered, “Five golden hemorrhoids [emeralds] and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines; for one plague was on you all and on your lords. Wherefore ye shall make images of your hemorrhoids and images of your mice that mar the land, and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel.” It doesn’t get much weirder than that.

Apart from finding these things entertaining, it is worth considering what the strangeness of stories like this means for how we should write premodern history more generally. We have a tendency to treat these

strange things as isolated “beliefs,” in the sense that we say, well, yes, these people believed in miracles in a way that many modern secular people do not, or these people did not adhere to modern scientific norms, and then we as historians bracket off that idea and ask questions like, How did these people deal with power hierarchies, or gender performativity, or religious competition, or state violence? Which are, of course, things that we ourselves happen to believe in. To some extent, this mental act of bracketing weirdness off is a natural result of historiographical practice as it developed during the early modern period. The work of the Bollandists or the Maurists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who attempted to remove legendary elements from traditional hagiographical materials; or the search for universal laws of historical causation and thus the insistence on empirical observation of patterns in history; or the development in the late twentieth century of data-driven historical modeling: all of these are indicators of a certain increasing cultural pressure to favor, and to view as factual, phenomena that are not unique. We approach strange accounts of strange events with an eye to what might make them less strange.

There is a certain logic to this practice: if what we want, as historians, is to understand human experience in the past, it makes sense to focus primarily on what seems to be, at first blush, understandable. This impulse is fundamentally a warm-hearted one: it is to see the people that we study, and about whom on some level we care deeply, as somehow “like us.” The historical project of making people from past worlds like us is an empathetic project, and it does useful work in many contexts, such as when we argue for the continued relevance of ancient history to the contemporary world. I would like to suggest, though, that the empathetic project of history, especially premodern history, is better served by a kind of imaginative stubbornness, a determination to remember that people living in past worlds were not always very much like us, but that we should pay attention to them anyway. And this much harder project of empathy is what I think focusing on weirdness allows us to undertake. So this essay will not offer proof of the historical importance of any one weird event, nor will it offer, as better historians than I have already done, an analysis of premodern senses of the marvelous.² Instead it is a meditation, and an exhortation, on the aesthetic and moral importance of writing histories that include weirdness in their narratives, and that do not explain it away. It is also a plea to create history that is itself weird, as a way of refusing to ignore the weirdness of the world we live in.

RADIANCE

AT THIS POINT I am going to stop favoring the words *weirdness* and *strangeness* and will write instead about what I prefer to call historical radiance. I take the word *radiance* from as distinguished a historiographical source as I can, that is, from the medieval historian Marc Bloch, one of the cofounders of the *Annales* school of historiography. (I will return to the *Annales* school later in this essay.) Perhaps even more than for the influence of this school of thought, Bloch is known, and even revered, for his work as a French resistance fighter in World War II. For his work with the resistance, he was captured, tortured, and executed by the Gestapo in 1944.

Not long before his capture, Bloch began his famous and unfinished treatise on historical practice that was later translated into English under the title *The Historian's Craft*, and it is in this beautiful and unusual little book that I find the idea of radiance.³ In Peter Putnam's 1953 English translation of Bloch's book, during his discussion of what historical evidence is, Bloch quotes the Greek historian Herodotus as follows: "Herodotus of Thurium here sets down his inquiries toward the end that the things done by men should not be forgotten with the passage of time and that the great and marvelous exploits, performed by both Greeks and barbarians, should not lose their radiance."⁴ Bloch, as is traditional in such appeals to Herodotus, then examines the idea of inquiry or research, from which our concept of history arises. But it is not really the work of inquiry that is my interest here. Instead, it is radiance.

What is the radiance of history?

