

## **“An Echo that Still Can’t Be Still”: The Repercussions of Border in Christine Dwyer Hickey’s *Last Train from Liguria***

Christine Dwyer Hickey’s *Last Train from Liguria* (2009) mostly narrates the story of Bella Stuart, a young Anglo-Irish woman, who begins work as tutor to the child of a wealthy aristocratic family in Italy in the early 1930s. As the decade draws on and political events in Italy become more convulsed, Bella is asked to help the child (Alec) escape: his mother is Jewish and his life is now in danger. Jointly with the boy’s music teacher, Bella accompanies Alec on a desperate train journey out of Italy, entirely unsure that they will ever make it to the other side.

In many ways, this is a fairly conventional “get out while you can” narrative, with elements that—at times—align it with thriller fiction (although the novel as a whole is rather more complex than this summary suggests). In this respect, it makes central use of the trope of a spatial border crossing, with all the usual accompanying paraphernalia of the rushed journey; the issuance and validity of travel papers; false identities; suspicious fellow passengers; sinister guards on the lookout for tell-tale signs; and an overwhelming sense of danger swiftly enclosing the protagonists in their attempt to flee. But it is much more than this. The narrative also works as a mesmerising interplay of a far broader, far more metaphorical array of notions of border, such as that dividing event and memory, peace and war, protector and protected, right of access and threat of closure and, more generally, the attempts to negotiate the need to cross all these borders.

The novel opens epigrammatically with a poem (“Echo”) by Anna Akhmatova, which begins “[t]he paths to the past have long been closed”. This paper will examine some of the ways that Dwyer Hickey’s novel reopens that hardest of frontiers and, in doing so, reveals (in the words of our own Cfp) “the multiplicity of textual spaces in which borders can be expressed and negotiated”.

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