Slop and droop

Marina Warner
FORMS OF ENCHANTMENT
Writings on art and artists
288pp. Thames and Hudson. £24.95.
978 0 500 02146 0

Throughout her career, Marina Warner has been drawn to fantasies, myths and dreams and the way these "ancient products of the human mind" dramatize our (at times discomforting) desires and beliefs. Taken from artists' books and exhibition catalogues written over the past thirty years, the essays in *Forms of Enchantment* explore this persistent fascination. They offer a trove of insight and erudition, lightly worn as ever, and provide a vision of a new aesthetics that is refreshingly optimistic.

Warner listens carefully to her artists, and a fertile commentary on those who challenge entrenched aesthetics – and the ideologies that underpin them – emerges, along with their organic, erotic and uncanny alternatives. Building his aslant sculptures, Richard Wentworth feels he is "walking backwards through spoken language". Kiki Smith uses her art to overcome "the persistent idea that she was stillborn". "Suddenly it's as if a dog were able to tell its own story", explains Paula Rego. The book's frontispiece shows Rego's "War" (2003) – "a Goya-like scene of disaster", inspired by the conflict in Iraq, "casting cadaverous floppy pink bunnies and other soft toy-like creatures, disfigured and hybridized, as the heroes and victims". It is a fitting epigraph to the book. Rego, who draws from nursery rhyme and nonsense songs, shows that she can intensify and condemn this horror using a maternal, folkloric mode.

Warner is enchanted by the idea that through such revisionary work, the old patriarchal systems can be been shaken up – that, in fact, already "the old gods have been deposed". She shows that this confrontation can take many forms: from employing traditionally domestic skills to using materials conventionally seen as base or ethically suspect. Even today, the term "formal purity" is unlikely to be applied to something wet, sticky or perishable. In the face of this, Kiki Smith develops a "lexicon of slop and droop" that embraces "floppy, flaccid forms . . . spills and effluents"; Zarina Bhimji uses "translucent, wafer-thin resins"; while Helen Chadwick's work explores her own flesh through the "spiky, silky, slimy, furry".

Warner connects these artists deftly to their predecessors: Eva Hesse, Carolee Schneemann and Louise Bourgeois, who all "consciously developed a new aesthetic of female organic experience". In doing so, she creates a valuable genealogy of artists who have "dethroned the gaze" and who work to expand the range of meaning until "biology no longer coerces species (women or wolves) into subordinate or disparaged roles".

JOSIE MITCHELL

The dancer Elsie Altmann-Loos, wife of Adolf Loos, 1922. Photograph by Madame d'Ora; from *Vienna 1900 Complete* by Christian Brandstätter and Rainer Metzger (544pp. Thames and Hudson. £85. 978 0 500 51930 1)

Marzipan

Maureen Footer
DIOR AND HIS DECORATORS
Victor Grandpierre, Georges Geffroy, and the New Look
272pp. Vendome. £40 (US $60).
978 0 86565 353 5

To what extent do interiors and fashion nurture and inform each other? The design historian Maureen Footer explores this question through the collaborations of Christian Dior and two lesser-known, but arguably equally talented, contemporaries, Victor Grandpierre and Georges Geffroy. Although in Dior's own autobiography Geffroy and Grandpierre merit only three and four mentions respectively, their influence within these pages is pervasive.

Dior began his career as a gallerist, Grandpierre as a fashion photographer and journalist, Geffroy as a couturier. These disciplines flowered at different points in their careers and their shared background in theatre was never far from the surface. "Lessons learned in one medium", writes Footer, "are ultimately, but not immediately, translated into another". She depicts Dior's milieu as idiosyncratic, if not hermetic: the people courted "no approval except their own, answering only to the dictates of style"; the parties were pure "fantasy", but the mood was "as clear, linear and rational as a theorem by Descartes". And, just as "a good couturier understands that a beautiful gown comes alive only when worn", so "the success of a room depends on the human activity that unfolds within its walls".

While the book charts the evolution of Dior and his interiors, one of the most interesting strands is Grandpierre's influence on Dior the brand. It was Grandpierre's early choice of Trianon Grey and white as Dior's "consistent visual messaging" that solidified Dior as a "brand before brand existed". For Grandpierre, grey was a "stormy sky" or "the interaction of shadow and light". It was so effective that the formula had to be kept a closely-guarded secret. The book itself is awash with Trianon Grey, its illustrations seamed with the houndstooth Grandpierre suggested for Dior's perfumes.

