

dementia. Previously, they had not been able to agree on the circumstances surrounding the death of Fredrick. He had gone missing on a hunting trip the week Elizabeth was born. Louise secretly blamed Charles for not accompanying his stepfather on the outing, believing his presence could have prevented what Charles insists was a freak accident. They both "told the truth, yet ... couldn't believe each other" but Charles admits that, as mother and son "separated" into their own stories about the tragedy, they "had to try to love each other", in spite of their conflicting truths. And when Louise mistakes a stuffed elephant toy for Charles as a baby in her deepening confusion, he just nods along. The pathos in these painful scenes suggests that love can be a matter of tact, and that the truth can be brokered somewhere between conviction and compromise.

In *Fire Exit*, the stories "that make us" refuse to clarify into neat narratives. Charles, speaking to his daughter, realizes there is always "so much more to say and not enough time to say it". The novel's coincidence of miseries (death, dementia, depression) risks bleakness, but the simplicity of Talty's style, and the sympathy it achieves, staves off any hopelessness.

Philippa Conlon

HASHTAGS

MEDIEVAL TWITTER
ALICIA SPENCER-HALL
232pp. Arc Humanities Press.
£114 (US $143).

Rarely has the study of the Middle Ages been as fast-moving, or as quick to turn sour, as in medievalists' engagements with social media. Brantley L. Bryant's *Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog: Medieval studies and new media* (2010) celebrated the possibilities of the internet as a platform for humour, irony and fandom, often in distinctly Chaucerian ways. Fifteen years on, Alicia Spencer-Hall charts the short and bitter history of #MedievalTwitter, a hashtag that became widely used to announce events and publications, and to build medievalist communities, and was seen by some as a way to disrupt the norms of academic writing and the exclusions of academic structures. Over time, however, it became increasingly cacophonous and fractious.

Spencer-Hall's story is framed as a tragedy. In her account, Twitter, now X, was killed off by Elon Musk, whose takeover changed irrevocably "the platform's norms and culture". "The world's richest man had wanted something, so he had taken it, brutally." What's more, he paid no regard to "the collateral damage for users who had tended their social garden assiduously, even lovingly, for years" - users like Spencer-Hall. *Medieval Twitter* is sustained by such a plangent tone: the author clearly feels Twitter's recent transformation as a personal betrayal.

In her book's four main chapters, Spencer-Hall offers a comparison between medieval literary forms and twenty-first-century digital media. The Middle English debate poem *The Owl and the Nightingale* anticipates "the dynamics of Twitter at its most interpersonally toxic"; Marie de France's *Laüstic*, in which a jealous husband kills a nightingale, parallels Musk's "murder of the much-beloved blue bird"; the mystic Margery Kempe, who dictated her biography to a scribe in the early fifteenth century, is "the Ur-influencer, a Twitter power-user born five centuries too early to best capitalize on her knack for self-promotion". Thus, *Medieval Twitter* offers a corrective to the idea that the cacophony of the internet is a contemporary invention. Medieval writers experimented with voice and reputation in ways similar to modern tweeters. More broadly, as Spencer-Hall points out, media forms such as Twitter share with medieval manuscript culture "the skilful recycling and reinterpretation of an existing narrative or trope", where originality is less important than creative reiteration.

Spencer-Hall's engaging book shows, above all, how the medieval past and the digital present are unhappily fraught with each other. I don't recall Twitter ever being a beloved utopia. It was a dynamic medium for commentary, but was always subject to markets and vested interests and bigmouths. Indeed, not unlike European medieval culture, Twitter tended to be produced by, and cater best to, the educated, the leisured or the zealous.

Anthony Bale

COMMUNITIES

ANOTHER ZIONISM, ANOTHER JUDAISM
The unrequited love of Rabbi Marcus Ehrenpreis
GÖRAN ROSENBERG
432pp. Other Press.
£37.99 (US $39.99).

On January 29, 1946, the American Yiddish newspaper *Der Tog* published an article under the headline: "The secret revealed. Our Jewish quislings. A true Swedish patriot speaks out". The supposed "quislings" were the Swedish Jewish community, who were accused of slowing the pace of immigration to Sweden from the disbanded concentration camps. The article quoted Per Nyström, an adviser to the minister of social affairs: "The Swedish opinion has already been very friendly to Jewish immigration, but the problem is the Swedish Jews, they don't want any immigration". The article was, according to Göran Rosenberg in his new book, part of a "smear campaign" against the Stockholm Jewish community and their chief rabbi, Marcus Ehrenpreis, that has cast a long shadow over Ehrenpreis's legacy.