To be clear, Herodotus himself does not actually mention radiance in his opening sentence. What Herodotus says, more literally, is that he is writing so that "great and marvelous deeds . . . will not become unrenowned" (*mête ta erga megala te kai thômasta. . . aklea genêtai*).⁵ In the preface to *The Historian's Craft*, Bloch tells his readers that due to the circumstances of the war, he was writing without the use of his library and so could not refer back to many sources that he would have liked to use. So Bloch, reproducing Herodotus's sentence about great deeds perhaps from memory, and in French, renders it as "que de grandes et merveilleuses actions . . . ne perdent point leur éclat." It is this final word, *éclat*, an echo of the Greek *aklea*, that Putnam's translation gives to the English-speaking world as "radiance." Some changeable form of sounds and ideas has made an imperfect, interrupted journey from Greek to French to English, traversing the dark years of World War II. But from such fragile

materials, I think radiance may appropriately emerge. The word *kleos* that Herodotus uses, with its Homeric resonances, is fairly translated by “renown”; it means the fame that is embedded in what people say or sing about the hero, often after he is gone. Marc Bloch, the visionary historian and resistance fighter, has *kleos*.

Radiance, though, is not like this. That is what makes it more interesting as a historical pursuit. Whereas fame and renown are clearly human phenomena, the idea of radiance does not imply dependence on human action. The sun is radiant; it would be strange to call it famous, despite the many poetic utterances it has inspired. Radiance implies some source of light or energy, a force of some kind that originates somewhere outside of those who see it. Radiance is something that is encountered. I would like to suggest that radiance in a historical context can be understood as the force of alterity. It is the force of the past’s otherness, an otherness that can never be entirely domesticated.

Now, when I say that this radiance is not under human control, I do not mean to revert to either a theological view of history or to a view of history in which we have anything like unmediated access to the past. The past does not simply appear without human intervention. Indeed, the depth of the past’s absence requires a complex set of mediations in order for us to see that past as past at all. The worn and broken columns in the center of Rome are things that we see now, not things that we see in some other world called “the past.” Seeing them as “past” objects requires a particular twist of the imagination that creates another world and consigns it to destruction at the same time. Although we sometimes consider historical training to be training in the production of knowledge about the past, it is salutary to think of it also as training in the practice of loss. It may even be the case that the historian should be better at losing things than at finding them, for the intense richness of the past is by definition more gone than it is here. The intellectual habit of producing historical loss, however, is also the practice of training oneself to experience the force of the past’s otherness, since the context of deep loss is what generates the radiance, the overwhelming otherness, of what is found. The more richly we can learn to imagine what is lost, the more other the past must become. Historical loss is the process through which Herodotus attempts to preserve *kleos*, but we see it today, through Bloch and Putnam, as radiance.

I would say that a historian describing the premodern world has one extremely powerful advantage over a historian describing the modern

one, and that is that the premodern world is very far away from us in time. Its loss is easier for us to imagine. Antiquity, for its inhabitants, worked by a very different set of spiritual, scientific, economic, and material rules than our lives do now. Technologies have changed; intellectual models have been replaced; structures of power, cities, and even landscapes have simply disappeared. In studying the past, especially the faraway past, we encounter modes of being in the world that are deeply different from our own. Experiencing this encounter is an immense privilege. I would go so far as to say that there is an inordinate benefit even to the sheer poverty of evidence that we now have about antiquity: the deep distancing in time, and the great incompleteness of our knowledge, force us to grapple in a very direct way with the otherness, and hence the radiance, of these past worlds. To the extent that historical inquiry seeks to find the radiant alterity of the past, and thus to expand the boundaries of what it means to exist in any world, those of us who study the faraway past may be closer to that radiance—precisely because the past from which it emanates is so easily understood to be distant.

Of course, catching a glimpse of alterity is not fundamentally dependent on linear temporal distance. Rather, it is a habit of looking, and a practice of inference, exercised with greater or lesser intellectual tenacity. The question is one of domestication. How willing are we to try to recover the interior logic of a world that is different from our own? There are ways in which the human inhabitants of past worlds can appear to be like us: they ate and drank, worked, had sex, raised children, fell ill, and passed away. But all such activities also had dimensions that were very much *not* like our own lives: What is eating and drinking in a localized agrarian economy that is subject to intense periodic famines, and is under the control of unfathomable deities? What is it to raise a child in a setting in which infant mortality rates and rates of death in childbirth were, by modern standards, shockingly high, and child exposure was a sanctioned possibility? What is it to fall ill when amulets and exorcisms are mainstream practices of healing? These are very simple examples, but they present the historian with a set of decisions about whether to focus on the strangeness of these activities, or on their similarities to behaviors that we more easily understand. There are certainly times when limiting the strangeness in our historical inquiries is desirable. But the full radiance of the past cannot be seen without an attempt to connect these familiarities to the outright otherness that surrounds them. To find historical radiance is to uncover the more difficult logic that connects, brightly and darkly, child rearing