The two decorators are framed as each other's foils: Geffroy a "man of contradictions"; Grandpierre "more scholar than snob". They disliked each other; when Dior employed them to decorate his house they were confined to different realms. Geffroy, with little-to-no training apart from an "eye", was set to work on the public spaces and entertaining rooms (in his own apartment his bedroom was "a monastic afterthought"), Grandpierre to the private chambers. After all, "though the house was most certainly about style, it was even more adamantly – and radically – about the individual". That included its interior designers: their ebullient personalities often push the unassuming Dior, "famously resembling a bland country curate made of marzipan", into the background.

Dior and his Decorators allows us to see the reciprocal links that were forged between couture and interior design in a Paris threaded through with opportunities for creative talent. The sumptuous illustrations throughout emphasize the parallels between fashion and interiors, but it is the generous detail and punctilious research that make Footer's book worth not just reading but re-reading.

MEG HONIGMANN

Epping Forest

Luke Turner
OUT OF THE WOODS
288pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £16.99.
978 1 4746 0715 2

With its hauntings and "unnerving dread", Luke Turner's memoir evokes Romanticism's addicts and obsessives, walkers through the thickets of the abject self. Generations of Turners, including his own parents, were raised around Epping Forest, yet he traces a more ominous childhood fascination to a print on his parents' wall: "A man, ragged and set about in the gale, trudging slowly towards the dark mass of the distant forest".

After breaking up with his long-term girlfriend (due to his compulsion for anonymous sexual encounters with men), a self-chastizing Turner obsessively returns to the forest for purification in between drink-fuelled dating-app sex. The child of a Methodist preacher, his early bisexuality destined him to secrecy and confusion. As the murk of his sexual shame mingles with that of the oppressive forest, his angst increases. Yet meditations and recollections emerge, confirming a lifelong splintering from sexual damage and a visceral fear of toxic masculinity as "other", even now in his mid-thirties.

A compensating solace comes by way of the Forest's history as a locus for outsiders: the period of Enclosures, the asylums and the "lopping" rebellions, the punk avant-gardists, the gay denizens and contemporary ravers. In the churches, he uncovers distant family transgression. He revisits an elderly, contented forest-dweller with a fractured past. The most telling images evolve from within suburban interiors. He notes the ghostly splatter in a windowpane made by a kamikaze Sparrow-hawk in pursuit of a songbird and hears the thump of a swift against another window, its wounded flapping and screeches. They remind us of Turner's distressingly repetitive circularities and self-reproaches.

These repetitions are problematic, with too many avowals of post-coital disgust. The dark pull of the sexual "wild" lacks specificity and immediacy. The same is true of his wrestling with his religious upbringing. He honourably shields his lovers and family in a hazy vagueness. Tantalizing excursions take in Vico and Werner Herzog and the "obscenity" of the wild. Yet the frustrating brevity of the multiple digressions (on pagan sexuality, gay and pop icons, family history, suicides, local churches, murders, rewilding, pollarding, Throbbing Gristle and the local asylum) diffuse the intensity. The concept of the forest itself meanders into an over-generalized signifier for an all-encompassing nature.

It takes a trip away from the encroachment of Epping Forest, to the Grünewald, for Luke Turner to arrive at a psychological clearing and to a moving affirmation of his ancestors, buried in the unmarked graves of the poor. In the end, the woods surprise him with a way to remain within – but tentatively out – of the threatening gloom.

MARIA ALVAREZ

Tobacco, tea, alcohol, sugar and coffee

Honoré de Balzac
TREATISE ON MODERN STIMULANTS
Translated by Kassy Hayden
Illustrations by Pierre Alechinsky
80pp. Wakefield Press. $12.95.
978 1 939663 38 2

As his *Treatise on Modern Stimulants* makes clear, Honoré de Balzac would have felt right at home in the hipster coffee scene. Not only did he drink between ten and fifteen cups a day, he also went on bean-buying expeditions across Paris to find just the right varieties for his brews. As many baristas will rejoice to hear, Balzac also favoured cold brews, believing they produced more "virtuous" infusions than boiling water, which thus led to stronger "surges of brainpower". Nevertheless, he cautioned, while "many people ascribe to coffee the power to provide inspiration . . . everyone knows that bores bore us even more after they have drunk it. Despite the fact that grocers in Paris stay open until midnight, certain authors are not getting any wittier".

