

die “Mykoniots d’élection” – eine von zahlreichen flüchtigen Gruppierungen, die auf der Insel vorübergehend zusammenfinden – immer wieder nach Mykonos und bilden dort eine “Community” auf Zeit, die ihr Leben nach hedonistischen und ästhetischen Prinzipien gestaltet. Die Insel mitsamt der unbewohnten Nachbarinsel Delos bietet ihnen optimale Anknüpfungspunkte zur Entwicklung ihrer “alternativen” Lebenskonzepte und Identitätswürfe. Sowohl die mit dem Ort verbundene griechische Mythologie als auch die ansässige Lokalbevölkerung und die zahlreichen TouristInnen, die die Insel in der Hochsaison besuchen, tragen dazu bei, dass die “Mykoniots d’élection” sich dort ihrer Individualität versichern und gleichzeitig für einen begrenzten Zeitraum Teil einer Gemeinschaft Gleichgesinnter sein können.

Dieses Spannungsfeld zwischen Einzigartigkeit und gleichzeitiger Zugehörigkeit zu einer oder mehreren Gruppen lotet die Autorin in ihrer detailreichen Studie immer wieder sorgsam aus. So erfährt die Leserin in dem Kapitel “Narratives of the Self” vieles über vier ausgewählte Persönlichkeiten aus der Gruppe der “Mykoniots d’élection”, was diese als extreme IndividualistInnen kenntlich macht. Im darauffolgenden Kapitel “Narratives of Place” hingegen werden zwei kultische Feste beschrieben, die als kollektive Erlebnisse die Zugehörigkeit zur Gruppe der “Mykoniots d’élection” bestärken, wobei auch das Verhältnis zu den alteingesessenen BewohnerInnen von Mykonos und den TouristInnen abgesteckt wird.

Überhaupt spielen Feste eine große Rolle im Leben der “Mykoniots d’élection”, die ständig auf der Suche nach Gelegenheiten zur Performanz von Liminalität sind, wie die Studie betont. Ausführlich beschreibt die Autorin im Kapitel “Narratives of Difference” die Ausrichtung einer Hochzeitsfeier, die sich primär aus ästhetischen Gründen unter anderem der griechisch-orthodoxen Tradition bedient und die aus Sicht des Bräutigams vor allem deshalb stattfindet, weil man so mal wieder einen Grund zum Feiern hat. Im Epilog schildert Bousiou schließlich noch die Trauerfeierlichkeiten nach dem Tod eines ihrer Informanten, wobei die Ambivalenz der “Mykoniots d’élection” zwischen dem Wunsch nach Autonomie und dem Bedürfnis nach Zugehörigkeit besonders deutlich wird.

Bei aller Ambivalenz legt die Autorin insgesamt jedoch deutlich größeres Gewicht auf “Agency” und Kreativität, wenn sie die “Mykoniots d’élection” beschreibt, als auf Bedingungen und die Reproduktion bestehender Strukturen. Wenn sie auf theoretische Ansätze wie beispielsweise die von Pierre Bourdieu und Judith Butler zurückgreift, betont sie dementsprechend deren begrenzte Würdigung individueller Handlungsspielräume. Mit ihren synkretistischen Überzeugungen, ihren hybriden Identitäten und ihrer nomadischen Lebensweise entziehen sich Bousious InformantInnen scheinbar herkömmlichen Klassifikationen. Weder Klasse noch Geschlecht oder Ethnizität spielen nach Bousiou eine entscheidende Rolle für die “Mykoniots d’élection” bzw. helfen analytisch weiter. Ganz überzeugend ist vor diesem Hintergrund jedoch nicht, dass die Autorin angesichts des

internationalen, kosmopolitischen Umfelds von Mykonos, das sie beschreibt, ausschließlich auf griechische InformantInnen zurückgreift – “in order to sustain some underlying cultural symmetry” bzw. “to explore diversity through cultural homogeneity”. Die Homogenität, die ansonsten bezweifelt wird, kommt hier durch die Hintertür mit einem undefinierten Kulturbegriff wieder herein.

