

Celestial Wordplay

ÆROTOMANIA: THE BOOK OF LUMENATIONS

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A review of the book

ÆROTOMANIA:

THE BOOK OF LUMENATIONS

By Adeena Karasick. Published by Lavender Ink, 2023

Review written by Bergur Ebbe for New Explorations – Studies in Culture & Communication, September 2023.

It is almost incomprehensible how travelling through the air has become a mundane thing. How entering a flying machine through a gate and listening to life-jacket speeches has become a ritual stripped of obvious meaning. How jaded we are. It must be mankind's greatest feat, not to have conquered the skies, but to have made us become bored with it as well.

But is Adeena Karasick, the author of *Ærotomania*, bored of travelling through the air? After first glance of her sparkling book of poetry, the answer could go either way. She is either so bored that she has come up with clever ways to connect every single mundane thing from the world of airports and jet travel to a larger narrative or she is coming up with all those interesting and daring thoughts because she is actually one of the few adults out there that is still genuinely fascinated to be travelling through the skies. If the latter is correct, why shouldn't she? By all historical biological human standards, it is quite fascinating that we have the opportunity to fly through the air. The amount of human beings that lived and died without the slightest chance to experience air travel outweigh us who have. How can we not think of the meaning behind all this? To conclude, it might not matter whether the poet's inspiration comes from fascination or boredom because in a certain context the outcome is the same.

And talking about context. It wouldn't necessarily be a right description to say that *Ærotomania* is about air travel. The air travelling theme is rather a source of scale than subject and measuring the scale is perhaps the right way to pierce through the book. The title itself suggests grandeur. Not only does the title have two decipher worthy words, "ærotomania" and "lumenations",- but it also has three simple words with a very epic sound to them "...the book of...". To call something "the book of" something might have an innocent appearance, but it is an obvious reference to aesthetics of religious texts which becomes more evident on the first pages of the book.

The book opens with the poem *Eicha*, produced in five parts all with roman numbers. *Eicha*, meaning "how" in Hebrew is also the name of the book of Lamentations which gives a

connotation to the word in the title: "lumenation". Such a connotation suggests the word lumenation should be read as something poetic and sacred. But what does lumenation mean exactly? When googling the word, the first thing that pops up in the reviewer's search engine is a lighting sales agency providing service to Kentucky and southern Indiana. That's maybe not so sacred, but the relative likeness to the word lamentation helps to bring it closer to profound thoughts of grief and the search for meaning. And that's where we are in the first half of the book. "Out letters have been turned over to strangers / our light to aliens" (*Eicha V*, p. 20). The mood is dark, and although *Talmudy Blues II* is a clever self-referencing poem, it isn't until the commencement of the poem *Checking In II* that we are truly airborne. There is something about disembarking a jet plane, perhaps after landing in a different time zone, and seeing the billboards on the long corridors of an airport in a foreign country, that makes the mind come up with the wildest notions. Seeing well-known brand names and hearing a distant chime from a classic rock station, being surrounded by familiarity but still being completely lost. Could that be the inspiration for "Microsoft is getting hard" (p.34), "The House of Pancakes is waffling" (p. 40), "Lynard Skynard is in the skin i live in" (p.40) "Kant is looking for duty free" (p.45). *Checking in II* thoroughly checks the reader in to the second chapter of the book and perhaps the main theme: air travel, titled *Ærotomania*.

Yet, *Ærotomania* doesn't only mean that the chapter is about air travel. The word *ærotomania* seems to be a spin on the word *erotomania*, which is a medical term used to describe the condition when one thinks another person is constantly sending special signals out to them (A stalker-like obsession would be a more common way to describe it). The added "a" before *erotomania*, which creates the beautiful character "Æ", suggests that this particular obsession has to do with aeronautics. The theme is therefore not just air travel but being obsessed with air travel and that is not quite the same thing.

The poems of *Ærotomania* are filled with references to the endless signage of airplanes: Seat numbers, emergency exit and oxygen mask illustrations and regulations "NO SMOKING NO TOOTHPASTE NO FIREARMS NO LIGHTERS..." (p. 73). The reader becomes aware that language used on airplanes is noteworthy because it has to be truly universal since the airplane is sometimes "moving through and across geo-political, socio-ethnic and gendered borders". The airplane needs to be "flying like a language / a distributional force gliding / between local and global figurations" (p.67). The poet also explores the "aeronaughty" with notions relating to both the shape of airplanes and their vibration. Perhaps some of it is just general wordplay but both Wittgenstein and McLuhan are quoted in the chapter so the wordplay shouldn't be taken too lightly.

It is not to conclude this review with yet another wordplay, but the meaning of *Ærotomania* is to make us think of what creates meaning. It seems that many things surrounding the aesthetics and ritual of air travel has stagnated in our minds. To take a break and rip some of it out of context can create a fruitful exploration of how meaning is achieved. Nothing about airplanes is

coincidental. They are, for the sake of their ability to fly, without ornament like the modernists were so fond of. All language and signage in airplanes are spartan and as universal as possible. The poet though is not minimalistic while describing it. *Ærotomania* is filled with gust, playfulness and tons of references but what the book's text and the aesthetics of the world of air travel have in common is that they both include thoughts that stretch the limits of language – which are the limits of our world like the poet points out through Wittgenstein (p. 96).

Finally. On the last and final page of the book there is a picture of the poet boarding a jet plane inscribed with the logo of Trans World Airlines (TWA) – a now defunct company that has become symbolic for the golden age of jet travel. TWA was the airline of the jet set, of people who lived in a time when there was nothing mundane about boarding an airplane. The poet is smiling. Of course the poet is smiling. The poet is about to travel through the air and it's fascinating. It has always been fascinating. Maybe that could be seen as a "lumenation".