Part of a series of physiologies – short, proto-self-help manuals – that Balzac wrote in the 1820s and 30s, this *Treatise* shares with its siblings its author's mercurial wit, and his humorous gossipy prose. Beginning with the premiss that "the destiny of a nation is dependent on its food and diet", Balzac's breezy study examines the impact of five stimulants – tobacco, tea, alcohol, sugar and coffee – on the European societies of his time, although the examples he employs to support his hypotheses are certainly among the oddest ever put to paper, as evidenced by his account of an experiment conducted in London: "The British Government gave three condemned men the option of being hanged, as was the custom in the country, or to each live exclusively on either tea, coffee, or chocolate, and without consuming any other food or drinking any other liquid whatsoever. The rogues accepted the latter proposition." Thanks to the experiment, Balzac was able to deduce that tea is the least harmful substance of the three, given that the convict who picked it outlived the others who'd chosen chocolate and coffee instead.

As with everything Balzac wrote, this *Treatise* is fuelled by his curiosity about, and his genuine concerns over, the momentous societal changes occurring in his time. After all, despite being an unabashed gourmand himself, Balzac was definitely a friend of the temperance movement as he firmly believed that intoxication was the "enemy of social progress". As the translator Kassy Hayden puts it in her valuable afterword, "Balzac's meticulous descriptions of French society and, particularly, his references to medicine and physiology offer us rare insight into life in the 19th century, the germination of scientific ideas and changing medical practices . . . laying bare the fears – both real and imagined – that swept France in Balzac's era". This handsome, pocket-sized offering from Wakefield Press, featuring a beautiful set of illustrations by the Belgian artist Pierre Alechinsky, merits an afternoon's quiet investigation.

ANDRÉ NAFFIS-SAHELY

Wine, beer, schnapps

Giles MacDonogh
ON GERMANY
272pp. Hurst. £20.
978 1 84904 945 0

Germany is often seen as a land divided by invisible lines – demarcating north from south, east from west, Catholics from Protestants, and progressive from conservative areas. In *On Germany*, Giles MacDonogh redraws the map in terms of regionally based preferences for three beverages: wine, beer and schnapps. His method is discursive and benefits from a harvest of cross-cultural encounters gathered over many years of travel. Casual-sounding gambits like, "From the balcony of my hotel, I was able to observe . . . " or "Over a glass of wine, we discussed . . . " serve to introduce Germany's post-war history, people and culture. Waitresses, landladies and drinking companions become informants and case studies. Like Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (1810), this is an unapologetically subjective tour. Tantalizing innuendoes, whether about Bavaria's controversial minister Franz Josef Strauss or Kaiser Wilhelm's favourite playwright, Major Joseph von Lauff, will have the reader turning to other sources to complete the picture.

The point of departure is 1945 and the end of the Second World War. MacDonogh's sympathies lie firmly on the side of the Germans. He focuses initially on the dietary aspects of their sufferings: the occupying US Army fed their German prisoners of war raw lentils and haricot beans which, MacDonogh claims, had "catastrophic effects" on their digestive systems. He describes how the defeated nation was initially denied the crunchy wholemeal bread to which it was accustomed and made to eat American Wonderloaf instead. Of course, it is important not to forget the 400,000 fatalities caused by Allied bombing, but nor should we ignore the Dutch "Hunger Winter" of 1944 or forget that there were a significantly higher number of collateral and strategically planned civilian casualties across Poland, the Balkans and Russia.

The author is at his best when commenting informatively on German wines and beers, even if some of the most favoured tipples may nowadays prove hard to find. Few of us will ever be able to share the pleasure of sampling Bremen's legendary Rose Wine, for example, which even the local cellarmaster himself is not permitted to sip. At this point it might be worth reflecting that, had the occupying forces inflicted what MacDonogh calls a "Carthaginian" retribution on their victims, there would be no vineyards, breweries or distilleries with which to enrich his palate or his narrative.