Pola Bousiou hat offensichtlich sehr intensiv Feldforschung betrieben und ist Teil der “Mykoniots d’élection” geworden. Sie lebte phasenweise im Haus von InformantInnen, feierte oft mit ihnen und war Trauzeugin bei der beschriebenen Hochzeit. Die Studie profitiert einerseits enorm von den Detailkenntnissen der Autorin. Andererseits scheint jedoch die enge Vertrautheit mit einigen InformantInnen teilweise dazu beizutragen, dass Bousiou vor lauter Bäumen den Wald, also die sozialen Zusammenhänge, in die ihre InformantInnen bei aller Individualität eingebettet sind, ein wenig aus dem Blick verliert. Es ist der Autorin unabhängig davon jedoch gelungen, eine kenntnisreiche und nicht ethnisierende Studie über eine besondere Gruppe von GriechInnen zu verfassen, die insbesondere auch für die Tourismusforschung interessant ist.

Ramona Lenz

Boyd, Brian: *On the Origin of Stories. Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction.* Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. 540 pp. ISBN 978-0-674-03357-3. Price: \$ 35.00

Boyd is perhaps the world’s leading authority on Nabokov, one of the most gifted storytellers of the 20th century. In this work, though, he presents a long impassioned argument for a “biocultural” perspective on the arts as “a specifically human adaptation, biologically part of our species.” Although he concentrates on fiction, his case pertains to all arts, an evolutionary extension, for our information-needy species, of the serious play found in all vertebrates.

Boyd’s energetically sets out his treatise, integral to which is a plea for consilience between “the sciences, the humanities, and the arts.” It is structured as two “books” sandwiched by an introduction and a conclusion (and afterword). The first of these, “Evolution, Art, and Fiction,” defends the biocultural perspective on arts in general and fiction in particular, while the second aims to demonstrate “evocriticism’s” power through a lengthy analysis of two quite different texts (Homer’s “Odyssey” and Dr Seuss’s “Horton Hears a Who”). The work’s length and energy demonstrate Boyd’s impressive capacity for hard, assimilative reading in contrasting disciplines, but do not suffice to make the overall argument precise.

Few areas of academic endeavour rival evolutionary biology’s capacity to reverberate through other areas of intellectual inquiry. The evolutionary picture of diacritical human characteristics has particularly influenced the psychological and social sciences, as well as regions of the humanities; it depicts a nexus linking human intelligence, the maintenance of unparallelled levels of non-kin social cooperation, and the massive ecological expansion of our species: we are an unusual species because we

are uniquely dependent upon extensive, supra-familial networks of cooperation, the creation and maintenance of which require highly particular, powerful cognitive capacities. The ultrasociality basic to our way of life enables a uniquely cooperative mode of resource acquisition differentiate us from our closest evolutionary relatives, but only because we have the cognitive capacities necessary to communicate with and monitor our coevals to the extent that we can.

Boyd's perspective stems from this "social intelligence" model, which is grounded in evidence from human evolutionary biology. The model has also inspired the adapted mind program in evolutionary psychology (hereafter EP), a distinctive approach to explanation in the psychological and social sciences associated with the work of Pinker, Tooby and Cosmides, and their colleagues. EP views the human mind as a set of modular adaptations produced by gene-level selection processes operating on our ancestors during the Pleistocene: culture is explicable by reference to our psychology, which, in turn, is explained by our species' evolution. EP, within approaches that accept evolution's relevance to psychology, is distinguished by its readiness to treat complex psychological traits as adaptations. EP's defenders are not, though, required to claim that every aspect of our psychology has a particular evolutionary history – that is, has a history of selection as an *adaptation*: some features of an organism are by-products (or exaptations or spandrels) of such selection processes. Pinker, for example, denies that the arts are adaptations even if some aspects of them are adaptive, (see, for example, his 2007 piece in *Philosophy and Literature* 31: 162–178). Boyd, by contrast, is sufficiently willing to see evolutionary design in human psychology and its productions to affirm just what Pinker denies.