and child exposure, or that connects the horror and rot of a sixth-century plague in Rome to visions of an angel bringing that plague to an end.

The decision to focus on the otherness of past worlds, rather than their similarities to our own, requires a particular view of what writing history is. Often we ask how we can most fully describe the events of the past in ways that make sense according to our own understanding of how the world works. If writing history is an attempt to address this question, then we will tend to shy away from pasts that strike us as strange. If, on the other hand, the question we ask is how, living in our own world, we can experience something of what it is like to live in another, then we will likely be interested in what I am calling historical radiance. Allowing the past to be radiant to us includes a refusal to assimilate it to ourselves; it is to experience what Caroline Walker Bynum has called the “non-appropriative nature of wonder.”⁶

Recovering the radiant alterity of the past does not necessarily mean *believing* strange accounts. Personally, I do not believe that the now-extinct European aurochs (agreed to have been the template for the animal that pseudo-Aristotle calls the *Bolynthos*) defended itself by squirting burning shit at hunting dogs twenty-four feet away. Deciding to focus on otherness does mean, however, actively incorporating strange accounts into narratives that describe the worlds in which they made sense. Whether or not we believe these things to be true, we cannot give a true account of the past without giving them their full weight as part of the strange worlds our subjects lived in. This recognition of alterity requires us to refuse to domesticate the bizarre, and even the horrible, in our accounts of the past. Radiance, far from being merely attractiveness, includes the force of an otherness that we may wish at times to disavow. It includes the shameful pasts of child exposure and slave economics as fully connected to the more palatable weirdness of miracle stories. In all cases, however, radiance is experienced as the unsettling force of encounter, rather than the reassuring process of explanation.

HISTORY AS AISTHESIS

I WOULD SUGGEST, moreover, that searching for historical radiance is not merely a matter of responsibility to the historical record. It is, in addition, the cultivation of a particular kind of aesthetic sensibility. To return to Marc Bloch, briefly, it is worth remembering that he locates the beginning of historical inquiry in pleasure: “The same is true of any intel-

lectual discipline, but . . . history has its peculiar aesthetic pleasures. The spectacle of human activity which forms its particular object is, more than any other, designed to seduce the imagination—above all when, thanks to its remoteness in time or space, it is adorned with the subtle enchantment of the unfamiliar.”⁷⁷ While it would not be fair to Bloch to suggest that the creation of aesthetic pleasure is his primary justification for the practice of history (although it is mine), it is certainly true that the capacity to be surprised, even delighted, by the sheer unfamiliarity of the past is a fundamental skill for any historian. This surprise is an aesthetic experience in the basic sense that it is about perception, but it is often also aesthetic in the more conventional sense, that the force of the past’s otherness, its radiance, constitutes a kind of beauty, or is at least related to the beautiful. As Elaine Scarry writes: “At the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering. [. . .] It is not that we cease to stand at the center of the world, for we never stood there. It is that we cease to stand even at the center of our own world. We willingly cede our ground to the thing that stands before us.”⁷⁸ This decentering and ceding of ground should also be the effect of encountering the strangeness of the past. We are prompted to imagine a world that unfolds entirely without us, outside of both our own experience and our own logic. The historical figures we encounter are not radiant to us as examples of what we are, only better (or worse), but as configurations of an otherness that we had not previously imagined existing. They are radiant insofar as they are expansions of the modes of otherness that are available to us in the world. Seeking historical radiance is, in this way, a mental habit of making room for others in the world.

