

Mario Aquilina, Bob Cowser Jr, and Nicole B. Wallack, Editors. *The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay*. Edinburgh University Press. 2022. 501. ISBN 978 1 4744 8603 3.

The Edinburgh Companion to the Essay, edited by Mario Aquilina, Bob Cowser Jr, and Nicole B. Wallack, is a collection of articles based on the topic of essay writing. Although most of the authors in the volume examine the essay from a historical perspective, the emphasis is on the contemporary significance of essay writing. Rather than focusing on the essay as a genre, different contributors reflect on the specifics of that particular type of writing referring to it as a “contested space” (1). Given the diverse academic backgrounds of the contributors, the volume offers a thorough and all-encompassing examination of important themes and issues, with a particular emphasis on the specifics of “essay studies.”

The book consists of twenty-seven chapters, divided into three main parts. The inserting of eight texts of different essayists in between the three main parts greatly contributes to the integrity of the volume. The edited interviews contain introspective bits of writing that illustrate the authors’ own experiences with the text-creation process.

The origins and development of the term “essay” are considered in the first part of the book. The difficulties in defining the term arise from the fact that the essay “may contain an infinitely varied choice not only of subjects but also of approaches, moods and dispositions” (6). Mario Aquilina summarizes different points of view describing the essay as an expression of an individual personality and a form of conversational dialogical speech (26). Alan Stewart explores the origins of the English essay tradition in depth in “The Birth of the English Essay” (37 – 49). Thomas Karshan’s essay, “The Problem of a Name: The Essay and Its Titles” (50–67), delves into the contradictory aspects of crafting titles for essays. The author explains why it is difficult to name an essay, discussing the works of various essayists concerned with this problem. In “The Thing of the Essay” (68 – 81), Erin Plunkett comments on the subjective nature of essays and the way authors experience personal essay writing. Jason Childs (82 – 97) presents the opinions of different essay theorists who challenge the essay’s classification as non-fiction and support the idea of it being a poetic form (83). Douglas Hesse (114 – 129) focuses on personal essays, which illustrate the experience of the author: “experiences I remember” and “experiences I make” (114). Kara Wittman (98 – 113) and R. Eric Tippin (130 – 142) see the essay as resistance and a kind of advertisement, respectively.

The second part of the volume, “Publics, Pedagogies and Histories,” deals with the various contexts within which the essay establishes itself as a genre. Nicole B. Wallack (167 – 179) discusses the role of “creative reading” in the process of writing an essay. Bob Cowser Jr (180 – 190), Kevin Rulo (191 – 203), and Pat C. Hoy (204 – 216) focus on the craft of classroom essay teaching. The specifics of political writing are discussed by Bruce Robbins (217 – 231). The post-Second World War American essay, the liberal imagination, and the contemporary essay are the topic of Philip Lopate’s chapter (232–244). Contemporary women essayists are presented by Jenny Spinner (261 – 275). The essay in Asian (American) contexts is examined by Louise Kane (276 – 291). The characteristics of the genre of the personal essay are covered by Briallen Hopper (245 – 260) and Sarah Allen (292 – 305).

The third part studies the form of the essay and its genre characteristics. Kurt Borg (327 – 342) and Arleen Ionescu (343 – 357) examine the relation between the essay and philosophy. The role and significance of the essay in science is dwelled upon by Dirk Vanderbeke (359 – 373). Ivan Caluss examines the correlation between columnism and essayism (374 – 390). The features of the “lyric essay” are studied by Beth Peterson (391 – 404). The author highlights the idea that “the lyric essay tends

to work through juxtaposition and association” (395). Peterson further claims that “lyric essayists put greater power in the hands of readers” (401). The interaction between words, pictures, data, and text as exemplified by the “visual essay” is the topic of Elizabeth F. Chamberlain’s chapter “The New Seesaws of the Digital Visual Essay: Genre Provocations, Definitions and Tensions Beyond the Age of Print” (405 – 421). The role of archives in shaping essayism as a process is examined by Julija Šukys (422 – 433). Glenn Michael Gordon analyses the form of the essay, relating it to the body (434 – 447). The final chapter in the volume’s third part, written by Paolo Bugliani, is dedicated to the animal essay, detailing its history and evolution across time (448 – 464).

In summary, the book provides a thorough exploration of essay writing, highlighting its significance in diverse contemporary contexts. It engages the reader with a detailed analysis of the essay form, encouraging a deeper investigation into the art of essay research and composition. According to Rebecca Solnit, “[a] really good essay, any really good piece of writing, gives you the thinking of the author but also encourages you to do your own thinking” (147). And the book accomplishes that goal: it causes us to ponder and critically evaluate reality, both through its content and its structure.

**Department of English and American Studies
University of Veliko Tarnovo**

Gergana Kusheva

CORRESPONDENCE: Dr Gergana Kusheva, Department of English and American Studies, University of Veliko Tarnovo, 2 Teodosi Tarnovski St., Veliko Tarnovo 5003, Bulgaria. [@g.kusheva@ts.uni-vt.bg](mailto:g.kusheva@ts.uni-vt.bg)