Another Zionism, Another Judaism is the author's impassioned attempt to reclaim the story of this remarkable religious thinker, author and diplomat, and the "unrequited love" of the subtitle is Ehrenpreis's vision that Jews could live in deeper connection with people of other faiths. He lauded, in Rosenberg's words, "the universal significance of the Jewish minority experience [as] a vivid and at times inspiring reminder of the human condition: the minority and the stranger could one day be [any of] us". Yet, to his disappointment, many of the Christian leaders whom he encountered - some of whom would fall in with Nazism - valued Judaism only for its historic links with their own faith, rather than as a "living spiritual force".

Ehrenpreis was also secretary to Theodor Herzl at the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897. The author shows that his Zionism preceded his encounters with Herzl (he had been involved in attempts to organize a similar congress in 1893) and that their thinking diverged profoundly. Ehrenpreis imagined a spiritual centre in Palestine "from which cultural impulses would radiate all over the Jewish Diaspora"; the more secular Herzl was open to other locations. As Ehrenpreis wrote: "While Herzl wanted to save the house of Jacob, we wanted to save the indispensable treasures contained in it".

Rosenberg, who describes himself as "a teenage pioneer in the young Jewish state", has chronicled his own disillusionment with Zionism in *Israel: A personal history* (first published in Swedish in 1996). He writes that Ehrenpreis, who died in 1951, would be horrified by the forms of nationalism that now dominate the country - he was convinced that Israel "would not be a state like all the others", and would proclaim the rights of the weak and powerless, both Jewish and gentile. Rosenberg turns to Ehrenpreis's "deep and heartfelt love for our common Jewish heritage" at a time when "the skies are darkening again", in Israel and elsewhere: "It is said that history is written by the victors, which is probably true, but sometimes a pity. I believe that the history of the losers can be just as interesting, especially when the losers have right and justice on their side". He finds in Ehrenpreis's thinking an alternative vision of both the past and the future.

Tom Sperlinger

TERTÚLIES

A TOAST TO ST MARTIRIÀ
ALBERT SERRA
Translated by Matthew Tree
96pp. Divided Publishing.
Paperback, £11.99.

The most impressive fact about the Spanish film-maker Albert Serra's fragmented memoir, *A Toast to St Martirià*, is that its central essay came from a speech that was "entirely improvised", according to its publisher. That speech occurred during an annual festival in the director's small Catalan home town of Banyoles, a fundamental source of inspiration for his films, which include *Pacifiction* and *The Death of Louis XIV*. Improvisation is key to Serra's artistic style and approach to life, which opposes structure and planning in favour of handling each moment with the lightest touch and the greatest possible amount of openness. That attitude is on full display in this book, which has been translated by Matthew Tree. The result is a thoughtful, if scattered, ode to small-town culture, parties and playfulness.

In a world where loneliness has become an epidemic, Serra's fierce love of his Banyoles community, and his conviction that it gave him a resilience he would not otherwise have, feels poignant. He goes so far as to say that city life is inferior because people "become undifferentiated and are valued only because of what they contribute". On the other hand, he believes that village life allows enough breathing room for individuality to flourish:

> the value of life is to be found precisely - so I think and so everyone who influenced me and who I knew in Banyoles taught me - in singularity, in peculiarity, which are completely alien to any form of plan, and which avoid any kind of uniformity.

Though he shares a few anecdotes of lucky coincidences in his life, including the influence of his friendship with the actor Lluís Carbó, predominantly he lauds the value of nighttime social gatherings, *tertúlies*, without any specific stories or details of those meetings, nor explanation of why he chose to centre the shape-shifting power of the night in all his films. There are scant references to his professional rise, his personal life and the development process behind his films; in that sense, this is not a traditional memoir. Nevertheless, Serra's ideological commitment to "propagating chaos" in order to enter into the "playfulness of life" is admirable in its consistency. His short essay about directing great actors, whom he regards as "beyond reality" when their "gestures work as an epiphany of the kinetic life", brings his passion to the foreground. Though he professes a bizarre "Olympian contempt for cinema as an art form", his devotion to it is undeniable. ■

Julia Lloyd George