The mental habit of looking for otherness, and inferring the strange logics that connect it to the apparently familiar, is only one part of the task of radiant historiography. The other part is representing this radiance in our own writing. This can be done through modes of critical description, for which there are many precedents in modern history-writing, as well as through aesthetic representation, for which there are fewer. First, consider critical description.

In some respects the practice of describing radiance that I am trying to encourage is indebted to developments in, and reactions to, the *Annales* school of historical writing overall: in the early and mid-twentieth century, the *Annalistes* emphasized both the expansion of the scale of history to periods far longer than any human lifetime, and attempted to analyze the thought-habits or mentalities of past societies, as modes of understanding

human experience. The jarring shifts in scale, and the examination of intellectual difference as the foundation of alternative thought-worlds, precluded easy identification between the historian and the subjects of history, and so these techniques worked to highlight the radiance of earlier worlds. Marc Bloch's 1924 study *The Royal Touch*,⁹ for example, considered the phenomenon of healing miracles performed by kings over multiple centuries, in order to elucidate deep-rooted beliefs on kingship, and templates for the experience of being governed, in medieval and early modern Europe. Yet this tremendous expansion in the temporal scale of history also allowed historians to imagine a shift in the opposite direction. Partly as a development within the history of mentalities, then, and partly in reaction against the expansion to larger-than-human history, some social and cultural historians in the second half of the twentieth century turned to microhistory, collecting and analyzing detailed records of individual events in the everyday lives of particular human individuals, as a way of illuminating the social, cultural, and imaginative structures that governed the smaller-scale workings of the past. In *The Cheese and the Worms*,¹⁰ Carlo Ginzburg famously used sixteenth-century inquisition trial records to uncover the heterodox beliefs of a single individual, the miller Domenico Scandella, who believed that God and the universe emerged from chaos the way cheese emerges from milk, and the way worms, in turn, appear in cheese. Ginzburg placed Scandella at the intersection of much larger trends in early modern print culture, religious reform, and earlier folk and oral tradition; thus, at one small meeting point of these larger intellectual paths, a particular and idiosyncratic vision of the God and world became possible. As with Bloch's kingly miracles, so with Ginzburg's cosmological miller: in both cases, it is a combination of shifts in the scale of narrative, and a focus on the startling otherness of imagined worlds, that allow descriptions of the past to take on a peculiar force.

The narrative project of shifting the scale of inquiry and focusing on alterity returns us to the strangenesses of natural history with which I began. For the nonhuman world does not limit itself to a human scale, and it possesses its own radiant otherness. There is, of course, no human world that exists separately from the nonhuman, and the entanglements between all of a world's inhabitants make up the internal logic of that world. For this reason, all descriptions of the logic of worlds are in some sense ecological descriptions, descriptions of encounters between many different kinds of beings, acting on many different kinds of scales. Expanding such descriptions to include more literally ecological encounters is

another way in which radiant historiography avoids limiting itself to an alterity that looks exclusively human. The rural and agrarian histories that the *Annalistes* pioneered are exemplary in this regard: in 1922, just before Bloch published *The Royal Touch*, his colleague Lucien Febvre published *A Geographical Introduction to History*,¹¹ in which he attempted to connect large-scale human social and intellectual history to fundamental problems of landscape and human survival within it. Writing environmental history is another way of describing a past that is not like us.

