

a refusal of the 'oh dear yes, the novel tells a story', makes not for silence but for a gripping narrative about jealousy and colonialism and, yes, life; while Greene's acceptance of it turns the fascinating concept of 'burn-out' into just

another (very good) page-turner. At least Forster, in his last novel, stayed with his instinct and produced by far his best novel – though both before and after, in commenting on the book, he perhaps misunderstood his own creation.

Echoes from a Conference on Crisis

VAHNI CAPILDEO

They keep trying to come in, a guard reportedly said. The lady and the man will not listen. They turn up at the door. They want to come up the steps. A little boy in a sailor suit is with them. They insist that they should be able to come in. What a job it is, looking after the place at night. It is under restoration during the day. He is tired trying to stop them from coming in.

The phrase 'colonial uncanny' has been haunting me, and not just in its academic sense. Not far away, Mille Fleurs, the marble and wrought iron mansion built in 1904 for Dr and Mrs Prada, and now government property, palely overlooks Port of Spain's Queen's Park Savannah where masked people exercise at dawn or dusk. Mille Fleurs had been falling apart for years, in contrast with the health-seeking, sweating bodies across the road. Lately somewhat restored, and secured at night, it continues to host tensions of ownership, between territorial creole ghosts and post-independence guards. The proximity between decaying refinement and straining movement recalls our genetic and/or cultural legacy from slavery and indentured labour. Yet 'colonial uncanny' spoke itself in my mind only when the 'pandemic uncanny' was invoked during a Zoom conference I attended on 26 June 2020. Zombies also received a mention.

This was the British Association for Contemporary Literary Studies (BACLS) conference on crisis. Two hundred participants registered, with the majority remaining in attendance throughout. Preparation for the online BACLS 2021 conference is already underway. Since the plague has changed how we can know each other, and intensified pre-existing differences, I have witnessed the eagerness of some attendees at online events for normality's return, when they can reconvene, or invite new friends. This was not a theme of the BACLS conference.

While eagerness to meet up is a sign of living hopefully, hope can be perverted into destructive channels. The thoughtfulness of the BACLS participants about many senses of 'crisis' laid the groundwork for new thinking. Perhaps this means that – rather than hoping for the return of rushing about by aeroplane and private car for short trips, polluting, consuming, touristifying – organisers will set an example, and embrace the lightness of distance and nearly carbon-neutral approaches; enhanc-

ing accessibility, too...

Virus-related anxiety belongs in a longer-running story of disaster: our species' addiction to anti-environmental ways of life. Lethal habits enjoy a flipped value, as if they were signs of our specialness and flourishing. We could activate instead a sense of 'crisis' deeply and ordinarily enough to modify our turning points. For the history of the word 'crisis' indicates judgment as well as event, decision-making as well as loss of control. It names the moment in illness that may lead to bettering.

Moreover, 'crisis', beautifully, is related to 'discernment' (via the -cern- element). At the BACLS conference, it became possible to discern many more different modes of understanding, and living, the applications of this small, supercharged word, while rethinking what personal experience might constitute 'crisis'. This piece will highlight details that implanted themselves in me and are changing my mind; without prejudice to those presentations left unmentioned. The aim is to give a faithful example of how one individual might react to the saturation of a day dedicated to the discussion of crisis; not to report from a reconstructed, ideal perspective. Fuller information is available from BACLS'.

My first reflections are on the nature of the day itself as a prolonged moment. Attending a conference via Zoom (during extended lockdown in someone else's home) compels attention into unaccustomed forms. While I failed to be there for the 'real time' component of several panels, considerable material was provided in advance, on the conference website. At the time of writing, these audio recordings, documents, and slides remain freely available. Anyone interested can catch up later and re-play sections. Learning via replay has the kindness which slowness brings. You can pause, cross-check, and become unsocially absorbed. Notably, though, it lessens the feeling of things coming to a point – the crisis-like quality of energetic, ephemeral talk.

Is it universally acknowledged that listeners lose part of what they try to learn – it passes too fast? Are recordings therefore better than live participation – an improvement, not an alternative or supplement? Such a judgment, biased towards garnering information rather than engaging in thought, loses the importance of shared