Various conceptual issues beset theoretical and empirical discussions here (as the efflorescence of the philosophy of biology attests), but it seems clear that the distinction between traits that are *adaptive* and those that can be claimed to be an *adaptation* must be observed. The evolutionary history of a trait (whether as an adaptation or by-product) need not be relevant to its present role; arguably, being able to read, although it has no evolutionary history as a genetic *adaptation*, is nowadays an *adaptive* trait (a gene that impaired this capacity would, other things equal, make its bearers less fit and be selected against), while just the opposite is the case for the physiological effects of the human appendix. These and other conceptual matters are relevant to aspects of Boyd's arguments, but remain substantially unaddressed, which means a degree of uncertainty attaches to the work as a whole.

It is possible that the sheer scope of Boyd's ambition has made it hard for the volume to be as persuasive as it might have been. For although Boyd is strongly supportive of EP, he wants the sort of "ennobling" story of the evolutionary significance of art that Pinker rejects. As stressed on the dust jacket and in Book I, Boyd argues that art is itself an adaptation rather than a by-product of our evolved psychology. Later, however, he presses

this claim less strongly, and his "biocultural" approach becomes less clear, even as he adduces more and more of the evidence he takes to favour it. At the beginning of Book II, for example, he recapitulates his claim about art as an adaptation that evolved because it offered "survival advantages" to our species. He then surprises the reader (who here catches a glimpse of Boyd's admiration for science as defined by Karl Popper, whose biography he is writing) by referring to the empirical testing demanded by the "hypotheses" he has proffered in Book I. Yet, he adds, the hypothetical status of his claims does *not* weaken a broader argument for evolutionary approaches to art; a biocultural approach is sufficiently justified by the fact that evolution has "shaped not just our bodies but also our minds and behavior" (210). On this less specific view, the virtue of evocriticism is its insistence on merely connecting fiction to evolution, "the widest context for explaining life"; literature is thereby illuminated at various levels, from the most general – pertaining to human nature – to the specifics of plots and motivations: "Like a lens that can slide smoothly from macro to wide-angle to telephoto, [evolution] ... offers us more precision, breadth, and depth as we look at art ..." (380). Boyd sees this perspective as not only supporting the emphasis of traditional literary studies on the value of literature, but as showing that there is little in a specifically human life to which storytelling is not important.

The uncertainty evident here relates, perhaps, to Boyd's intention to address rather different sort of reader and his strong desire to reform literary studies. Thus, Boyd is sometimes intent on persuading evolutionary psychologists that the art has its own evolutionary history, while at others he is speaking to fellow specialists in literary theory, especially the defenders of "Theory," the mode of literary theory that is dominant in most academic departments of literature. Driven by liberal sensibilities about the West and the "naturalization" of its specific, hegemonic history, many modern literary theorists embraced, first, the death of the author, and then the death of the "subject"; they repudiate the human nature represented in narrow, "Western" conceptions of culture, and insist on the explanatory priority of local factors: "there are no universal truths and no universal human nature, but only local cultural and historical differences" (339). Such views, which have stifled "the *pleasure*, the *life*, and the *art* of literature" (11; author's emphasis), incite Boyd's most passionate claims about the virtues of evocriticism as a corrective to the erroneous orthodoxies of "Theory."

The strength of Boyd's work, then, derives from its great breadth and the energy with which he sets out his convictions; the book should provide readers interested in the arts but new to evolutionary psychology with fresh insights about the place of fiction in the life of our species. The weakness derives from the work's uncertainty about the scope of the argument relevant to the issues dividing those who nevertheless share a broadly Darwinian picture of human beings and their distinctively cultural mode of existence.

Don Gardner