Critical, or even uncritical, description is also not the only mode of historical production that radiant history makes possible. Because encounter with the otherness of the past is akin to aesthetic encounter, and is perhaps even a form of aesthetic experience, it is appropriate to adopt at least some forms of aesthetic production in conveying this encounter to others. We can attempt to re-create, or re-imagine, the force of the past's strangeness through the historical production that we ourselves undertake. This project is similar to that envisioned by historian and archaeologist R. G. Collingwood, whose posthumous book *The Idea of History*, published in 1946,¹² suggested that the task of historical scholarship was the re-imagining and re-enacting of the thoughts of past human actors. This re-enactment asks the historian to hypothesize, even if incompletely, a lived experience of a past world, an experience that the historian may reasonably think her objects of study may have had, and then to translate that experience into an echoing experience that the contemporary reader of history might also have. The historian here is the idiosyncratic, and inevitably flawed, medium of experiential translation. In radiant historiography, what is translated is the forcefulness of alterity. To turn again to Elaine Scarry's description of the experience of beauty: "It is the very way the beautiful thing fills the mind and breaks all frames that gives the 'never before in the history of the world' feeling."¹³ For the historian of radiance, we might say that the radical strangeness of the past gives rise to a "never *again* in the history of the world" feeling. This is the feeling that radiant historiography seeks to reproduce: the breathtaking now of loss. Histories written in this way are always made up of imagination and translation; they are not transparent chronicles. The writers of these histories are striving for the experience of a particular and fleeting encounter: to have this experience, and in some way, to give it to others.

The project I am describing in this case is an aesthetic one, but this quality does not make it alien to historical writing in its more traditional forms. The linguistic turn at the end of the twentieth century brought into

sharp focus the ways in which language necessarily mediates human access to the world, and thus reminded historians of the fundamentally literary nature of historical writing.¹⁴ Historians of the premodern world have, for the most part, taken on attention to literary and discursive effect as part of our analysis of historical texts and documents. The texts and phenomena that we use as evidence for the past we know to be creative objects rather than simple records. We have been less thorough, however, in attempting to write our own histories in a way that explicitly recognizes the literary and creative nature that we ourselves express. Few contemporary works of history, either of modern or of premodern history, deploy self-consciously aesthetic or somatic effects to convey the force of the past. One rare but dazzling example is the work of the historian of the English working class, Carolyn Kay Steedman, whose 1987 *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*¹⁵ combines traditional twentieth-century social history, autobiography, and fairy-tale fragments, in order to achieve a description of the interior logics of class and family desire in postwar London. “My mother,” Steedman writes, “had wanted to marry a king. [. . .] From a traditional Labour background, my mother rejected the politics of solidarity and communality, always voted Conservative, for the left could not embody her desire for things to be *really* fair, for a full skirt that took twenty yards of cloth, for a half-timbered cottage in the country, for the prince who did not come.”¹⁶ Steedman summons the force of the past’s alterity by engaging aesthetic and literary forms that are in some ways anachronistic: by normal standards of historical evidence, the stories of Hans Christian Andersen cannot explain the social effects of postwar British economic recovery. Yet in radiant historiography they can. In this history, such stories have similar decentering effects, elucidating force, alterity, and desire in other worlds by means of forces, othernesses, and desires in our own literary repertoire. This is an inversion of the attempt to explain the past by making it familiar: it is an attempt to summon the past’s strangeness by walking into the dreams and strangenesses of our own world. What weird and beautiful works could emerge if historians approached their craft as a dreaming art? Rather than make the strange past like us, we can hope to make ourselves more strange.

RADIANCE AND MORAL URGENCY

THERE IS, FINALLY, a moral dimension to the act of dedicating oneself to the weirdness of history. In her essay “The Difficulty of Imagining

Other Persons,”¹⁷ Elaine Scarry suggests that the mental habits that are necessary to avoid doing injury to others are twofold: first, we must learn to imagine people who are not like ourselves in their full weight and complexity as human beings. Second, and in some ways more importantly, we must learn how to “dis-imagine” ourselves, or as she puts it, to assign to ourselves the same imaginative “weightlessness” that the anonymous other normally possesses. One of the reasons that radiant historiography is morally important is that it is committed to both of these imaginative tasks. On the one hand, it requires us to encounter otherness in its full disturbing weight; on the other it requires us to remove weight from our own experience in the world: one cannot fully experience the vividness of an ancient magical healing spell without becoming aware, even briefly, of the precariousness of modern medical technology. The moral task of radiant historiography is a decentering of the self, a formal practice of recognizing one’s very limited presence in the world.