OSMAN DURRANI

Pilaf, dumplings, tart

Caroline Eden
BLACK SEA
Dispatches and recipes – through darkness and light
288pp. Quadrille. £25.
978 1 787 13 131 6

In *Black Sea: Dispatches and recipes – through darkness and light*, Caroline Eden repeatedly forsakes comfort for more strenuous modes of conveyance and lodging as she journeys along the coasts of Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. Her lyrical, evocative prose has an immediacy that communicates the distinctiveness of each place she visits. Here she is on the tea plantations of Rize, Turkey: "The sun began to set over the tea fields, turning both the sky and the sea candyfloss pink, melding the horizon and transforming the identical, skinny dirt tracks into mazes. Male stag beetles, enormous with hard bodies of black armour and flying only a few months of the year when they look to mate, dive-bombed me as I tried to navigate my way back to the hotel." The reader is swept up in the sights, smells, sounds and, above all, tastes of the region, thanks to the fifty-odd recipes scattered throughout. These are so appealing – Chestnut and Sage Pilaf, Half and Half Manti (lamb-stuffed dumplings half topped with yoghurt, half with melted butter and chopped walnuts), Raspberry Buttermilk Tart – that the publisher should have included a recipe index to guide the reader quickly to them.

Eden also explores the region's lesser-known wonders: the 6,000-year-old salt works near Varna, Bulgaria; the "mad honey" made from Turkish rhododendron blossoms; the Old Believer community still practising their religion in Romania's marshlands 300 years after the great schism in the Russian Orthodox Church. There are glimpses of a dreamlike world where mysteries abound and the radiance of nature conceals a dark undercurrent of melancholy. In a poignant set piece called "The Last Fisherwoman of Bulgaria" she tells the stories of the people who inhabit the Black Sea coast.

Eden's narrative is so compelling that I wished she could have made a complete circumnavigation of the Black Sea, travelling on to Georgia and Russia, especially since her stories repeatedly describe Russia's impact on the countries she does visit. But the cultural and culinary riches on offer here are lavish, and though the circle isn't closed, Eden beautifully captures the romance of the region.

DARRA GOLDSTEIN

Front rooms

Jim Grover
WINDRUSH
Portrait of a generation
248pp. Jim Grover. £35.
978 1 5272 2789 7

Last year marked the seventieth anniversary of the arrival of *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury docks in June 1948. Teachers, lawyers, writers, artists and field labourers from the Caribbean came to the UK in response to a recruitment drive and for a better life. They had not all intended to remain "in foreign", but gradually it dawned on them that they were here to stay. For over a year, the British documentary photographer Jim Grover set out to capture the daily lives and customs of these Caribbean-born British citizens in south London where he lives. His book opens with a photograph of ninety-two-year-old Alford Gardner, who had served in the RAF during the war as a motor mechanic; having paid the standard £28 to cross the Atlantic on the *Windrush*, Gardner settled for good in Leeds.

The project began in June 2017 in Grover's Anglican church in Clapham, where a parishioner invited him to see the Caribbean clubs where he played "bones", or dominoes. Subsequently Grover was welcomed into homes, community centres, places of worship and even funerals. His moving and often beautiful photographs show another side to the Caribbean migrant story and celebrate a community and a generation that has contributed immeasurably to the British economy and culture. Known for his tactful presence, Grover photographed London calypso-mento dancers in their "felts" (fedora hats) and domino hotshots banging down tiles. At crowded dance parties in clubhouses south of the Thames, he photographed old-timers moving to jazz-tinged ska, rocksteady and reggae. He scoured the south London streets in search of the famed West Indian "front room" – once a part of every Jamaican home – and found one in Brixton. Front rooms typically contained framed family photographs, a picture of Jesus walking on the water, sofas covered in protective see-through plastic and ornamental glass blowfish. They are nearly all gone now; Grover felt impelled to document a way of life before it was too late.

The book combines the "verbal histories" of first-and second-generation West Indians with "photo-stories" on such themes as faith, friendship, community, love and death. One extraordinary composition shows a woman, Diane Bailey, pouring a libation of rum into the grave of her mother, Floris, at Lambeth cemetery, with the mourners ranged respectfully round. Katy Barron, who curated Grover's exhibition *Windrush: Portrait of a generation* at Oxo Tower Wharf last summer, described the photograph as "a history painting in its drama and scale".

IAN THOMSON