I would like to suggest, however, that the practice of radiant historiography has another moral advantage, and that this advantage works precisely by insisting on the alterity of the past from our own world. Recognizing the radical otherness of the past has two moral effects: first, it significantly limits one’s ability to draw historical analogies from the past to the present. In radiant history, the election of Donald J. Trump to the American presidency is not particularly like the rise of the populists Clodius, Julius Caesar, or the Gracchi, presaging the end of the Roman republic, as some have argued; nor, on the other hand, does less stringent U.S. border and immigration policy threaten to create an invasion that is anything like that of the Goths or Huns in the later Roman Empire. The reason that hindering our ability to draw such historical analogies is morally important is that historical analogy is not a useful substitute for direct moral reasoning. Without recourse to such analogies, we are forced into the often uncomfortable position of asking ourselves directly, is what I am doing right now, in this moment, the right thing? The weirdness of the past gives us fewer places to hide in the present. The second moral benefit to radiant historiography, along the same lines, is to rid us of the comforts of universality and inevitability. It is true that atrocities and injustices occur with depressing frequency throughout human history. Consoling ourselves in the face of present injustice with the idea that things have always been this way is nonetheless a failure of both moral and historical imagination. In contrast, deliberately adopting a stance of otherness toward the past may help us also to decide not to wait and

watch while the next injustice unfolds. In this case, the disturbing weirdness of the past can act as a safeguard. Dis-imagining ourselves in the face of the past's otherness does not mean disavowing our own moral agency. Rather it can, I think, recollect to us our freedom and responsibility to undertake considered moral action in the present.

For although as a practicing historian I find many things to disagree with in Marc Bloch's description of the historian's craft, I think it is neither an accident nor a paradox that the historian who analyzed the divine healing powers of kings could also have died actively resisting the takeover of Europe by authoritarian Nazi and fascist regimes. The radiant strangeness of the premodern past can allow us to imagine worlds very different from our own, and that freedom of imagination should spur us to moral action. We must work at times to imagine very horrible things that are different than we are. We must work at other times to imagine very beautiful things that are different than we are. It is the consciousness of difference that allows us to desire to become, however imperfectly, less like the one and more like the other. Domesticating the past is a disservice to that past in a factual sense, but it is also a disservice to ourselves in an aesthetic and moral sense.

The project of learning to see and write weird history is a harder empathetic task than writing normalizing history. It is harder because it takes away the safety of normalcy and replaces it with the moral immediacy of encounter with what is not like us. In strange worlds, we are weightless and strange ourselves. That is our moral beginning. Yet in return for looking for the strange, and allowing ourselves to be eclipsed by it, we are also allowed to find delight in the stories of copper that grows from the ground, mice that collect gold or that eat iron, and even the bewildering prospect of golden hemorrhoids as sacrificial offerings. And in finding delight in these things, we can be assured, with Herodotus, and perhaps also with Marc Bloch, that strange past worlds have not yet lost their radiance.

NOTES

¹ *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, volume 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1272–1298.

² See especially Caroline Walker Bynum, “Wonder,” in *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 37–75.

³ Bloch, Marc. *The Historian’s Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Vintage Books, 1953).

⁴ *The Historian’s Craft*, 60.

⁵ <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0125>, accessed 6 January 2017.

⁶ “Wonder,” 52.

⁷ *The Historian’s Craft*, 8.

⁸ *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 111–12.

⁹ *Les Rois Thaumaturges*, translated into English by J. E. Anderson as *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

¹⁰ *Il formaggio e i vermi*, translated into English by John and Anne Tedeschi as *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

¹¹ *La Terre et l’évolution humaine: introduction géographique à l’histoire*, written in collaboration with Lionel Bataillon, translated into English by E. G. Mountford and J. H. Paxton as *A Geographical Introduction to History* (New York: Knopf, 1925).

¹² *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised edition, 1994).

¹³ *On Beauty and Being Just*, 23.

¹⁴ See especially Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

¹⁶ *Landscape for a Good Woman*, 46–47.

¹⁷ In *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*, ed. Eugene Weiner (New York: Continuum, 1998), 40–62.